

Impact of Electronic Word of Mouth on Purchase Intention in the Fast-Food Industry in Sri Lanka, with the Mediating Effect on Brand Image

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This study explores the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on purchase intention in the Sri Lankan fast-food industry, considering brand image as a mediating factor. Unlike prior research focusing on limited eWOM platforms and global contexts, this study addresses the gap by surveying 384 consumers in Sri Lanka and examining a broader range of eWOM platforms. Employing a deductive approach with multiple theoretical foundations, the study employs a survey research approach to establish hypotheses and conduct a quantitative analysis. Initial scrutiny validates the data's reliability, validity, and normality, while inferential analysis confirms regression and correlation patterns. The research findings indicate a robust direct and indirect relationship between eWOM and purchase intention. Specifically, the credibility, quality, intensity, and positive valence of eWOM significantly impact purchase intention. Consumers exhibit a heightened willingness to make purchases from brands associated with reliable, accurate, relevant, and positive eWOM, thereby enhancing the overall brand image and subsequently increasing purchase intention. While this study highlights the demonstrated impact of eWOM on purchase intention, it calls for further exploration into the moderating role of consumer attributes, the dynamics of specific social media platforms, and the influence of emerging technologies such as virtual reality and AI.

Keywords: *Brand Image, eWoM, Fast-Food Industry, Purchase Intention, Sri Lanka, Word of Mouth (WOM)*