

Mapping the drivers of Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) Diffusion: A Bibliometric Analysis (2015-2025).

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Abstract

This article aims to identify the factors and motivations influencing the diffusion of messages through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), based on a bibliometric analysis that seeks to map the current state of the scientific literature on sharing intentions. The objective is to provide an overview of the dominant themes by identifying the most recurrent approaches. The co-occurrence analysis of keywords will also highlight the main research topics and their evolution over time. Furthermore, it enables the identification of underexplored research areas, revealing theoretical gaps and opening new research directions.

This study employs a bibliometric approach to examine the factors and motivations underlying the diffusion of messages through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). A total of 163 articles published between 2015 and 2025 were collected from the Scopus database, using a search query constructed around keywords synonymous with eWOM, sharing intention, and behavioral determinants of such diffusion.

The analysis has identified the dominant themes within the literature on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), as well as highlighted several persistent gaps. Existing studies primarily focus on the impact of eWom on consumer behavior, while research on the underlying factors remains relatively underdeveloped. These studies mainly concentrate on cognitive approaches, while neglecting certain approaches that could enrich the understanding of the phenomenon.

This research focuses on analyzing the factors that drive the dissemination of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) messages, an area that remains relatively underexplored in the literature. While many studies focus on the impact of eWOM, few examine the determinants of its diffusion.

Keywords : Electronic word of mouth, diffusion, motivations, Drivers, bibliometric analysis.

Introduction

The rise of digital technologies has profoundly transformed the way information is exchanged among consumers (Lee and Mason, 2011). Moving beyond traditional channels of interpersonal communication, individuals now express themselves extensively through digital platforms such as social networks, discussion forums, blogs, and review sites. This phenomenon has given rise to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), defined as any positive or negative communication shared online by consumers about products, services, brands, or companies (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Cheung and Thadani, 2012).

Scientific research on this phenomenon has focused primarily on studying its effects, notably on trust, satisfaction, and purchase intention (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Chetioui et al., 2021; Bhaiswar et al., 2021). eWOM is often perceived as more credible and authentic than traditional advertising, as it emanates from individuals perceived as independent and without direct commercial interests (Cheung et al., 2009).

Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, eWOM is characterized by rapid dissemination, extended reach, message traceability, and the possibility of anonymity (Lopez and Sicilia, 2014; Huete-Alcocer, 2017). These specific features strengthen its role in consumption decisions while simultaneously making its dynamics more complex to understand.

However, while the literature focuses primarily on the effects of eWOM, particularly in terms of trust, satisfaction, and purchase intent, it pays relatively little attention to the processes that drive dissemination itself. Understanding what motivates people to voluntarily share information represents an essential step in comprehending the real dynamics of eWOM in digital environments. Some research has highlighted the influence of variables such as product characteristics and associated evaluations (Lovett et al., 2013), perceived message usefulness, and intrinsic motivations including the need for expression, personal satisfaction, and helping others (Godes and Mayzlin, 2009).

In this context, this study addresses the following research question: How has the scientific literature structured the factors and motivations driving the sharing of electronic word-of-mouth messages?

Accordingly, this study aims to identify and structure the factors and motivations underlying the dissemination of eWOM messages by examining the scientific literature on this phenomenon. The

study therefore moves beyond the analysis of the effects of eWOM to examine the factors and motivations associated with its dissemination. The analysis is based on a corpus of 163 articles from the Scopus database, selected according to a query constructed around keywords relating to eWOM, dissemination, sharing, and behavioral factors. The data are analyzed and visualized using VOSviewer to provide a structured and evolving interpretation of the scientific literature devoted to this phenomenon.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. First, the theoretical background on electronic word-of-mouth and its related motivations is presented. Second, the methodology adopted in this study is described. Third, the results of the analysis are presented. Finally, the findings are discussed.

1. Theoretical Background

The emergence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is based on a complicated motivational framework that brings individual, social, and technological factors together. Initially, the literature highlighted psychological drivers such as altruism, self-enhancement, and economic utility (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). However, the evolution of digital ecosystems now requires us to incorporate the structuring role of platforms and technological environments in mediating these behaviors (Cheung and Thadani, 2012).

Individual motivations refer to the intrinsic factors that drive users to share their experiences. Beyond pure altruism, the pursuit of self-validation and the expression of perceived expertise are key drivers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). These dimensions remain central to contemporary research, which highlights that specific personality traits, such as market mavenism (broad market expertise) or the need for evaluation, influence the intention to share eWOM (Anastasiu et al., 2024).

eWOM is, at its core, a relational act grounded in social capital. Individuals are driven by the desire to maintain connections, to strengthen their sense of belonging to a community, or by a principle of reciprocity. Chu & Kim (2011) demonstrate in this regard that the strength of ties between individuals within social networks is a significant predictor of eWOM engagement; the stronger the ties, the higher the propensity to share. Added to this dynamic is the role of homophily, the tendency of individuals to interact preferentially with peers who share similar values or characteristics which reinforces perceived trust and facilitates the flow of information. Finally, the

authors distinguish two forms of social influence that mediate these behaviors: normative influence, linked to peer pressure and the desire for community integration, and informational influence, based on the search for useful advice within the network.

Following an examination of the individual psychological determinants and social dynamics of sharing, it is necessary to analyze how the technological infrastructure shapes these interactions. In this regard, Majchrzak et al. (2013) propose a theoretical framework based on the affordances of social media, which helps us understand how the platform's intrinsic capabilities (metavoicing) act as mediating mechanisms. These affordances do more than simply facilitate exchange; they operationalize individual motivations and social factors by triggering specific behavioral mechanisms. For example, where individual motivation drives contribution, the affordance of network-informed associating channels this effort by making social capital visible, thereby guiding the trajectory of the conversation. This perspective highlights that the technological aspect, far from being a mere medium, imposes a functional duality that can, depending on the mechanisms activated, amplify or constrain the collective dynamics of sharing.

These motivations are not mutually exclusive. Their coexistence within a single intention to share suggests that eWOM dissemination cannot be reduced to a single explanatory factor, whether psychological, social, or technological. It is precisely this multidimensional nature that makes it a phenomenon difficult to model and, at the same time, an area of research that remains open.

2. Data and methodology

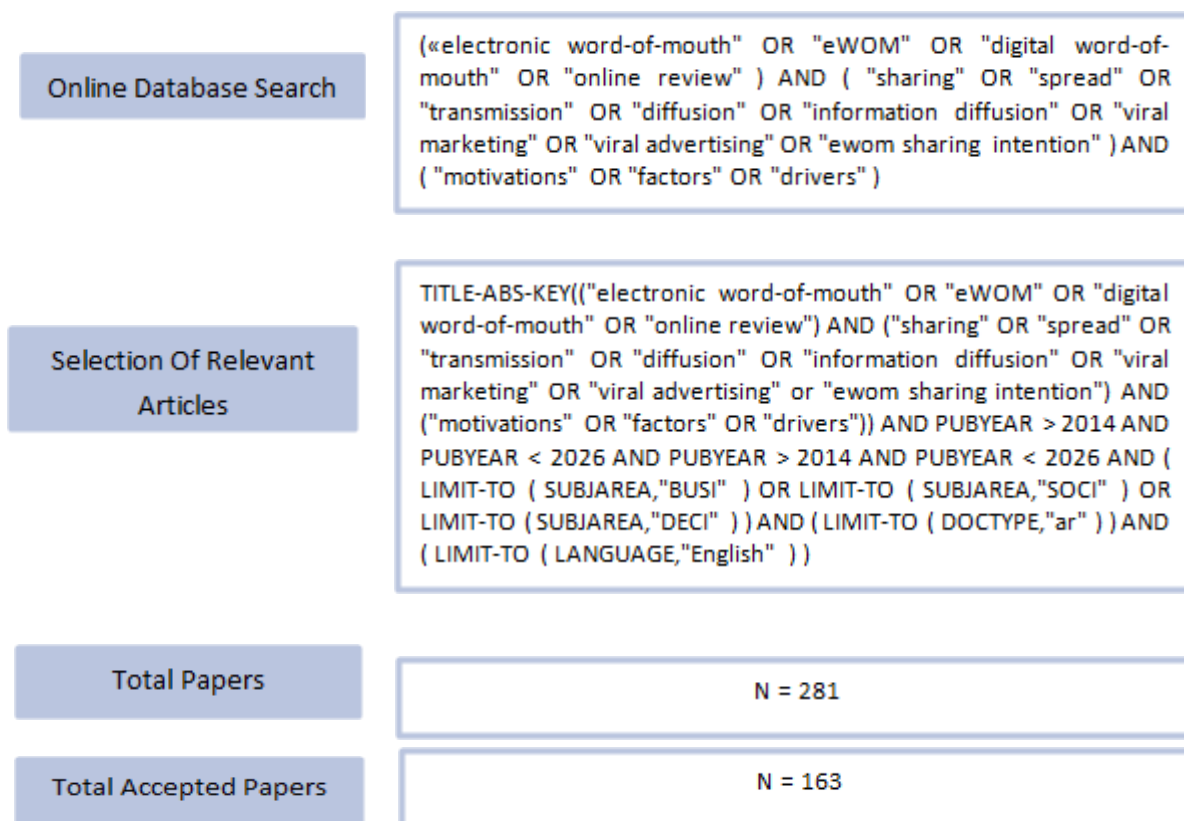
The present research utilized bibliographic data from the Scopus database. Scopus was selected due to its comprehensive, neutral coverage of scientific work, compiling abstracts and citations validated by experts (Mongeon and Paul, 2016).

To construct the database, a search query was developed based on keywords identified from existing conceptual publications, meta-analyses, and systematic reviews. These keywords included terms related to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) such as "eWOM," "electronic word of mouth," and "online review." Keywords related to dissemination behavior were also incorporated, namely "transmission," "diffusion," and "sharing intention," alongside keywords concerning factors influencing these behaviors. Given that the objective of the study is to examine how research on eWOM dissemination has developed and been structured, bibliometric analysis was considered appropriate for examining the scientific literature on this topic.

Document selection was subsequently refined through the application of specific filters. The publication period was restricted to the decade from 2015 to 2025. Only scientific articles were included, thus excluding other document types. The search was limited to articles written in English and circumscribed to the following thematic areas : "business, management and accounting," "social sciences," and "decision sciences." This methodology enabled the collection of 163 relevant articles in total.

The full workflow of the data collection and screening process is illustrated in Figure 1. Results were exported in CSV format and subsequently imported into VOSviewer, selected for its proven data visualization and network mapping capabilities (Bukar et al., 2023).

Figure N°1 : Methodology Flowchart for Bibliometric Review



Source : Authors analysis of Scopus data

1. Results

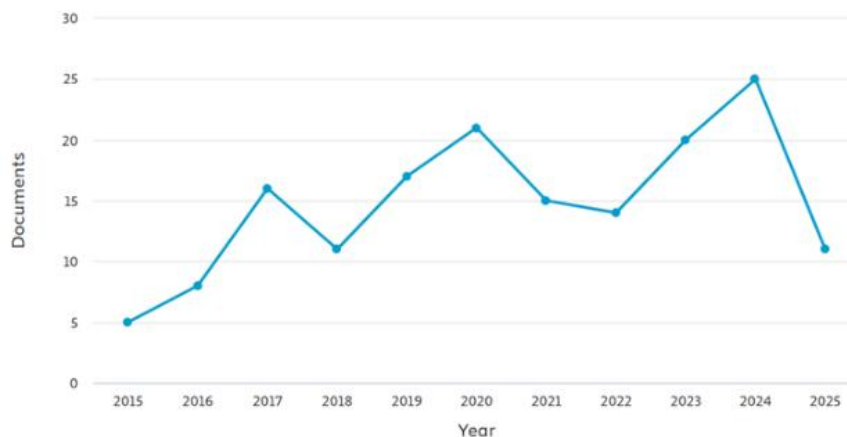
3.1. Evolution of publications on the diffusion of eWom (2015-2025)

Research papers on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) message dissemination have developed significantly over the decade under review, with the majority demonstrating an upward trajectory. Analysis of annual publication dynamics reveals progression in the field (Figure 2). In 2015, the number of published works was modest, totaling approximately 5 papers. Subsequent years witnessed gradual increases, reaching nearly 16 publications in 2017. Following a slight decline in 2018, scientific output recovered, reaching approximately 21 publications in 2020. Although 2021 and 2022 marked stabilization around 14-15 papers, the field experienced a notable resurgence in activity. Scientific publication subsequently increased in 2023 to approximately 20 papers and peaked in 2024 with almost 25 contributions. This continuous increase through 2024 suggests growing recognition of the relevance of online information dissemination mechanisms and sharing factors, reflecting consolidation and deepening of research.

Although 2021 and 2022 marked stabilization around 14-15 papers, the field experienced a notable resurgence in activity. Scientific publication subsequently increased in 2023 to approximately 20 papers and peaked in 2024 with almost 25 contributions. This continuous increase through 2024 suggests growing recognition of the relevance of online information dissemination mechanisms and sharing factors, reflecting consolidation and deepening of research.

The decrease observed for 2025, with publication volume at approximately 11 documents, should be noted with caution. This value does not reflect an actual trend, as 2025 data is partial, covering only the first six months, preventing exhaustive comparison with previous years.

Figure N°2 : Publication Trend in eWOM Research (2015-2025)



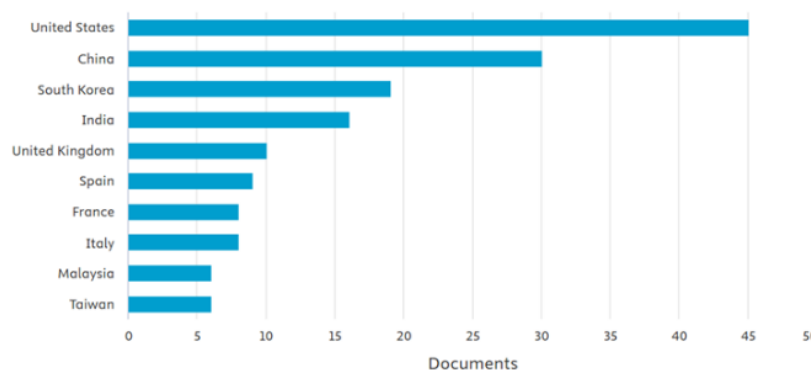
Source : Database collected from Scopus

3.2.Publication analysis of eWom distribution by country (2015-2025)

Analysis of the geographical distribution of publications reveals significant research concentration in certain countries (Figure 3). The United States stands out as the primary contributor, with approximately 45 papers totaling 2,130 citations, closely followed by China with approximately 30 papers generating 1,005 citations.

Other Asian nations, including South Korea and India, are also among major contributors, underlining growing interest in this theme within these regions. The United Kingdom, Spain, France, and Italy represent active research centers, with between 6 and 10 publications each.

Figure 3 : Publication by country (2015-2025)



Source : Database collected from Scopus

Tableau 1 : Countries Having Significant Citations in the Area of eWOM

Country	Documents	Citations	Total link strength
United States	45	2130	19
China	30	1005	11
South Korea	19	549	16
United kingdom	10	511	9
Spain	9	267	1
France	8	239	8
Italy	8	144	8
Malaysia	6	297	2
Taiwan	6	235	2

Source : Scopus and VOSviewer database

3.3. Analysis of co-citation associated to the diffusion of eWom (2015-2025)

Co-citation analysis reveals the organization of academic research on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) between 2015 and 2025 (Figure 4). The studied network comprises 47 authors meeting a minimum threshold of 30 citations, structured into four thematic clusters, totaling 1,070 links with cumulative connection strength of 15,652. This structure suggests a stabilized field built around common references while gradually integrating new perspectives.

The first cluster, the densest and most connected, encompasses seminal work on eWOM's impact on consumer behavior. Publications by Hennig-Thurau et al. and Cheung occupy central positions, frequently co-cited with later research extending or reinterpreting their models. This configuration reflects persistence of a solid theoretical core focused on eWOM effects, although recent connections increasingly integrate contributions from data science and digital technology.

The second cluster encompasses work on eWOM digital platforms and mediating technologies, illustrating analytical focus on technical diffusion conditions. Frequent links between this cluster and the first demonstrate growing articulation between behavioral and technological dimensions of the concept.

The third and fourth clusters, though less central, display distinct thematic specializations. The third focuses on sector studies, notably in tourism and hospitality, featuring authors such as Ladhari (2015). The fourth comprises work on emerging digital communication forms, including ephemeral content and immersive environments. This final group remains relatively peripheral within the main network, potentially indicating limited diffusion within established currents.

Citation distribution highlights strong concentration around few authors, with 60% of link strength attributed to interactions among the 15 most co-cited authors. This concentration reflects both field stability and obstacles to recognizing new approaches. Some authors, such as Berger, lie at cluster intersections, helping articulate classical approaches with emerging issues related to content virality.

The analyzed network overall highlights predominance of work on eWOM effects, particularly on consumer behavior. Conversely, publications dealing specifically with dissemination mechanisms such as sharing motivations, propagation dynamics, or influencing factors remain relatively underexplored.

3.4. Co-occurrence analysis of keywords associated to the diffusion of eWom (2015-2025)

The most central terms, including eWOM and social media, occupy dominant network positions. Their size and strong interconnection signal their status as fundamental concepts in this field. Their co-presence reflects strong interdependence, with social media emerging as both a privileged distribution channel and recurring study object for analyzing eWOM dynamics.

The first cluster concerns individual motivations. The propensity to share is driven by self-enhancement and self-expression, as evidenced by analyses of generational differences in the

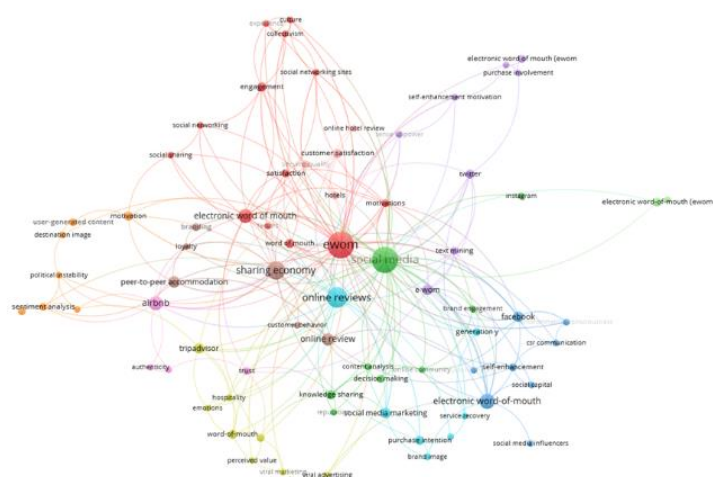
diffusion of negative experiences (Ažić and Bačić, 2020). Stable dispositions toward sharing on social media further activate diffusion behavior beyond immediate situational triggers (Bailey and ben Mimoun, 2024). Intentions to engage in eWOM increase when satisfaction and knowledge-sharing motivations are present, particularly in service and tourism settings where technology acceptance shapes message expression (Yang, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2025). This pattern aligns with results demonstrating that behavioral intention among virtual community members depends on identifiable individual antecedents within these environments (Tseng and Kuo, 2015).

The second cluster underscores the role of content characteristics. Informational and normative credibility structures recommendation behavior and conditions downstream retransmission, while trust shapes the attitudinal foundations that precede the circulation of reviews (Chetioui et al., 2021). The media richness of reviews, notably the inclusion of photographs, increases both content production and diffusion by enhancing perceived usefulness and user engagement (Cai et al., 2024). Recent syntheses of decision-making in social environments indicate that informational value and emotional salience operate as diffusion accelerators by activating attentional and influence mechanisms (Reshma and Selvam, 2024).

The third cluster addresses platform affordances. Relative to traditional word-of-mouth, eWOM is characterized by rapid diffusion, extended reach, and message traceability, properties that collectively sustain amplification and persistence within social networks (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Credibility in social media environments rests on mechanisms endogenous to the platforms, shaping both trust in sources and the propensity of users to relay information (Moran and Muzellec, 2017). In service communities, technology acceptance factors moderate the effects of motivations and satisfaction on sharing intention, indicating that the adoption of platform features directly conditions diffusion processes (Yang, 2017). Recent analyses also reveal differentiated patterns of information seeking and sharing across user groups, confirming that socio-technical characteristics guide the circulation of content (Pompurová and Filieri, 2025).

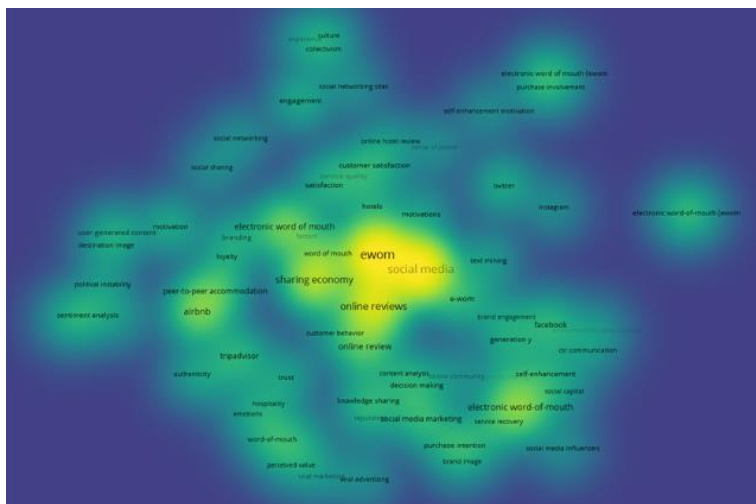
The fourth cluster pertains to sectoral contexts. In hospitality and tourism, consumer decision-making is tightly coupled to online reviews whose visibility and comparability guide evaluations of perceived service quality (Ladhari, 2015). Within the sharing economy, users attach substantial value to platform-based evaluations and rely on reputation signals to arbitrate among alternatives, thereby intensifying diffusion (Xu, 2020). In restaurant settings, satisfaction and knowledge-

Figure 5 : Co-occurrence of Keywords in eWOM



Source : Co-occurrence of Keywords in eWOM

Figure 6 : Co-occurrence of Keywords in eWOM (Density)



Source : VOSviewer and Scopus database

An analysis of the structure of the field reveals a gradual thematic diversification, summarized in Table 2. Beyond the foundational concepts (eWOM, social media), the literature now focuses on specific sectoral contexts, particularly the hospitality industry and the sharing economy.

This expansion of research topics is accompanied by an evolution in methodological approaches, where conventional content analysis is supplemented by the use of big data and sentiment analysis. On a theoretical level, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) remains a central framework for explaining the role of digital interfaces in the intention to share.

These developments mark a shift in research toward the analysis of psychological and behavioral antecedents, placing motivations and emotional states at the center of eWOM diffusion dynamics.

Tableau 2 : Thematic Evolution of Research Themes in eWOM Literature

Themes	Keywords
Fondation	Electronic word of mouth (23), eWom (32), social media marketing (5), viral marketing (2)
Platforms	Facebook (5), Instagram (2), Twitter (4), social networking sites (2), Tripadvisor (5)
Content	Online review (27), online hotel review (2), UGC (3)
Business Sector	Hotels (3), airbnb (9), hospitality (2)
Research topics	Destination image (2), decision making (3), emotions (2), engagement (4), satisfaction, sharing economy (15), customer behavior (2), motivations (9), factors (2), social sharing (2), perceived value (2), purchase intention (4), trust (3), loyalty (2)
Theory	Technology acceptance model (2)
Methodology	Sentiment analysis (3), big data analysis (2), content analysis (2)

Source : Author's analysis of Scopus data from keyword's co-occurrence

Note : The numbers in parenthesis are the frequency of occurrence of keywords

4. Discussion

This bibliometric analysis results highlight theoretical development structuring within the eWOM field. Models focusing on electronic word-of-mouth effects benefit from relatively consolidated conceptual foundations, while frameworks explaining message dissemination logics remain less systematized. This orientation emphasizes predominance of approaches focusing on eWOM consequences, relegating antecedent analysis to secondary importance.

This imbalance can be partially explained by difficulties in formalizing sharing behaviors, which require intersection of psychological, technological, and social variables often linked to rapidly evolving digital contexts. This structural limitation restricts in-depth understanding of eWOM circulation dynamics and construction of conceptual tools for grasping sharing as an autonomous communicative practice.

Analysis also reveals strong dominance of quantitative approaches and recurrent use of cognitive interpretation frameworks. While methodological homogeneity enables analytical standardization and result comparability, it limits exploration of symbolic, cultural, and contextual dimensions of this phenomenon. Qualitative, ethnographic, or mixed approaches remain marginal, despite potentially contributing to more nuanced, situated understanding of diffusion behavior.

Cognitive model prevalence reflects tendency to approach sharing behavior through rational logic centered on conscious decision-making. This perspective tends to minimize attention to irrational mechanisms such as emotional impulses or socially acquired behaviors frequently involved in digital interactions.

Publication mapping demonstrates strong research concentration in Anglo-Saxon and Asian countries. This distribution questions result scope obtained in restricted cultural environments. Relative absence of contributions from regions such as Africa or Latin America limits possibilities for constructing transversal frameworks.

Existing model generalization must therefore be approached cautiously, as digital uses, social motivations, and communication practices vary culturally. Study rootedness in specific contexts calls for developing comparative perspectives capable of articulating differentiated communication regimes according to socio-technical environments.

Geographical dimensions also influence knowledge transferability to emerging markets. Sharing behavior, influence norms, and trust representations do not necessarily follow identical logic across different contexts, necessitating more localized, culturally sensitive research.

Dynamic publication increases through 2024 attest to sustained academic interest in eWOM while simultaneously underlining structural challenges in synchronizing scientific production with technological developments. Rapid platform transformation, functionality evolution, and algorithmic logic changes alter conditions under which messages are expressed and circulated. This instability complicates construction of lasting theoretical models.

Thematic analysis suggests evolution toward more integrated eWOM interpretation, articulating technological, behavioral, and sectoral dimensions. This trend opens pathways for disciplinary cross-fertilization among management science, psychology, information science, and network analysis.

Better understanding of influence levers could be strategically exploited, particularly in contexts where platforms amplify certain content types over others. Therefore, integrating ethical reflection into future research appears appropriate, examining conditions under which distribution stimulation can occur transparently, respectfully, and socially responsibly, considering growing debates on algorithmic responsibility and audience protection.

These findings collectively call for new approaches to theoretical and methodological frameworks used in eWOM study. Future work would benefit from integrating affective, relational, and situational sharing dimensions that remain underexplored. Using mixed, qualitative, or comparative methods would also enable transcending certain generalizations derived from dominant models.

Finally, emerging technological tools, notably those linked to artificial intelligence and interaction automation, invite reconsideration of expression and dissemination modalities in digital environments. These transformations pose new challenges while offering opportunities to enrich theoretical approaches and open new investigative fields.

Conclusion

This study employed a bibliometric approach to analyze scientific literature evolution devoted to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) dissemination over the 2015-2025 period. Based on a corpus of 163 articles indexed in the Scopus database, it identified primary research directions while highlighting certain underexplored themes.

Analyzed works demonstrate particular attention to eWOM effects on consumer attitudes and behaviors, especially in sectors such as hospitality and collaborative economy, where digital exchanges represent central influence levers. Simultaneously, growing use of analysis tools derived from massive data processing notably sentiment analysis mobilized to exploit user-generated content on social networks and online review platforms is observed.

Conversely, analysis highlights still partial theoretical coverage. While factors linked to eWOM spread are not absent from existing studies, they are most often approached from post-experience perspectives, focusing on purchase or consumption reactions. Moreover, most research employs cognitive approaches, excluding other dimensions that could enrich analysis, notably affective, social, or contextual elements.

Several limitations exist. Restricting the corpus to English language publications indexed exclusively in Scopus may reduce perspective diversity by excluding other relevant scientific contributions from databases such as Web of Science or Google Scholar, or those written in other languages.

With these considerations, broadening future research scope by accounting more thoroughly for individual, emotional, and contextual factors likely to influence eWOM message dissemination appears appropriate. Such orientation would enable development of more nuanced phenomenon understanding, transcending current analytical frameworks.

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