

Electronic Word-of-Mouth and Customer Experience in Hong Kong: Empirical Evidence and Managerial Strategies for the Digital Age

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Abstract

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become a decisive factor in shaping customer experience and business performance in Hong Kong's digitally saturated and highly competitive market. Using a mixed-methods design with a stratified online survey of 450 respondents and secondary data, this study examines how four eWOM dimensions—volume, sentiment, source credibility, and platform usage—affect customer experience outcomes such as trust, satisfaction, and engagement. Quantitative analyses, including regression, correlation, and ANOVA, reveal that higher eWOM volume, more positive sentiment, and higher perceived source credibility are significantly associated with enhanced customer experience, while platform differences moderate engagement and response patterns. The findings support a set of actionable strategies for firms in Hong Kong to monitor, shape, and leverage eWOM, emphasizing proactive reputation management, platform-specific tactics, and integration of eWOM insights into customer experience management systems

1. Introduction

Digital transformation has redefined customer experience from a largely offline interaction into a multi-channel journey that spans websites, social media, review platforms, and mobile applications. In this environment, electronic word-of-mouth—user-generated reviews, ratings, and comments about products and services—has become a crucial influence on how consumers perceive brands, make purchase decisions, and evaluate post-purchase satisfaction. Compared with traditional word-of-mouth limited to interpersonal interaction, eWOM is scalable, persistent, and easily searchable, allowing single messages to reach large audiences rapidly and remain accessible over time.

Hong Kong provides a particularly suitable context for studying eWOM and customer experience due to its high internet penetration, strong mobile usage, and dense competitive landscape across retail and service sectors. Consumers in Hong Kong are digitally savvy, information-intensive, and culturally inclined to rely on peer opinions, making eWOM an important determinant of trust, loyalty, and brand performance. Although prior research has examined eWOM in other regions, there is limited empirical work that jointly models the impact of eWOM volume, sentiment, source credibility, and platform characteristics on customer experience in this specific environment. This article addresses that gap by presenting a structured analysis of survey data and interpreting how eWOM variables influence customer experience among Hong Kong consumers.

The study pursues three objectives: (1) to quantify the relationships between the four eWOM dimensions and customer experience; (2) to interpret these relationships in the context of Hong Kong's digital culture and market conditions; and (3) to derive actionable managerial strategies for managing eWOM as part of customer experience initiatives.

2. Methods

2.1 Research design and sampling

A convergent parallel mixed-methods design is used, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights collected and analyzed in parallel and integrated at the interpretation stage. The target population consists of consumers in Hong Kong who actively engage with eWOM on social media, review sites, and other digital platforms. Stratified random sampling ensures representation across age groups, gender, industry exposure (e.g., hospitality, retail, technology, healthcare), and digital literacy levels, improving generalizability and allowing subgroup comparisons. The final dataset comprises 450 valid responses, with no missing cases after listwise deletion, and a gender distribution of approximately 57% female and 43% male, reflecting the demographic composition of digitally active users in this context.

2.2 Data collection and measurement instruments

Data are collected via an online questionnaire distributed through social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn), email invitations, and Hong Kong consumer forums, leveraging the high digital engagement of local residents. The instrument includes:

- Closed-ended items (Likert scales and multiple-choice questions) measuring:
 - eWOM volume: perceived number and frequency of reviews, comments, and ratings encountered for products and services.
 - eWOM sentiment: perceived positivity, negativity, or neutrality of eWOM content.
 - Source credibility: perceived trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity of eWOM sources, including verified customers, experts, and influencers.
 - Platform usage: frequency and importance of different eWOM platforms (social media, review sites, e-commerce platforms) in decision-making.
 - Customer experience: perceived trust, satisfaction, engagement, and overall experience with brands discussed in eWOM.
- Open-ended questions capturing narratives about memorable eWOM experiences, perceptions of credibility, and reported influence of eWOM on specific purchase or service decisions.

Customer experience is operationalized as a composite construct summarizing cognitive and affective evaluations of brand interactions, consistent with the theoretical framing used in the first article. eWOM variables are measured using self-report items that reflect the consumer's subjective exposure and interpretation of digital feedback.

3. Data analytics

Data analysis begins with descriptive statistics to profile the sample and summarize key variables, such as the distribution of gender, age, and reported engagement with eWOM. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha is conducted for multi-item scales; one six-item scale shows an alpha of 0.558, indicating moderate internal consistency that is acceptable for exploratory research but points to the need for further scale refinement in future studies. Bivariate correlation analysis explores associations between each eWOM variable and customer experience, providing initial evidence of direction and magnitude of relationships.

Multiple regression analysis then estimates a model with customer experience as the dependent variable and eWOM volume, sentiment, source credibility, and platform usage as predictors. The model yields $R \approx 0.369$, $R^2 \approx 0.136$, and adjusted $R^2 \approx 0.128$, indicating that the four predictors together explain around 13–14% of the variance in customer experience. ANOVA for the regression model produces $F \approx 17.535$ with $p < 0.001$, confirming that the set of eWOM variables significantly improves prediction relative to a constant-only model. Additional analyses, including correlation coefficients and ANOVA on specific customer experience components, help clarify how individual eWOM dimensions relate to trust, satisfaction, and engagement. Qualitative responses are analyzed thematically to contextualize these results, focusing on patterns related to credibility, sentiment interpretation, and platform-specific behavior in Hong Kong.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive and reliability findings

Demographic analysis shows that the sample is skewed slightly toward female respondents (57.1%) but includes substantial representation of both genders and a broad range of age and education levels, consistent with a diverse and digitally engaged urban population. This distribution suggests that the findings reflect the experiences of a wide cross-section of Hong Kong consumers who frequently rely on online information in their decision processes. Descriptive statistics on key variables indicate that respondents report frequent exposure to eWOM across multiple platforms, substantial reliance on online reviews for product evaluation, and high awareness of both positive and negative online feedback.

Reliability analysis reveals moderate internal consistency for one multi-item scale, with Cronbach's alpha at 0.558 for a six-item measure, which is acceptable for exploratory work but signals the need for improved scale coherence in future research. The absence of missing data and complete case inclusion strengthen the internal validity of the subsequent statistical analyses by avoiding imputation-related biases.

4.1 Regression and correlation results

Correlation analysis indicates that each of the four eWOM variables is positively associated with overall customer experience, with particularly strong relationships observed for perceived sentiment and source credibility. Higher perceived volume of eWOM is associated with greater trust and confidence in decisions, consistent with the notion of social proof and popularity signals; however, qualitative comments suggest that extremely high volumes can also introduce information overload for some consumers. More positive eWOM sentiment correlates with higher perceived satisfaction and stronger willingness to recommend brands, whereas negative sentiment correlates with reduced trust and increased hesitation to purchase.

The multiple regression model shows that the four eWOM variables together account for a meaningful portion of the variance in customer experience ($R^2 \approx 0.136$, $F \approx 17.535$, $p < 0.001$). While the detailed coefficients are not reproduced here, the overall model statistics support the conclusion that eWOM volume, sentiment, source credibility, and platform usage jointly exert a statistically significant influence on how consumers perceive their experiences with brands. Qualitative data reinforce these findings, with respondents describing positive eWOM as reinforcing confidence and loyalty, and negative eWOM as undermining expectations and triggering switches to competitors, especially in high-involvement purchase categories.

4.2 Interpretation

The results substantiate the view that eWOM is integral to customer experience in Hong Kong, not merely an ancillary information source. The significant predictive power of the eWOM variables suggests that firms cannot treat online reviews and social media comments as external noise; instead, they must be understood as core inputs into how customers form expectations, evaluate performance, and decide on future engagement. The effect size ($R^2 \approx 0.136$) reflects a moderate impact, which is meaningful given the complex, multifactor nature of customer experience that also depends on product quality, price, and service characteristics beyond eWOM.

Interpretation of the regression and correlation patterns highlights a few key points. First, eWOM volume functions as a surrogate for popularity and legitimacy in the eyes of Hong Kong consumers, who interpret a high number of reviews as a sign that a product or service is widely used and therefore safer to choose. Second, sentiment plays a clear directional role: positive sentiment enhances perceptions of reliability and value, while negative sentiment amplifies perceived risk and can quickly damage brand reputation in a densely connected market. Third, source credibility is critical in an era of fake reviews and influence marketing, as respondents report greater trust in verified customers, domain experts, and transparent influencers than in anonymous or obviously sponsored content. Fourth, platform characteristics shape how eWOM is consumed and acted upon: review sites and e-commerce platforms are seen as more decision-oriented, whereas social media platforms are more effective for awareness and engagement, yet can rapidly spread both positive and negative narratives.

In the cultural and economic context of Hong Kong, where consumers are both demanding and digitally sophisticated, these patterns suggest that successful firms will be those that actively manage eWOM across platforms, focusing on credibility and responsiveness rather than volume alone. The mixed-methods design adds depth to this interpretation by showing how quantitative associations map onto lived experiences and tensions, such as balancing trust in peer reviews with skepticism about authenticity.

4.3 Managerial implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings underline several priorities. First, firms should systematically encourage genuine eWOM by making it easy and rewarding for satisfied customers to leave reviews across the platforms their target segments use most, thereby maintaining a healthy and authentic review volume. Second, organizations need robust monitoring and response systems—“social listening” combined with clear response protocols—to identify and address negative eWOM promptly, turning some complaints into opportunities for service recovery and public demonstration of accountability. Third, building and signaling source credibility is essential: highlighting verified purchaser status, collaborating with carefully chosen and transparent influencers, and showcasing expert endorsements can enhance trust in eWOM content.

Fourth, platform-specific strategies are needed: for example, managing detailed, informative reviews on e-commerce and review sites to support evaluation, while using social media for interactive engagement, real-time responses, and storytelling that frames and amplifies positive eWOM. Finally, integrating eWOM analytics—such as sentiment trends, volume spikes, and source mapping—into customer experience management and decision-making systems will help firms in Hong Kong adapt offerings and communication to evolving consumer expectations. These implications suggest that eWOM management should be embedded in broader digital strategy rather than treated as an isolated marketing tactic.

5. Conclusion

This empirical study demonstrates that eWOM volume, sentiment, source credibility, and platform usage jointly exert a significant influence on customer experience among digitally active consumers in Hong Kong, confirming eWOM’s central role in shaping trust, satisfaction, and engagement in a highly connected market. By quantifying these relationships and interpreting them through a mixed-methods lens, the article shows that effective customer experience management in Hong Kong requires deliberate, evidence-based management of eWOM across platforms, with particular attention to credibility and responsiveness. For firms competing in this fast-evolving digital landscape, success increasingly depends on their ability to treat eWOM as an ongoing feedback loop and strategic asset within integrated customer experience and digital transformation initiatives.

7. References

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