

Influence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), online trust and message appeal on KWASU students' purchase intention of mobile phones

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The emergence of digital innovations and online forums has revolutionized the way consumers seek and share information about mobile phones. The rapid growth of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and its impact on consumer behavior has attracted significant attention among researchers. The predictive potentials of e-WOM, message appeals and consumers' trust which are variables associated with the digital marketing environment is yet to be examined among major mobile phone target markets in Nigeria, specifically the Nigerian students. Hinged on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, this study adopted a quantitative research approach, in which Kwara State University (KWASU) undergraduates were surveyed. The study showed that e-WOM positively influenced respondents' intention to purchase mobile phones. Also, promotional messages with a combination of logical reasoning and emotional elements may positively influence consumer decisions toward the purchase of mobile phones. The majority of the respondents trust the comments and recommendations online as they perceive the online promotion as credible especially when the promotional intents of sources are disclosed and transparency is ensured. Hence, this study recommends among others, that brands and influencers ensure clarity, disclosure, and transparency in communication to boost students' trust and confidence in e-WOM when considering the purchase of a mobile phone.

Keywords: e-WOM; Online trust; Purchase intention; Mobile Phone; Appeals; Students

Introduction

The marketplace has become more and more digitalized coupled with consumer dynamics that are shaped by various factors. This has become a source of concern for marketers and businesses who seek understanding and means of stimulating consumer psychological and behavioral change towards the purchase of products or services. Purchase intention has become a key predictor of consumption behavior and can be influenced through the intersection of interpersonal communication, persuasive messages, and consumer trust in digital environments. The adoption of digital trends and social interactions to achieve advertising objectives today represents a significant shift from traditional advertising using legacy media such as Newspapers, Magazines, radio, and television as well as traditional word of mouth (Chuguvi, 2022). Unarguably, the online platform has enabled people to consume and share information more easily than ever, leading to a shift

in how people access news, information, and other content. Today, successful marketing strategies are hinged on customer loyalty and brand advocates. These changes in advertising and marketing strategies have led companies to adapt to reach consumers through these new channels (Umeaku & Dada, 2020; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019) Word of mouth is long known as an influential tool in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchase decisions. It is known to be the oldest means of influencing people to purchase a product or service (advertising), as satisfied customers share their opinions and product experiences with friends, family, colleagues, etc. Word-of-mouth marketing has consistently been one of the most effective marketing tools, and its impact has only been amplified by the advent of new media. Saleh (2023) opines that word-of-mouth marketing offers a more

organic, credible, and cost-effective approach when compared to traditional advertising methods. While traditional advertisements may still have influence, there seems to be a significant decrease in their efficacy and credibility in recent years (Saleh, 2023). Online or electronic word of mouth, known as eWOM, is a means of communicating opinions, referrals, recommendations, and experiences about products and services through online platforms (Cheung & Lee, 2018). This communication is achieved among people who interact with one another in the virtual world of social media. With e-WOM, information may, and can be sent more quickly and widely unlike traditional word-of-mouth communication (WOM), reaching a larger audience and having a meaningful influence on consumer behavior (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). E-wom often involves complete endorsement for product information shared and posted in Web 2.0 technology (Sulthana & Vasantha, 2019). Businesses tend to strengthen the impact of word of mouth through social media networks, online consumer reviews on websites and e-commerce platforms, and influencer endorsements (Saleh, 2023).

At the same time, the way marketing communications are presented is very important in determining their effectiveness. The appeal of a message has the potential to captivate audiences and drive their purchasing choices. Message appeals relate to the persuasiveness of the message. In marketing communications, marketers utilize message appeals to attract customers' attention, persuade them to like the products or services, and influence them to make a purchase (Hongcharu, 2024). Appeal forms the underlying content of the messages that marketers employ to realize their communication objectives (Belch & Belch, 2003 citing William Weilbacher). As marketers rely on visual and verbal information, many options are available for the design and presentation of such messages. Therefore, a marketer's choice of an appropriate appeal becomes one of the most important creative strategy decisions to make. While some messages are deliberately structured to appeal to the rational, logical aspect of the consumer's decision-making process; others appeal to feelings in an attempt to evoke some emotional reaction. Many believe that effective advertising combines the practical reasons for purchasing a product with emotional values.

Central to this dynamic is online trust, a crucial factor in mitigating consumer skepticism and fostering confidence in digital transactions. Online trust plays a crucial role in influencing consumers' behavior, perceptions, and purchase intentions. Consumers rely on various sources, including recommendations from friends and family, opinions and reviews posted by other consumers, endorsements from brand influencers, and even comments made by celebrities or industry experts to evaluate the trustworthiness of brand communications. Consumers' trust in these sources influences their decision-making process, as they seek credible and reliable information to guide their purchasing choices. This digital era and the wide use of online platforms have made it easier for consumers to access recommendations, evaluate phones, and seek general opinions about phones from other consumers online. Trust has been defined variously in different situations and contexts. It is a factor in interactions involving uncertainty and dependency. Aljazzaf, Perry and Capretz (2010) aver that the degree of uncertainty, dependency, and risk is higher in the online world than the offline world. Corritore, Kracher and Wiedenbeck (2003) define online trust as "an attitude of confident expectation in an online situation of risk that one's vulnerabilities will not be exploited". It is believed that marketers who seek positive change in the behavior of prospective consumers understand the key psychological variables such as perceived risk, vulnerability, expectation, confidence, and exploitation, associated with users' trust, as given in the definition.

It is therefore important to evaluate the predictive potentials of e-WOM, message appeals, and consumers' trust which are associated with the digital marketing environment concerning mobile phone brands. The study of this nature is important to be conducted among Nigerian students who increasingly use smartphones and are brisk on various online networking sites (Oladosu, Sanni, & Tanimowo, 2021). Therefore, the university environment provides a fertile ground for examining how well the students use, and trust the information obtained from online platforms and its impact on their buying decisions and behavior toward mobile phones.

Statement of Problem

In the context of this study, mobile phone marketers or companies tend to attract their prospective

buyers' attention and influence them to purchase through different message appeals on various online platforms where these consumers receive an increasing amount of information from other customers or even brand influencers through electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Oftentimes, their perception of the credibility of such messages tends to impact their purchase decision. While these variables have been examined individually or combined in different contexts (e.g Hongcharu, 2024; Wu & Wang, 2011; Sharma & Parmar, 2018), none of these studies have investigated the interaction of the three variables and their influence on mobile phone consumption among Nigerian students. There is also little to no attention given to the digital marketing environment in Nigeria within the context of this study. This research therefore seeks to fill this gap, providing valuable insights for marketers and advertisers targeting the Nigerian mobile phone market.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the level of students' exposure to e-WOM on mobile phones
2. To determine the level of student trust in e-WOM
3. To determine students' opinions on the types of appeals they are exposed to
4. To establish the effect of e- WOM and online trust on the purchase intentions of mobile phone among KWASU Students

Research Questions

The research is designed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of students' exposure to e-WOM information on mobile phones?
2. What is the level of trust students place in e-WOM?
3. What are the opinions of students regarding the types of appeals they are exposed to?
4. To what extent does e-WOM, online trust affect the purchase intentions of KWASU students towards mobile phones

Literature Review

The emergence of technology and interactive media platforms has revolutionized how consumers seek and share information about mobile phones. The rapid growth of electronic word-of-mouth communication and its influence on consumers has become a significant concern in the context of mobile phone purchase. Using the social media has

become a popular source of information for customers, especially in the context of mobile phone purchase. According to Sivadass and Baker (2018), the current shift towards online shopping has caused a notable increase in the importance of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) communication on purchase intention of consumers

The significance of online trust in influencing customers' buying decisions has been noted (Chen & Barnes, 2007; Fan, Ming, & Whinston, 2005; Fang, Chiu, & Wang, 2011; Hassanein & Head, 2007) to lower perceived risk and fosters positive word-of-mouth. When consumers perceive higher levels of online trust, they are more likely to engage in e-WOM activities, trust recommendations from others, and have higher purchase intentions (Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2008; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Conversely, a lack of trust can lead to skepticism, information seeking from alternative sources, and reduced purchase intentions.

Empirical studies have highlighted the relationship between online trust and purchase intention. For example, a study by Wang, Shahzad, Ahmad... & Hassan (2022) found that online trust positively influenced consumers' purchase intentions mediated. Also, Zeqiri, Ramadani and Aloulou (2023) established that trust is mediating in the influence of e-WOM on customer repurchase behavior.

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that message appeals have a significant role in influencing consumers' buying intentions (Jovanovic, Vlastelica, & Kostic, 2016; Hongcharu, 2024). A variety of appeals, such as musical, emotional, fearful, informative, humorous, and rational, can be used to grab customers' attention and change their attitudes and actions toward a good or service. It is a multifaceted construct that includes features like usefulness, functionality, and beauty. Products that have good usage scores and a pleasing appearance tend to attract more attention from consumers. For instance, the study conducted by Mosa (2021) examined how Iraqi Facebook users' purchasing intentions were affected by the believability of advertisements. The research utilized a quantitative approach, gathering information via questionnaires. The results showed a strong correlation between purchase intentions and advertisement credibility. This implies that consumers are more likely to make purchases when

they believe that advertisements are reliable. This study emphasizes how crucial it is for advertisements to establish trust through the logical presentation of information and visual aids to positively affect consumer psychology, leading to positive intention towards advertised products online.

The impact of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) communication on purchase intention and brand image in North Cyprus was investigated by Alrwashdeh, Emeagwali, & Aljuhmani (2019). Their study used a quantitative approach, gathering data through surveys. Their study demonstrates that e-WOM has a considerable impact on consumers' intentions to purchase. The study emphasizes how influential and earlier customer suggestions are in influencing purchasing intention. Similarly, studies conducted by Kazmi and Mehmood (2016); Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) showed that e-WOM

Theoretical Framework

The Elaboration Likelihood Model was considered relevant to this study. ELM, developed by Petty and Cacioppo in 1986, mostly applies to advertising and psychological research. This study is useful in examining the varying levels of elaboration and the routes individuals take when evaluating e-WOM communication, online trust, and appeals. This, in turn, helps to understand the underlying processes that influence purchase intention and how different factors interact in shaping consumers' attitudes and decision-making. ELM justifies the examination of various factors that can enhance central processing, such as the quality of information provided in e-WOM, the credibility of the sources, and the relevance of appeals. Understanding how these factors affect central processing, helps gain insights into how they influence purchase intention.

Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative research approach, specifically a survey research design which focused on the undergraduates of KWASU, for the 2022/2023 academic session. The researcher's choice to specifically target Kwara State University students is driven by several factors. Firstly, the university represents a diverse and significant student population from different parts of Nigeria, providing valuable insights into the preferences and behaviors of students in the Nigerian context. Secondly, these University students are accessible to provide samples for data collection, allowing for efficient and effective research implementation.

has a considerable impact on consumer intention to purchase. These studies further highlighted the dependence of consumers on Internet recommendations during the information search and evaluation in their decision-making process. In addition, studies have observed that social media influencers persuade consumers and enhance e-WOM intention (Kim et al, 2008; Lou, Tan & Chen, 2019).

The study tends to enrich the literature on consumer behavior in Nigerian environment, focusing on students' mobile phone purchasing decisions. It also addresses the impact of e-WOM, online trust, and appeals on purchase intention. Its findings provide practical insights for mobile phone manufacturers, marketers, and e-commerce platforms to enhance online trust, promote positive e-WOM, and leverage effective appeals, thereby gaining a competitive advantage and fostering credibility with customers.

Furthermore, this population consists of undergraduates who are knowledgeable about the valence of electronic word-of-mouth. They are consumers who seem to be actively involved in the search and purchase of mobile phones. They are also active users of the online media platform.

To ensure a representative sample, a multiple-stage sampling technique was employed. First, four out of nine faculties in the school were strategically selected as clusters. Then, primary sampling units (PSUs) within each selected faculty are identified, and students from these departments were sampled. A sample size of 400 was employed for study.

Data Collection

The data collection instrument utilized is a self-administered questionnaire, divided into five sections.

A questionnaire is an instrument of research which consist of a series of questions crafted to gather data or information from respondents (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker 2018). It is a standardized tool for collecting data, which ensures that each respondent is asked the exact set of questions in the same arrangement, and thus, useful for achieving a high degree of consistency in the data collected. The Section A collects personal information of the research respondent (demographic questions such as age, gender, academic level etc.), while Section B assesses exposure to e-WOM information on mobile phones. Section C evaluates the level of trust in e-WOM and Section D gathers opinions on appeals.

Lastly, Section E examines purchase intentions.

gender, academic level etc.), while Sectio

Table 1.

Reliability of items

Constructs	N	No of items	Cronbach Alpha (α)
Exposure to e-WOM information on mobile phone	400	6	0.810
Trust in e-WOM	400	5	0.825
Appeals in e-WOM	400	4	0.869
Purchase intentions towards mobile phones	400	5	0.854

Source: fieldwork, 2023

All the scales demonstrate good reliability, all attaining Cronbach's alpha values above .70. This suggests that the items within each construct are internally consistent and suitable for measuring the respective aspects of the study. The results indicate that your measurement instruments are reliable and that the data collected from these scales can be considered dependable for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from respondents are analyzed using the IBM SPSS statistical software to uncover

patterns and relationships between key variables. Percentage tables and frequency analyses are employed to analyze and interpret the data, aligning with the study's objectives.

Findings/Results

The following presents the demographic characteristics of respondents and the survey responses to measures of exposure, trust in e-wom, appeals and purchase decision process. Responses are interpreted and analyzed below

Table 2.

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	213	53.2
Male	187	46.8
Age Bracket (years)		
18-21	179	44.8
22-25	187	46.8
26-29	26	6.4
30 and above	8	2.0
Academic Level		
100	39	9.8
200	91	22.8
300	69	17.3
400	174	43.5
500	27	6.6

Faculty		
Engineering	100	25.0
Education	62	15.5
ICT	112	28.0
Pure and Applied Sci.	126	31.5

Source: fieldwork, 2023

The demographic data above shows that the sample is relatively balanced in terms of gender, with slightly more females (53.2%) than males (46.8%). The majority of respondents (91.6%) are between 18 and 25 years old, reflecting a predominantly young population, likely representing university students. Only a small portion (8.4%) are aged 26 and above. Also, most respondents are in their final years of study, with 400-level students making up the largest group (43.5%). Lower levels, such as 100 (9.8%) and 500 (6.6%), have the fewest respondents,

indicating that the sample is skewed towards students nearing graduation, which suggests that they have substantial exposure in their field. Finally, the sample is well distributed across faculties, with the highest representation from Pure and Applied Sciences (31.5%) and ICT (28.0%). Engineering (25.0%) also has significant representation, while Education (15.5%) has the least number of respondents among the listed faculties. This distribution highlights a diverse academic representation.

Table 3

Student exposure to e-WOM information on mobile Phones

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Online Media Use		
Yes	386	96.5
No	14	3.5
Respondents who come across information about mobile phone (brands) online		
Yes	374	93.5
No	26	6.5
Frequency of exposure to information about mobile phone (brand) online		
Rarely	66	16.5
Occasionally	79	19.8
Sometimes	89	22.2
Often	82	20.5
Very Often	84	21.0
Online platform for mobile phones		
Social Media platform	283	70.8
Online forum & Discussion Board	48	12.0
Product review website	35	8.8

Blogs and Vlogs 34 8.4

Level of influence of online information in shaping opinions and perceptions about mobile phones

Not Influential at all 45 11.2
Slightly Influential 147 36.8
Very Influential 173 43.2
Extremely Influential 35 8.8

Attributes of information seen online about mobile phones

Positive Reviews 201 50.2
Negative Reviews 36 9.0
Influencers' Recommendation 84 21.0
User-generated Content 52 13.0

Personal experiences shared by others 27 6.8

Total

400 100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

The findings show that 96.5% of respondents use online media, and 93.5% come across information online about mobile phones. Social media platforms are the primary source of information, with 70.8% of respondents accessing information through these channels. Additionally, 12.0% access information through online forums and discussion boards, 8.8% through product review websites, and 8.4% through blogs and vlogs. In terms of frequency, 16.5% of respondents rarely encounter information online, while 19.8% occasionally, 22.3% sometimes,

20.5% often, and 21.0% frequently encounter information online. The online information has a significant impact on respondents, with only 11.2% not influenced at all. Specifically, 36.8% are slightly influenced, 43.2% are very influenced, and 8.8% are extremely influenced. When making purchasing decisions, 50.2% of respondents consider positive reviews, 9.0% consider negative reviews, 21.0% consider influencers' recommendations, 13.0% consider user-generated content, and 6.8% consider personal experiences shared by others.

Table 4: Level of Respondents' Trust in e-WOM

(N=400)	Level of agreement		(freq)			M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
I trust the online comments and recommendations about mobile phones	11	18	118	189	64	3.69	0.11

I am confident in the credibility of online information shared by the influencers about mobile phone	88	32	37	194	49	3.2	0.28
						1	
I believe that the information shared by the Influencers about mobile phones is reliable	5	43	112	180	60	3.6	0.12
						1	
I need to verify the credibility of online information shared by the influencers before making a purchase decision for a mobile phone	12	17	72	169	13	3.9	0.18
					0	7	
I trust the e-WOM by influencers because they mention promoting certain brands in their messages	3	40	114	183	60	3.6	0.62
						4	
Total						3.6	0.26
						2	

Source: Fieldwork, 2023; Scale: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

The table above presents survey responses measuring trust in online comments, recommendations, and influencer endorsements about mobile phones. Each statement is rated on a scale (from 1 to 5), with mean (average) and standard deviation (SD) values provided for each statement to indicate the level and variability of trust among respondents. The data shows that respondents moderately trust online comments and recommendations about mobile phones (M=3.69, SD=0.11). Respondents are somewhat confident in the credibility of information shared by influencers, but this trust is less strong than in general online comments (M=3.21, SD=0.28). Also, respondents generally believe that the information the influencers share about mobile phones is reliable

(Mean=3.61, SD= 0.12). Furthermore, a high mean score (M=3.97, SD=0.18) suggests that respondents strongly need to verify the credibility of influencer information before making purchase decisions. Respondents tend to trust influencer endorsements, particularly when influencers disclose promotional intentions, although there is notable variability in responses (M=3.64, SD=0.62).

Generally, respondents display moderate trust in online and influencer information about mobile phones (M=3.62, SD=0.26) with the highest trust seen in general online comments and a strong desire to verify influencer claims before making purchase decisions.

Table 5: Students' Opinions Towards Appeals in e-WOM

(N=400)	Level of Agreement (%)					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
I am more likely to consider purchasing a mobile when promotional messages with logical reasoning, facts, or statistics to support their claims	29	24	24	242	81	3.81	0.14
Promotional messages emphasizing product function and benefit have captured my attention and positively	6	29	100	192	73	3.74	0.11

influenced my purchase decision for a mobile phone

Promotional Messages that try to impress me by evoking feelings of happiness, fear and excitement have influenced my purchase decision for mobile phone.	14	31	70	214	71	3.74	0.12
Humorous appeals in messages for mobile phone capture my attention and positively influence my decision	5	26	79	213	77	3.83	0.09
Total						3.78	0.39

Source: Fieldwork, 2023; Scale: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

The table presents results that measure the perceived influence of different types of promotional messages on respondents' decisions to purchase mobile phones. Respondents are highly likely to consider purchasing a mobile phone when promotional messages include logical reasoning, facts, or statistics to support their claims Mean: 3.81, SD: 0.14. Promotional messages that emphasize the product's functions and benefits capture respondents' attention and positively influence their purchase decisions. Mean: 3.74, SD: 0.11. The data further shows that: messages that evoke emotions like happiness, fear, and excitement moderately influence respondents' decisions to buy

mobile phones. Mean: 3.74, SD: 0.12 while humorous messages are particularly effective in capturing attention and positively influencing purchase decisions. Mean: 3.83, SD: 0.09.

Overall, respondents show a strong likelihood of being influenced by promotional messages, particularly those using humor and logical reasoning (M=3.78, SD=0.39). Emotional and functional appeals also play significant roles, suggesting that a mix of persuasive techniques can effectively influence mobile phone purchase decisions.

Table 6: e-WOM Influence and Students' Buying Intention

	Level of Agreement					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
(N=400)							
I intend to purchase a mobile shortly	5	15	27	184	169	4.24	0.08
I consider peoples' reviews and comments (negative and positive) important when considering purchasing a mobile phone	47	96	49	196	12	3.08	0.20
I value the opinions and recommendations from e-WOM	8	24	85	193	90	3.83	0.11

I am more likely to consider online recommendations when making a purchasing decision for a mobile phone	94	12	22	189	83	3.39	0.30
I am willing to spend a huge amount of money for a mobile as long as it is highly recommended by other influencers online	20	54	97	162	67	3.43	0.24
Total						3.56	0.19

Source: Fieldwork, 2023; Scale: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

The table shows results for the influence of online recommendations and reviews on their decision-making process for mobile phones. Respondents have a strong intention to purchase a mobile phone shortly, as indicated by the high mean score (M=4.24, SD=0.08). Respondents moderately consider positive and negative reviews and comments important when deciding on a mobile phone purchase, but this factor shows considerable variability in responses (M= 4.24, SD=0.08). Respondents value opinions and recommendations from online word-of-mouth sources when considering mobile phone purchases (M=3.83, SD=0.11). Online recommendations are somewhat likely to influence respondents' purchasing decisions, although responses vary notably (M=3.39, SD=0.30). Respondents are moderately willing to spend a significant amount of money on a mobile phone if

it is highly recommended by influencers, showing a moderate level of influence from online endorsements (M=3.43, SD=0.24).

Overall, respondents show a strong intention to purchase mobiles soon and they value e-WOM and influencer recommendations, though the degree of influence varies. Reviews, comments, and online recommendations are moderately influential, indicating that while personal intention is strong, external opinions still shape purchasing decisions.

The possible influence of e-WOM, online trust, and appeals, on the buying intention of mobile phones.

Linear Regression: Where: B= Standard coefficient, SE= Standard Error of the Estimation, T= calculated value, P= probability of confidence level (0.05), F= Critical F ratio, R2 = Residual Square.

Table 7: Linear Regression Model for the influence of e-WOM on purchasing intention of mobile phone.

Model	B	SE	T	P	Decision
Constant	11.487	.965	11.908	.000	Significant
e-WOM	.147	.083	1.771	.024	

F= 3.136, P= .024, R²=.802 DV: Purchase intention

The model is statistically significant (F = 3.136, P = 0.024), with an R² value of 0.802, indicating that e-WOM explains 80.2% of the variance in purchasing intention, demonstrating a strong relationship. The

model shows that e-WOM significantly influences the purchasing intention of mobile phones, suggesting that positive online word-of-mouth can effectively drive consumer purchase decisions.

Table 8: The possible influence of Online Trust on purchasing intention of mobile phone

Model	B	SE	T	P	Decision
Constant	9.418	.466	20.219	.000	Significant
Trust in e-WOM	.330	.038	8.647	.000	

F= 74.778, P= .000, R²=.158 Dependent variable: Purchase intention



The model summary shows that the influence of online trust on purchase intention is statistically significant ($F = 74.778$, $P = 0.000$), with an R^2 value of 0.158. The R^2 value This means that trust in e-WOM explains 15.8% of the variance in purchasing intention, suggesting a meaningful, but not exhaustive, impact. The findings demonstrate that trust in online information, particularly in e-WOM, significantly boosts the intention to purchase mobile phones.

Table 9: Linear Regression for Appeals in e-WOM and purchasing intention of mobile phone

Model	B	SE	T	P	Decision
Constant	11.487	.965	11.908	.000	Significant
Appeals in e-WOM	.147	.083	1.771	.000	

F= 100.589, P= .000, R²= .202

Dependent variable: Purchase intention

Table 8 shows that the influence of message appeals on purchase intention of mobile phone is statistically significant ($F = 100.589$, $P = 0.000$), with an R^2 value of .202. This implies that appeals in e-WOM influence purchasing intention of mobile phones.

Discussion

This study examined the influence of electronic word of mouth on KWASU undergraduates' purchasing decisions regarding mobile phones. The study sought to determine the level of students' exposure to e-WOM on mobile phones, the level of trust students have in e-WOM, their perception of the types of appeal they are exposed to, and the extent e-WOM affects the purchase intention of students towards mobile phones.

The findings showed that most students at Kwara State University are exposed to online communication, primarily through social media platforms, significantly influencing their opinions and perceptions about mobile phones. Additionally, e-WOM significantly influences the purchasing intention of mobile phones, suggesting that positive online word-of-mouth can effectively drive consumer purchase decisions.

Respondents show a strong likelihood of being influenced by promotional messages, particularly those appeals using humor and logical reasoning. Emotional and functional appeals also play significant roles, suggesting that a mix of persuasive techniques can influence mobile phone purchase decisions.

Moreover, trust in online and influencer information about mobile phones is generally moderate. The highest level of trust was shown in general online comments and a strong desire to verify influencer claims before making purchase decisions. The study demonstrates that trust in online information, particularly in e-WOM, significantly increases the intention to purchase mobile phones, highlighting the importance of cultivating consumer trust in online platforms and influencer recommendations. Corroborating this outcome is the study by Zeqiri et al (2023) which found that some mediators, such as trust or e-WOM influence customer repurchase behavior.

The positive influence of e-Wom on consumers' purchase intention as found in this study is supported by the study conducted by Kazmi, Mehmood, (2016); Jalilvand and Samiei, (2012); which shows that communication has a considerable impact on consumer intention to purchase, and the consumers rely on internet recommendations to gather information and make informed purchase decisions respectively. In addition, Kim et al (2008); Lou et al (2019) observed that social media influencers persuade consumers and enhance e-WOM intention.

Conclusion

The findings of this study make it valid to conclude that online word-of-mouth, appeals, and online trust, have a positive impact on students' purchase intention of mobile phones.

The study further recommends the need for brands and influencers to disclose promotional content and

ensure transparency in communication to increase users' trust and confidence in e-WOM when considering product purchases. Also, companies should actively engage in social media to influence potential buyers. They should encourage satisfied customers to leave positive reviews and engage with user-generated content. Furthermore, consumers should be educated on data verification as many buyers feel the need to confirm the credibility of online information before making a purchase decision. Finally, promotional messages that combine logical reason, facts, and emotional elements like humor can be more persuasive.

Researchers are encouraged to explore the potential of alternative online platforms such as online forums, discussion boards, product review websites, blogs, and vlogs as sources of information about brands, in future studies. This is because of the dependence of many undergraduates on social media for such purposes. Further research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how students seek and process online information when making purchasing decisions. Lastly, this research highlights potential directions for future studies in consumer behavior and e-commerce, such as exploring the influence of brand image on purchase intention or the moderating effects of demographic or psychographic variables.

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