



## Full length article

## Consumers' online information adoption behavior: Motives and antecedents of electronic word of mouth communications

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## ABSTRACT

Electronic word of mouth influences the consumer buying behavior through the online exchange of customer opinions and experiences about commodities using social networking sites. Reviews or comments posted on the Internet by consumers and experts are based on their personal experiences and the evaluation and expert analysis of a product. The current study explains an overview of key elements of eWOM communication antecedents, addresses eWOM motives to analyze food products purchasing factors associated with consumer engagement. We found certain factors of eWOM that should be considered in decision making according to the model for information adoption. It revealed that consumers' need for social interaction, economic incentives, and self-worth reinforcement are the primary drivers of eWOM involvement. However, argument quality was found to be more appealing than eWOM source credibility for food product purchasing. Practitioners should make their strategies to follow the credibility standards, trustworthy vehicles, perceived values, informative and digital channels for the enhancement of eWOM communications. eWOM communication is an emerging area, further research can be focused on the meta-analysis of relative factors, such as responses, moderators, and credibility to eWOM communication.

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## 1. Introduction

Owing to the explosive growth of the Internet and e-commerce over the last few decades, the concept of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has received considerable attention for e-marketing. Before the advent of the Internet, word of mouth (WOM) was the most useful tool for marketing research and was known as the most influential source for the exchange of information. It was well established that WOM had more influence on consumer behavior than other marketing strategy or advertising campaign (Breazeale, 2009; Maxham III and Netemeyer, 2002). WOM plays a central role in marketing studies; however, traditional WOM interactions have limitations such as boundaries and are effective only for particular communities (Bhatnagar & Ghose, 2004). Therefore, with the introduction of cyber technologies, eWOM became paramount to interpersonal communications. When food marketers design

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies, they seek online information adoption behavior, so the current study solves this important issue for practice.

Many studies have been purposed the models of consumer decision-making process and these models consist of different stages to analyze how individuals search the information, alternatives evaluation, problem recognition, pre-purchasing assessment, choices, consumption and post-consumption to make a better decision. eWOM process starts when consumers recognize the need or desire in the actual state because problem recognition and advertising is the best source to help for customers to recognize their problems and fulfill the needs (Quester et al., 2007). After the problem recognition consumers look for the information from an internal or external source. At this stage, eWOM allows consumers to compare the alternatives about product or services after information seeking. Also at the final stage of purchase decision which includes product or services choice, brand choice, and retailer selection, eWOM reduces risk perception has a great impact on consumers' decision. eWOM continuous to effect consumer

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behavior because purchasing process continues in the post-purchase phase as expectations of the customers indicate the post purchasing which meets the satisfaction level (Comegys, Hannula, & Väisänen, 2006). This study needs to be done so e-marketers can better understand the most of motivational, risk and communication factors which impact computer-mediated information use by consumers at each stage of purchase decisions.

In a computer-mediated information system, online information adoption behavior is critical as consumers make decisions on argument quality of a product/service. Only if customers feel that information about a product fulfills their perceived demands and requirements, they evaluate each product or service according to their buying criteria (Pappas, 2016; Shen, Li, & DeMoss, 2012; Yoo, Kim, & Sanders, 2015). This shows that customers' perception of information quality available on the Internet is a necessary element for measuring their potential purchasing behavior. How individuals are motivated by eWOM, according to the information adoption model (IAM) derived from the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), depends on how individuals adopt electronic information (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). According to ELM, the central and peripheral routes affect individuals' attitudes and behavior and are known as argument quality and eWOM source credibility in IAM, respectively. Therefore, IAM is used to investigate the factors of electronic information adoption (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008). As pointed out by Racherla and Friske (2012) studies should assess the quality of online information and its effectiveness in convincing consumers. Moreover, they noted that individual needs to be better-understood information transformation between readers and seekers are not reliable. On the other hand, consumers often read eWOM before purchasing products or services. According to this perception, the current study focuses on why people prefer to read eWOM and explains the various dimensions of eWOM information contributing to its effectiveness. The current paper tries to address this gap in the literature with the following objectives:-

- To address eWOM motives to analyze food products purchasing factors associated with consumer engagement.
- To examine the factors involved in eWOM for the purchase of food products.
- To explain an overview of key elements of eWOM communication antecedents.

## 2. Literature review

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is an advertisement tool to share viewpoints with each other because of customer's awareness regarding products (Jung & Kim, 2012; Thorson & Rodgers, 2006; Vimaladevi & Dhanabhakaym, 2012). People read comments or reviews posted by different people about merits or demerits of products on web pages or websites, after gaining the information from eWOM forums, affect customer's buying behavior and help them to the selection of product (Bajpai & Pandey, 2012). We can say that nowadays, people are influenced by eWOM in positive and negative ways because customers prefer to reviews the views of other customer's opinions before decision making. Electronic word of mouth needs to be focused on proper providing platforms, focus on social sites and customer relations that can help for the companies.

Marketing experts have realized the importance of consumer-generated conversations stating that advertisers cannot duplicate in marketer-initiated advertising campaigns (Lohtia, Donthu, & Guillory, 2013; Nielsen, 2013). Prior studies suggested several complications and biased information in connection with the current status of Internet access and writing reviews (Hu, Zhang, &

Pavlou, 2009; Racherla & Friske, 2012). For instance, Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) stated that sellers provide incentives to writers to introduce promotional comments to influence consumers' evaluation of products. Moreover, different firms spent a considerable amount of money to manipulate adverse comments of customers. This is made more complicated as consumer-to-consumer interactions occur via computer-mediated channels or online-based information that does not support direct verbal communication and social communications (Fang et al., 2014). Subsequently, consumers have to face more ambiguous information while considering eWOM. These problems have been addressed by many independent popular press reports of many websites conveying customer reviews (Miller, 2009). eWOM communication studies concluded that purchase intention is the utmost outcome variable used by experimental research design for different characteristics such as quality, valence, and volume (see Table 1).

### 2.1. Consumers' attitude among online shopping

According to Van Raaij (1998), "Attitude is the individual predisposition to evaluate an object or an aspect of the world in a favorable or unfavorable manner". Tsang, Ho, and Liang (2004) described in a study that Attitude is a major element in E-business systems and marketing studies. Attitude is an outcome of what we say, feel and know De Mooij (2010) and Patat (2011) said that "Attitude is a lasting general evaluation of people (including oneself), objects, advertisements or issues". Michael (2011) specified that at the time of purchasing consumers attitude is not simple interaction between traders and consumers. Modern dealers know that consumer behavior is a continuing process, and the study of this whole process involved when consumer select, purchase, use products, services, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires". The study of consumer behavior holds "what and why people buy" and the consumer activities, for example, "why and how customers use the products and services". The basic marketing concept states a company exists on satisfying consumer needs better than its competitors, which means it provides the prior values to the people who will buy and use its products or services. At the same time, the customer's feedback of the products is a decisive test for a company to know about the product how much it has satisfied the customer's needs. The company should assimilate the knowledge of consumers into its marketing strategy. The information of customers helps the company to identify its position and capture the business opportunities in the market (Zhao, 2012). The consumer behavior is generally influenced by the consumer individualities. Cultural Perspectives have the comprehensive and deepest influence on the consumer shopping behavior. It contains three elements: culture, subculture, and social class. The online consumers can belong to the subculture and social class they show the interest in online shopping, and high-class people have more probability to purchase online because they have more online facilities such as own computer and they know better about internet usage. The consumer online shopping behavior is impacted by the social online status of an individual, such as reference group, family, and social prominences. The reference group of a person is directly or indirectly influenced his attitude and behavior. The family is regarded as the primary reference group of people and has certain influences on people's perception (Anders, Selma, & Claudio, 2007). Furthermore, friends also play an important role for individuals purchasing decision making. For the online consumers, the reference groups are virtual communities or discussion group from the internet, such as online forums, blogs, or magazines.

The consumers can read other people's feedbacks and comments of the products and services on the website, which actually

**Table 1**

Constructs of communicator, stimulus, receiver and response factors described by different authors.

Constructs	Authors
Argument strength	(Cheung et al., 2009)
Argument quality (Relevance, Timeliness, Accuracy, Comprehensiveness)	(Zhang & Watts, 2008)
Attitude	(Lee, Park, & Han, 2008)
Awareness	(Davis & Khazanchi, 2008)
Attractiveness (Similarity, Familiarity, Likability)	(Kiecker & Cowles, 2002)
Choice	(Huang & Chen, 2006)
Cognitive personalization (Affect Intensity)	(Xia & Bechwati, 2008)
Confirmation with prior belief	(Cheung et al., 2009)
Consumer skepticism	(Lee & Youn, 2009; Sher & Lee, 2009)
Disclosure of identity	(Forman, Ghose, & Wiesenfeld, 2008)
Disconfirming information; Focused search	(Zhang & Watts, 2008)
Dispersion; Gender	(Dellarocas, Zhang, & Awad, 2007)
eWOM review credibility	(Cheung et al., 2009)
Helpfulness	(Sen, 2008; Sen & Lerman, 2007)
Information adoption	(Cheung et al., 2008)
Information source preference; Social tie; Homophily	(Steffes & Burgee, 2009)
Involvement	(Park, Lee, & Han, 2007)
Length of review	(Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Sen, 2008)
Loyalty	(Gauri, Bhatnagar, & Rao, 2008; Litvin et al., 2008)
Number of reviews	(Sher & Lee, 2009)
Prior Knowledge	(Doh & Hwang, 2009)
Purchase intention	(Bickart & Schindler, 2001)
Recommendation consistency; Recommendation framing (Valence); Recommendation sidedness; Recommendation rating	(Dellarocas et al., 2007; Hu, Liu, & Zhang, 2008)
Review Type	(Riegner, 2007; Xia & Bechwati, 2008)
Shared geographical location	(Forman et al., 2008)
Social presence; Usefulness	(Kumar & Benbasat, 2006)
Source Credibility (Expertise, Trustworthiness)	(Boush & Kahle, 2001; Kiecker & Cowles, 2002)
Trust	(Awad & Ragowsky, 2008)
Visual cues	(Davis & Khazanchi, 2008)

affect the product selection and purchasing of the online consumers. Besides the roles and statuses of the consumers decide the performance of consumers' purchasing activities, because the different levels of products' choosing certainly reflect the different customers' social statuses in the society (Kotler, 2006, p. 1). The higher social status of a person the more money he may spend on the similar products. Personal perspectives such as age, online experiences, acceptance, trust and loyalty, privacy typology, and risk perception, while as environmental perspectives, price, web design, product features, and services for post purchasing have great influence during online shopping (Kotler, 2011).

**H1.** Motivational factors including opinion seeking, self-worth reinforcement, product involvement, other involvement and economic incentives have a significant impact on eWOM credibility.

## 2.2. Consumers' adoption behavior factors among online shopping

### 2.2.1. Websites and perceived risks

Design, information content, privacy, and security are the dimensions for B2C websites which help customers for searching information as manufacturer or auction sites that allow to the customers for purchasing decisions. However, the role of retail websites varies rendering new sites and web page's design characteristics also have an influence on consumers' purchasing decisions through locate and product selection (Ranganathan & Ganapathy, 2002; Shergill & Chen, 2005). Many researchers explained factors like playfulness, information quality and service, system usage and design which are critical for website's success (Liu & Arnett, 2000). Website contents offered by information and website design presented the way to customers are two essential roles of considerations for online retailers (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2003). Duan, Gu, and Whinston (2008) differentiated an online WOM pre-release and post-release activity center which reflect the

review sites for consumer satisfaction. Park and Lee (2009) illustrated that negative eWOM, established websites, and experience goods have more influence than positive eWOM, unestablished websites and for search goods. Marketers should emphasize on well-established sites for the enhancement of positive eWOM observing by product type as well as information direction.

Perceived risk as defined by Cox and Rich (1964) that "the nature and amount of risk perceived by a consumer in contemplating a particular purchase decision". The concept of perceived risk was introduced by emerging the loyalty and performance of the brand, risk control approaches, and personality traits in marketing. Product purchasing or services associated with customers' views as consequences alter the risk perception in the shape of distinct of inherent and handled classes (Bauer, 1960, p. 398). There are six dimensions of perceived risk such as financial, physical, performance, psychological, social and time risk which refer to money loss, performance expectations, harmfulness, self-image, individuals' perceptions and time amount (Cases, 2002; Turley & LeBlanc, 1993; Zheng, Favier, Huang, & Coat, 2012). Perceived risk is a major element in e-commerce for customers' perspective, while from managerial perspective that business strategies can reduce the consumers' risk with the understanding of mitigating and consumer react, however, alternative payment method and comparison among product are most important for customers (Comegys, Hannula, & Väisänen, 2009; Liebermann & Stashevsky, 2002; Suki & Suki, 2007). In the context of online shopping, there are three elements such as remote source, interactive medium and command mode which can be categorized in perceived risk (Cases, 2002). It can be concluded that security or privacy are the key factors of perceived risk and consumers' get more attention during online shopping.

Argument quality can be defined as the impressive strength of a comment in an informational message and is considered an

important aspect in modulating consumer evaluation of a message. It is evident that consumers investigate the credibility and extent of bias of information on the Internet (Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2009). On the other hand, concerning common product comments that are written by online strangers, Internet users are keen to evaluate systematic clues in the information to explore a product's credibility and make a decision about the product. Product comments that are relevant and verified tend to be more convincing and are predicted as more trustworthy than those that are spacious.

**H2.** eWOM credibility has a positive impact on perceived risk and argument quality.

### 2.2.2. Service quality, convenience, and price

Service quality is a contrast of perceptions and expectations of customers about the service. To identify the performance as per customer's prospects, service quality has been used as important construct during shopping. Previous studies explained it as a multi-dimensional paradigm that service quality is a consequence of assessment practice during the consumer's service prospects that had been experienced. It depends on the quality of the product that creates the perception about the company in a negative or positive way (Clemes, Gan, & Kao, 2008; Santos, 2003). To measure or examine the service quality SERVQUAL has been used (Gefen, 2002). Technical and functional quality are two major dimensions as standard aspects, however, many researchers also identified the dimensions such as assurance, empathy understanding, access, competence, tangibles, empathy, credibility, responsiveness, security, communication, courtesy, and reliability of the customers.

There are five dimensions of convenience such as time, place, acquisition, use and execution which are the connection of services or goods with adoption environment, however, time is an important factor (Brown, 1989). Price is a major factor for a customer in the optimal condition which depends on alternatives and can be influenced the customers during choice situations and product evaluations compared the actual price (Chiang & Dholakia, 2003). Generally, consumers look for price information among retailers in order to economic situation and cost of the product. The Internet provides more price variations as compared to stores because of low direct cost, competition, and monopoly (Brynjolfsson & Smith, 2000).

### 2.2.3. Product variety, subjective norms, and consumer resources

Superior assortments, wider variety, and product choices are three factors that customers choose the online shopping because the range of the variety can affect the customer satisfaction level for the better decision (Van Herpen & Pieters, 2002). Subjective norms are the perception among performing the behavior in social pressure. Mostly, two theories have been used to explain the behavior of subjective norms such as "Theory of Reasoned Action" (TRA), and "Theory of Planned Behavior" to an argument the behavior about objective and subjective (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Information reception, time, money, and capability are the factors of consumer resources which can be derived from individual differences. In the e-commerce context, accessibility and knowledge and use of Internet is the resource for consumers to purchase or use the product (Blackwell, DSouza, Taghian, Miniard, & Engel, 2006).

## 2.3. eWOM antecedents, platforms, advertising channels, online opinions, volume, and credibility

It is believed that comments from innovators and opinion leaders have a positive influence on information seekers. The

Internet is another factor that is responsible for motivating consumers; active users seem more likely to be interested in an eWOM activity, which is rapidly replacing traditional WOM. It is accepted that not every person is familiar with the Internet and does not have the requisite Internet skills. eWOM is largely based on the knowledge of discussion forums, email, blogs, or online chats. Familiarity and experience with Web procedures, utilities, functions, and techniques are basic requirements for opinion leaders and seekers, and therefore, adequate knowledge of the Internet is a prerequisite for opinion leaders and/or seekers (Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006). It is evident that social relations are certainly considered with regard to eWOM in different contexts. Opinion leaders are perceived to be in contact with more people and participate in different informal social communications. Friendly relationships do matter for information sharing among people (Czepiel, 1974; Darden & Reynolds, 1971; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

Posters and lurkers are divided into two groups who participate in virtual communities (Nonnecke & Preece, 2001). Harrison-Walker (2001) confirmed some facts that customers' sentimental commitment may increase WOM messages sharing. Posters are the customers who shared their experiences through eWOM platforms about product or services and give feedback to information seekers. From consistent awareness, theory for opinion leadership is an eWOM platform for individual opinion leaders who share their experiences and give opinions to seekers time to time (Preece, Nonnecke, & Andrews, 2004). Active and inactive are two types of lurkers who frequent or constant visitors, might be restraint posting or silent listeners, due to buying uncertainty lurkers strive for eWOM as the reliability of consumers' referral compares to specialists (Rafaeli, Ravid, & Soroka, 2004). For eWOM conceptual framework developed by Chan and Ngai (2011) identify the motivational factors that why people write or read eWOM, and discussed the factors for appealing on eWOM platforms which are social ties, self-enhancement potentials, other consumers' concern and economic incentives. Usually, consumers consider that online information as provided by other consumer are trustworthy and reliable for decision making.

People send the messages whether in a positive or negative way by experts and customers about product or services called eWOM communication channel. Sending and receiving messages through eWOM increasing day by day through the internet, that's why eWOM has become a channel that people can share their suggestions or opinions regarding products or services. Because of internet technology, websites, blogs, and other social networks have become the source of information and ideas about a product that consumers can share (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Informative channels for advertising have been found positively affected by social experiences (Gvili, Gvili, Levy, & Levy, 2016; Schumann, von Wangenheim, & Groene, 2014). Advertising credibility, informativeness, and entertainment are dimensions which effect positively on advertising value of social websites (Van-Tien Dao, Nhat Hanh Le, Ming-Sung Cheng, & Chao Chen, 2014). Many researchers observed that consumers can share or write their experiences and information about products or services through websites, such as Facebook, Amazon, Taobao, za Pak, TripAdvisor, VirtualTourist, and [epinions.com](http://epinions.com) etc. It can conclude that one to one and many to many are channels of eWOM communication that refer to messages sent one to other and many to other people (C. M. Cheung et al., 2008; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).

eWOM source credibility is about receivers' expectations of the credibility and capability of the information source and message writer and reflects nothing about the information itself (Luo, Luo, Schatzberg, & Sia, 2013). Yoo, Sanders, and Moon (2013) pointed out that eWOM is an exchange of product information among

consumers that is expected to be accurate and truthful. Information from a professional and trustworthy source can be considered important in motivating buying behavior (Tormala & Petty, 2004). However, not all the information is supplied by experts and trustworthy sources. Therefore, evaluating the credibility of a message writer is considered very important in the information exchange process (Hussain, Ahmed, Jafar, Rabnawaz, & Jianzhou, 2017). According to Reichelt, Sievert, and Jacob (2014), expertise can be described as the source's professed ability to evaluate the right outcome, and trustworthiness can be viewed as the perceived information source's efforts to spread this expert information without any bias. An expert writer should have sufficient knowledge to evaluate products/services and provide sensible reviews and opinions about the products/services (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008). According to O'Keefe, a trustworthy writer is expected to be strongly inclined, to be honest with information receivers (O'Keefe, 2002, p. 384). eWOMs are most influential in shaping consumer attitudes and modulating purchase decisions (Plummer, 2007). So far, most marketer-generated messages are considered as efforts to sell online products; they are deemed to be reliable information by consumers owing to the writers' unbiased, persuasive intentions. Product reviews are the second most credible and trustworthy sources while considering product quality, among 70% of consumers. Currently, most online sellers provide consumers with opportunities to comment on and exchange their product experiences on retailers' websites.

Many studies revealed that social sites are the source of information before the right decision about products or services, this is a channel of opinions or recommendations sharing which allows to customers through weblogs or websites. Independently sharing or exchanging opinions felt reliable in general about things but it is difficult to trust at once because before eWOM people share their experiences or ideas face to face and people feel hesitant to make a decision to get information via eWOM immediately.

**H3.** Argument quality and perceived risk have a positive impact on information usefulness.

#### 2.4. Information adoption theories and models

As per the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the technology acceptance model (TAM), before accepting a technology or product, its consequences are considered and the expected outcomes of these consequences are evaluated (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Davis, 1989; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The adoption process is an international phase of knowledge sharing. In this phase of knowledge transfer, exact information is converted to internalized significance and knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). According to TAM, expert opinion is a significant factor in adoption while information from other individuals has a potential impact on users. They recognize this information as useful evidence and the credibility of the technology (Chen, Teng, Yu, & Yu, 2016). Dual process theories have been proposed to describe adoption behavior (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006; Liu, Ren, Song, & Mirkovski, 2015). A theoretical model elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of adoption proposed by Sussman and Siegal (2003) explains how computer-mediated communications (CMC) can influence the adoption behavior of people. ELM explains how a message can affect individuals' attention and behavior routed centrally and peripherally. The central considerations account for the nature of the core arguments in the message while peripheral behavior elaborates the issues that are not directly involved with the basic idea of the message (Li, Ngai, & Xu, 2015, pp. 1–11). Two key factors in the information adoption model are information quality a central factor, and information sourced a peripheral factor (Luo et al., 2013).

**H4.** Information usefulness has a positive impact on information adoption.

### 3. Materials and methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors involved in eWOM for the purchase of food products. Participants were selected using non-probability purposive sampling, which identified personal information. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to measure instrument validity according to Park and Lee (2009), data reliability was measured through SPSS Cronbach's alpha, used structural equation modeling (SEM), which helps to test a multifaceted model concurrently. Questionnaire was used of 520 samples from the Republic of China to measure the factors; Opinion Seeking (OS), Self-worth Reinforcement (SWR), Product Involvement (PRI), Other Involvement (OTI), and Economic Incentives (ECI) using the paradigm of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Flynn, Goldsmith, and Eastman (1996) and Darden and Reynolds (1971), while the measurement of Perceived Risk (PR) was measured by paradigms constructed by Bettman (1973). Variable Argument Quality (AQ) was followed the description of Zhang and Watts (2008) and Nelson, Todd, and Wixom (2005). eWOM Source Credibility (SC) and Information Adoption (IA) were measured according to Steffes and Burgee (2009), Cheung et al. (2008) and Wu and Shaffer (1987), followed Bailey and Pearson (1983) for the measurement of Information Usefulness (IU).

To reach a product purchase decision, consumers read eWOM, because users often prefer to buy online instead of visiting markets. Because consumers desire information on a product's advantages and disadvantages and, to save time, users prefer to read eWOM posts. People prefer to receive unbiased information from the eWOM platform from which the best alternative can be selected (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Khammash and Griffiths (2011) stated that self-worth reinforcement requires an individual's experience, and feelings lead the individual to read eWOM information. The different senses delight when reading the eWOM message, which becomes a unique experience. By reading eWOM, individuals gain a sense of personal intelligence and, in turn, can provide comments on those feelings to the eWOM community Khammash and Griffiths (2011) described the process of learning about and consuming new distinct products as product involvement. Consumers use eWOM to learn about a product's advantages and disadvantages, which is a new market phenomenon. Moreover, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and Yap, Soetarto, and Sweeney (2013) supported the idea that all people use eWOM to obtain the latest information depending on their curiosity. Individuals participate in the eWOM community to signify their presence, which is known as a virtual community (Granitz & Ward, 1996); (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In this community, individuals share their experiences and compare their experiences with those of others with the same product. When an individual finds other perspectives that are related to the individual's experiences, then, a comparison can be made to facilitate the evaluation of the social position and value of the product. Economic incentives are related to the monetary benefits for the consumer, and these benefits are called remuneration. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) stated that people participate in online communities to acquire some advantages on cash, discounts, points, and coupons as a return on their time and energy. Remuneration shows an independent objective for consumers in reading online views. eWOM reflects information adaptation between opinion leaders and opinion seekers (Sun et al., 2006). Those who express their comments or reviews via electronic media concerning products are called opinion leaders while readers are opinion seekers. Individuals who purchase online differ, but their similar experiences with products can cause their

comments to resemble those of others, which provokes different responses among readers (Racherla & Friske, 2012). For opinion seekers, investigating the influence of eWOM on consumers is appealing (see Fig. 1).

#### 4. Results

Forty-one percent (214) of respondents were male while 59 percent (306) were female respondents for this research. A total of 70.9 percent of the respondents were aged between 18 and 40 years, which was the age range with the highest frequency at 369 respondents. Respondents with income between 3001 and 6000 RMB comprised 34.6 percent and totaled 180. A total of 88.5 percent of respondents shopped online shopping, and 11.5 percent of respondents did not. A total of 54.4 percent of respondents engaged in online shopping between one and four times a month. In summary, 83.8 percent of respondents involved in online shopping for food product items, 87.5 percent of respondents collected information on the internet about food commodities before purchasing, and 87.5 percent of respondents read reviews/comments on the internet before buying. Respondents were also asked which kind of food products they preferred to buy online; it has been observed that most of the Chinese customers purchased the seasoning and spices than sweets, candies, chocolates, jam, jelly, honey, grain and grain products, tea and coffee (see Table 2).

The different factors such as opinion seeking, self-worth reinforcement, product involvement, economic incentives, information usefulness, eWOM credibility, argument quality, perceived risk and information adoption have forty-seven items which were examined to check the validity and reliability analysis of the sample through confirmatory factor analysis and SPSS. The values of factor loadings of each item, variance extract, and Cronbach's alpha are indicating (see Table 3).

The value of chi-square/df was 2.720 and showed a good fit for the model because chi-square/df value ranging from 0 to 3 is acceptable. Additionally, the goodness of fit index and the adjusted goodness of fit values were 0.815 and 0.795, which supported the model. Moreover, the Tucker-Lewis coefficient and comparative fit index values were 0.917 and 0.922, respectively, which confirmed the fit of the model because both values were in the range of the benchmark value. Browne, Cudeck, Bollen, and Long (1993) stated that fitting values of the root mean square of approximation should not be more than 0.08 of the goodness of the model, and the value of the root mean square of approximation for the model was 0.058. After determining the model, fitness estimated the model using regression coefficients. The structural model is shown in Fig. 2

along with the variable relationships among all the variables of the conceptual framework (see Fig. 2).

The regression weights of the estimate, standard errors, critical ratios and results of different casual paths are indicated in Table 4. Opinion seeking, self-worth reinforcement, and other involvement have the positive influence on eWOM credibility, the estimated value ranges are .417, .640 and .528 while product involvement and economic incentives have the negative impact on eWOM credibility with the estimated value ranges of -.420 and -.689. eWOM credibility has a positive influence on perceived risk and argument quality, the estimated value ranges are .066 and .069. Argument quality and perceived risk have positively affected by information usefulness, and information usefulness has also a positive impact on information adoption with the estimated value ranges .182, .355 and .200 respectively (see Table 4).

#### 5. Discussion

##### 5.1. Impact of motivational factors on eWOM credibility

This study revealed that the hypothesis “Opinion Seeking has a positive impact on eWOM Source Credibility is accepted,” demonstrate that Opinion Seeking is an essential motivator for consumers to read eWOM. Consumers read eWOM to understand the product's merits, demerits, and the price and costs. Today, consumers have less time to make frequent visits to the market and prefer to obtain new product information from the internet. Moreover, consumers also believe that online information is not biased. Therefore, individuals prefer to read eWOM comments, which saves time in food product decision making (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). “Self-worth Reinforcement hypothesis has a significant impact on eWOM Source Credibility”, and the hypothesis is accepted and considered an important factor after Opinion Seeking in motivating the readers of eWOM. When eWOM readers gain convincing information on products, the readers sense satisfaction because they believe that eWOM provides the latest information and experiences concerning products. “Product Involvement has a negative impact on eWOM Source Credibility” consists of product information, such as how to use the product and the new products available on the market. The basic concept of Product Involvement is to provide information on the advantages of a product and its availability for the interested consumer. The hypotheses for Other Involvement and Economic Incentives also have a significant role in product decision making. The Other Involvement factor has a likely impact on consumer's decisions where the individual must consider the social relationships in a virtual community for the latest product trends. Results

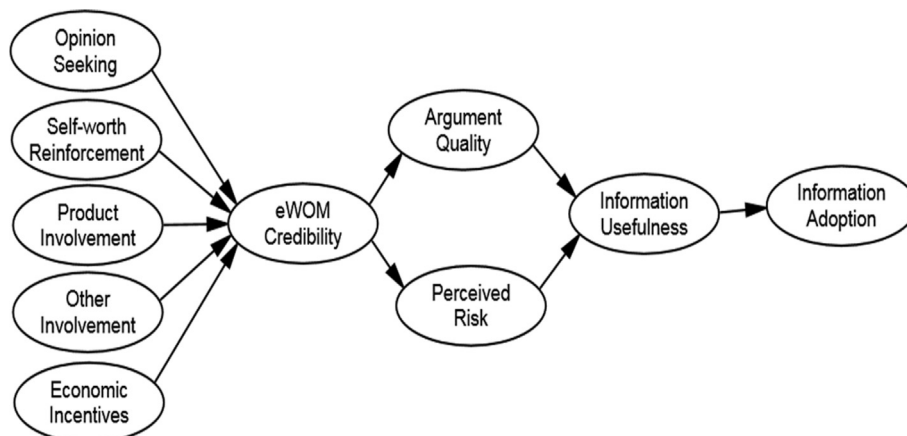


Fig. 1. The conceptual model.

**Table 2**  
Respondents demographic and search information for food products of the sample.

Variables	Categories	Percent	Variables	Categories	Percent
Gender	Male	41.2	Have you shopped online before?	Yes	88.5
	Female	58.8		No	11.5
Age	18–30	41.5	Online shopping in a month (on average)?	1–4 times	54.4
	31–40	29.4		5–8 times	30.4
	41–50	22.9		9–12 times	11.9
	51+	6.2		More than 12 times	3.3
	≤1000	8.1			
Monthly income (RMB)	1001–2000	9.2	Have you shopped online food products?	Yes	83.8
	2001–3000	18.5		No	16.2
	3001–6000	34.6	Search for food products before purchasing?	Yes	87.5
	6001–10000	21.5		No	12.5
	≥10000	8.1	Read reviews/comments before food purchase?	Yes	87.7
				No	12.3
Food products purchased through the Internet (Could be more than one)					
Grain and grain products (wheat, rye, oats, corn (maize), barley, buckwheat, rice, bread, buns, cakes, cookies, pies, cereal, flakes, popcorn, pasta, macaroni, noodles, vermicelli, dumplings, flour, etc.)					29.0
Meat, poultry, fish (meat and meat products, poultry, fish and fish products, seafood, eggs, etc.)					6.0
Dairy products (milk, dry milk, yogurt, butter, cream, cheese, etc.)					17.4
Fruit, berries, dried fruit, nuts, seeds, preserves (jam, jelly, honey, etc.)					30.4
Fruit juice, beverages, drinks (juice, tea, coffee, milkshake, water, soft drinks, alcoholic beverages/liquor, etc.)					23.6
Vegetables, peas, beans, corn, herbs					11.6
Sauces, salad dressings, vegetable oils, fats					21
Seasoning and spices					40.8
Baby food					18
Others					7.2

**Table 3**  
Validity and reliability analysis of the sample.

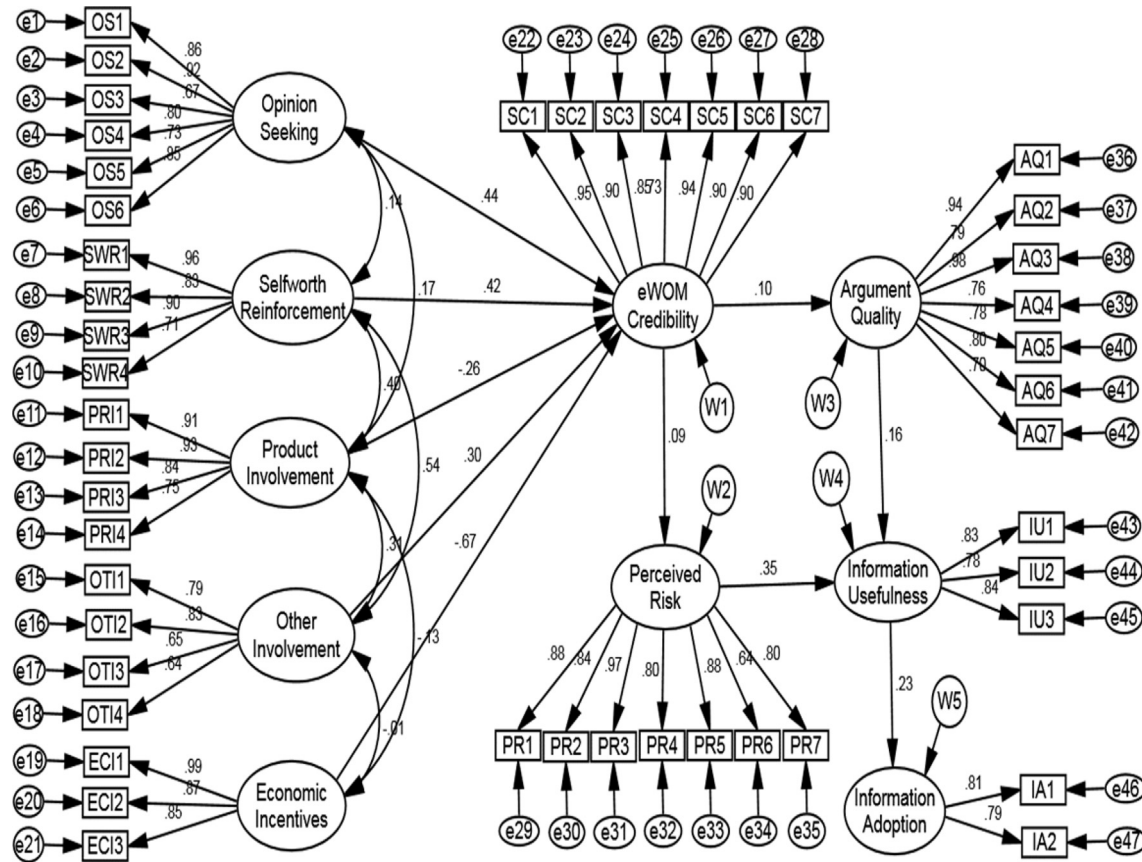
Factor	Item	Factor Loadings	VE	Cronbach's alpha	Factor	Item	Factor Loadings	VE	Cronbach's alpha
OS	OS1	.856	0.65	.910	SC	SC1	.951	0.78	.963
	OS2	.922				SC2	.903		
	OS3	.668				SC3	.846		
	OS4	.801				SC4	.730		
	OS5	.726				SC5	.939		
	OS6	.849				SC6	.896		
SWR	SWR1	.961	0.73	.912	AQ	SC7	.896	0.68	.937
	SWR2	.830				AQ1	.944		
	SWR3	.899				AQ2	.787		
	SWR4	.714				AQ3	.977		
PRI	PRI1	.912	0.74	.915	PR	AQ4	.757	0.70	.936
	PRI2	.933				AQ5	.785		
	PRI3	.844				AQ6	.804		
	PRI4	.748				AQ7	.698		
OTI	OTI1	.792	0.54	.817	PR	PR1	.877	0.70	.936
	OTI2	.830				PR2	.845		
	OTI3	.645				PR3	.969		
	OTI4	.639				PR4	.796		
ECI	ECI1	.990	0.82	.908	PR	PR5	.875	0.64	.771
	ECI2	.872				PR6	.640		
	ECI3	.846				PR7	.802		
IU	IU1	.832	0.67	.860	IA	IA1	.807	0.64	.771
	IU2	.777				IA2	.787		
	IU3	.842							

OS; Opinion Seeking, SWR; Self-worth Reinforcement, PRI; Product Involvement, ECI; Economic Incentives, IU; Information Usefulness, SC; Source Credibility, AQ; Argument Quality, PR; Perceived Risk, IA; Information Adoption. VE; Variance Extract, Cronbach's Alpha; More than 0.7 acceptable.

were supported by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and showed that Other Involvement motivates Source Credibility via eWOM because the opinions of various consumers assist in solving the problem of decision making. Economic Incentives has an adverse effect on online purchasing because of many factors, particularly the income differences of customers, as confirmed by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), which contradicts the findings of Khammash and Griffiths (2011).

## 5.2. Impact of eWOM credibility on perceived risk and argument quality

eWOM Source Credibility hypothesis has a positive impact on Argument Quality and Perceived Risk, and the result shows that people find Argument Quality and Perceived Risk when they read eWOM information. Argument Quality and Perceived Risk are defined as routes; in the process of eWOM review, individuals look for both routes. It was observed that Argument Quality has more



**Fig. 2.** Structural model fitness: Chi-square/Degrees of freedom; 2.720, Probability level; .000, Goodness of fit index; .815, Adjusted goodness of fit; .795, Tucker-Lewis coefficient; .917, Comparative fit index; .922, Root mean square of approximation; .058.

significance for food product purchasing.

### 5.3. Impact of argument quality and perceived risk on information usefulness

Both Argument Quality and Perceived Risk affect Information Usefulness positively and motivate the acceptance of these hypotheses. This shows that the hypotheses are significant and provide useful information. People have the preference for Argument Quality compared to Perceived Risk for online food product purchasing. Therefore, consumers look directly to others to provide consumer food product reviews. Owing to the ability of almost anybody to publish information, the quality of some online information has been adversely affected. Users evaluate information quality by accuracy, presentation, and timeliness (Suh, Greene,

Israilov, & Rho, 2015). Delone and McLean (2003) proposed that factors such as accuracy, relevance, understandability, completeness, currency, dynamism, personalization, and variety are information quality measures, while Wu (2013) suggested four fundamental characteristics of information: quality, understandability, reliability, and usefulness. According to another study, quality relies on four basic elements: relevance of the information, real need of current era, truthfulness, and comprehensiveness. The relevance of messages is important as most Internet users are conscious of their time (Cheung et al., 2008). Internet users spend very short time reading information on a Web page; they merely scan the page to look for information of interest. Therefore, it is vital to present only the most relevant message to a particular online community, which is also important in customers' decision making (Dunk, 2004).

**Table 4**  
Regression weights.

Casual Paths			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	Results
eWOM Credibility	←	Opinion Seeking	.417***	.020	21.060	Accepted
eWOM Credibility	←	Self-worth Reinforcement	.640***	.043	14.716	Accepted
eWOM Credibility	←	Product Involvement	-.420	.034	-12.189	Rejected
eWOM Credibility	←	Other Involvement	.528***	.048	10.936	Accepted
eWOM Credibility	←	Economic Incentives	-.689	.027	-25.999	Rejected
Perceived Risk	←	eWOM Credibility	.066***	.034	1.948	Accepted
Argument Quality	←	eWOM Credibility	.069***	.030	2.296	Accepted
Information Usefulness	←	Argument Quality	.182***	.052	3.511	Accepted
Information Usefulness	←	Perceived Risk	.355***	.049	7.292	Accepted
Information Adoption	←	Information Usefulness	.200***	.050	3.986	Accepted

S.E.; Standard Errors, C.R.; Critical Ratio, \*\*\*p values ≤ 0.05.

#### 5.4. Impact of information usefulness on information adoption

Finally, the Information Usefulness hypothesis is also positive for information acceptance, which suggests acceptance of the Information Usefulness hypothesis acceptance during online food product purchasing. The results show that when individuals select useful information and apply that information, information adoption contributes to decision making. Apparently, usefulness is referred to an individual's perception to adopt a new technology, which will either improve the performance or not. Usefulness is a fundamental parameter of user adoption and is a significant factor for current and future descriptions (Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu, 2012). In a particular Internet social group or community, it is vital to exchange innovative ideas and thoughts regarding products or services. People have different reactions relating to the usefulness of these opinions and whether these would help them to make the best choice. Therefore, if users perceive that a comment among online groups is used, they will be more inclined to adopt the information.

#### 6. Conclusion

Since the Internet represents a worldwide interactive forum, it is difficult to differentiate between opinion leadership and opinion seekers. Online discussions and comments may pave the way for disseminating information on the adoption of new technologies, decision making, and choice of products. Therefore, determining customers' perception regarding message quality on the Web is a basic characteristic for understanding their potential buying attitudes. Information credibility is an important motive for modulating consumers' purchasing behavior. Moreover, information credibility plays a significant role in the product information persuasion process. Therefore, to maintain the credibility of eWOM, it is essential to evaluate information credibility, however, by using contextual moderators, digital channels, and review platforms, future research can be implemented in eWOM communication adoption. This study developed a new technique to analyze the overall aspects of eWOM readership, developed the research model from the study of Sussman and Siegal (2003) and Khammash and Griffiths (2011), according to which most of the literature explains eWOM generation and its impact but does not address what motivates consumers to read eWOM. It was extended previous work by empirically investigating these factors of eWOM. A practical feature of this study is that it helps food product producers generate systematic eWOM. This is the first study that identifies why people read eWOM and how eWOM information motivates the decision making of consumers who are interested in purchasing online food products. This notion implies that managers should monitor their official information platforms such as websites and blogs. Managers must check that the information on these platforms is useful for customers. Therefore, argument quality is significant for individuals' final decisions.

Managers must engage in eWOM information appearing on their official websites, which can minimize risks and negative perspectives concerning product reliability for reviewers. Marketers can make their business strategies according to customer targeting towards sustaining retails, by facilitating eWOM activities, feedback mechanism, which can positively effect on consumers' purchasing behavior. Additionally, the information should provide a satisfactory, rewarding, and unique experience for the consumer. There are other motives, for example, consumer empowerment, new Socl and site administration. Future researchers should empirically examine these motives. The current study addresses eWOM readership from the perspective of food product purchasing, but the model in this paper can be applied to

other contexts and industries.

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