

Does eWoM matter in s-commerce? A comparative study between Kuwait and United Arab Emirates

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Received 3 April 2024
Revised 11 June 2024
27 August 2024
7 October 2024
Accepted 12 December 2024

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore the antecedent factors that directly and indirectly influence electronic word of mouth (eWoM) for social commerce (s-commerce) in two developing countries (e.g. Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates [UAE]) by extending social cognitive theory.

Design/methodology/approach – This study uses a previous robust model (Rouibah *et al.*, 2021) as theoretical background to investigate and compares the antecedents (trust in Instagram, perceived risks) on eWoM for s-commerce through the mediation of three mediators (perceived enjoyment, perceived value and customer satisfaction) among two Arab countries. Data was collected from Kuwait ($n = 1,132$) and the UAE ($n = 190$). Different statistical analyses and structured equation modeling-based analysis of moment structure are used to test the robustness of the research model.

Findings – This study found customer satisfaction to be most important factor that mediates the effect independent factors on eWoM for s-commerce in both countries. Surprisingly, perceived enjoyment has no effect, and trust in Instagram and perceived risks are the most important factors that are considered imperative for customer satisfaction and positive feedback.

Research limitations/implications – One limitation of this study is that the author does not focus on the difference between the effects of textual and graphical information on customers' decisions and trust in buying merchandise. Another limitation is that this study focuses on Kuwait and the UAE. Other Gulf Cooperation Council countries are also growing exponentially, and mobile and internet penetration rates are booming; they could be a trigger for more studies on whether differences occur among all of them.

Practical implications – The first implication is that it is the first in its field to extend the effects of eWoM. To the best of the author's knowledge, compared to the online research this study is unique because the authors examine six factors for eWoM in s-commerce using the Instagram platform as opposed to other platforms.

Social implications – The third implication of this study is that the previous ones have applied eWoM to different subjects of e-commerce such as tourism and marketing but have concentrated less on s-commerce, where in-depth research is needed much more to explore factors and theories that explain human behavior.



Originality/value – Furthermore, most of these studies have focused on the intention to use (Dincer and Dincer, 2023; X. Hu, Chen, Davison, and Liu, 2022; Zhou *et al.*, 2023). However, the attention in this research is on the actual use.

Keywords S-commerce, Trust, Risk, eWoM, Perceived value, Customer satisfaction, Perceived enjoyment

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Since the introduction of Web 2.0, more and more people use eWoM to communicate and exchange opinions and product information (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Rouibah *et al.*, 2021). Through eWoM, customers can evaluate products they purchased online by providing positive or negative feedback about their experiences.

Studying the effect of eWoM on potential customers is an important research area. Indeed, prior studies have posited that when customers make decisions regarding purchasing products from e-commerce websites, they tend to trust the online reviews of people they do not know more than the reports and ads in the traditional media (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). EWoM can be a vital information source for customers in deciding whether the product or service meets their levels of satisfaction. As eWoM takes place on the internet where consumers and posters seldom meet, consumers are usually unsure about the truthfulness and reliability of posters' feedback. Therefore, companies are very concerned about how eWoM affects their customers' attitudes. Furthermore, eWoM has significant effects on consumers' decisions to purchase. For example, 93% of users claim that online reviews have a significant effect on their purchase behavior, 81% of consumers use Google to evaluate local companies, and 50% of all internet users post online reviews. Moreover, only a few percentage (2%) have never read an online review (Howarth, 2023). In general, large companies in the market invest millions of dollars to ensure they have a strong presence on social media. For example, General Motors announced it would invest 30 million annually to generate content on Facebook (Nadeem *et al.*, 2021). According to MacRae (2024), 4.9 billion social media users across the world and 90% of marketers use social media as a tool for their marketing campaigns. In 2023 brands and big companies had spent more than \$207bn globally while they spent \$930bn between 2017 and 2023 (MacRae, 2024). Several scholars have argued that investing in the effect of eWoM based on social media results in many benefits for companies such as developing significant numbers of followers and facilitating customer relationships (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; López *et al.*, 2017).

The literature about eWoM has received extensive research because of huge investments and technological developments. However, prior studies in this field are very fragmented and have many inconsistencies (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Line *et al.*, 2024; Liu *et al.*, 2021). As a result, J. Lee and Lee (2009) have focused on two major levels of analysis: market and individual.

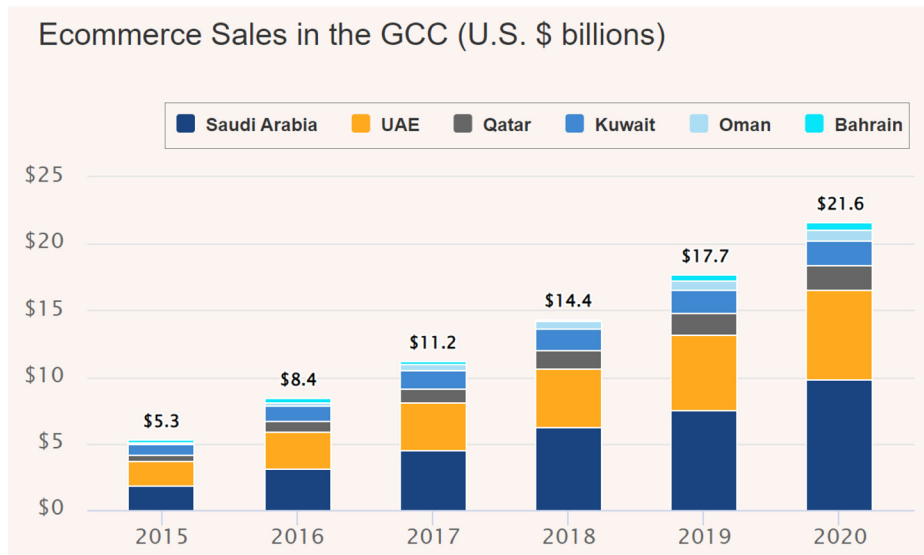
Unlike prior studies that focused on the effect of eWoM for individual social usage context, this paper investigates the effect of psychological factors on eWoM for s-commerce at the individual level for business context (i.e. for purchase reasons) across two different Arab countries (Al-Okaily, 2023; Rouibah *et al.*, 2021). This focus differs from those of prior studies that investigated different eWoM issues (Rouibah *et al.*, 2021) including the following: Why do consumers share eWoM about some products but not others (Y. Hu and Kim, 2018; Line *et al.*, 2024)? Why do people accept or reject technological products even in crisis periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Al-Okaily, 2024a, 2024b)? Why do some customers use eWoM while others do not, and can the effect of positive and negative eWoM be distinguished (Bronner and De Hoog, 2011; Y. Hu and Kim, 2018)? Therefore, this study focuses on studying the effect of psychological factors (fear and trust in social media) on eWoM for s-commerce purposes based

on Instagram. Prior studies have shown that enjoyment, risk and trust play large roles in the mood to interact with unknown individuals in social media (Rouibah *et al.*, 2021) and other forms of information and communication technologies (Al-Okaily, 2024a; Al-Okaily *et al.*, 2023).

This study compares the effect of antecedents of eWoM for s-commerce across two Arab countries (Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates [UAE])) for three reasons: First, they are among the largest economies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (after Saudi Arabia) and have similar size e-markets (see Figure 1).

However, the UAE tends to be much faster at adopting new technologies and integrating them into business due to its culturally open environment and liberal political system. Second, we focus on these two countries for convenience objective, because we have easier access to local data and therefore to follow-up on research issues. Third, very few studies compared the adoption of different technologies among countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council including mobile telephone (AlMutairi and Yen, 2017), m-banking (Thrassou and Philip, 2008) and m-learning (Alsswey *et al.*, 2020). However, neither of them focused on s-commerce (social media) nor used social theory. Following this analysis, we use the social theory as a lens for our comparative study, and we used the model developed and validated previously in Kuwait that includes three antecedents (propensity to trust – PT, perceived risks – PR, trust in Instagram – TRIN) and two mediating factors (perceived enjoyment – PE, perceived customer satisfaction – CS, perceived value – PV) which influence eWoM for s-commerce (Rouibah *et al.*, 2021).

Our research question is whether the independent factors (PT, PR, TRIN) have association on eWoM for s-commerce through the three mediation factors (PV, CS and PE).



Source: Figure courtesy of Boukarroum (2021)

Figure 1. E-commerce sales in the GCC region

The study consists of several sections. In the next one, we present the related literature followed by the research model and research methodology. After that, we present the data analysis for the comparison of the two sample countries. In the last section, we conclude by offering a summary of our research contributions, implications for both research and management and research limitations.

Literature review and model development

Importance of social networks for s-commerce

This study investigates antecedents of eWoM for s-commerce based on Instagram in Kuwait and UAE. We chose Kuwait because it ranks first in the GCC for the depth of penetration and speed of the internet, and the penetration of its mobile phone network. A majority of people use social media such as Instagram and Snapchat. The UAE has a similar situation, but a majority of its users are younger (Blogger, 2023; Kemp, 2023).

We followed Rouibah *et al.* (2021) and defined s-commerce as:

The exchange-related activities that can be influenced by an individual's online social network (as Facebook and Instagram) or computer-mediated social environments (e.g. WhatsApp, etc.) – where the activities correspond to need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase stages.

eWoM-based s-commerce, according to Dincer and Dincer (2023), plays an important role in creating the intention to purchase and increasing the loyalty of customers. Through social media and computer-mediated social environments, people exchange opinions with each other and build a collective decision to purchase. Moreover, eWoM-based s-commerce enhances interactions that consequently lead to the wisdom of the crowd after discussing, adjusting and enhancing customers' understanding (Xu *et al.*, 2023).

Two theories can explain why people are influenced by eWoM: the social information processing theory (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978) and the information richness theory (Draft and Lengel, 1986). According to these theories, the people who have more tools to communicate are socially more powerful in influencing others compared to people who lack such tools. In addition, they justify the use of Instagram as a social tool for s-commerce because it is rich in information and provides plenty of functions for people such as taking pictures, publishing multimedia data and providing different feedback (like, share, etc.) (Rouibah *et al.*, 2021).

Social cognitive theory

Social cognitive theory (SCT) is a cognitive formulation of social learning theory that explains human behavior as a dynamic interaction between personal factors. It supports the influential role of factors in the adaptation and change of humans. Bussey and Bandura (1999) believe that social, psychological, behavioral and technological factors combine to shape humans' decisions. SCT is built around four distinctive human capabilities:

- (1) symbolization helps in the understanding of the environment by triggering people's ability to create and regulate environmental conditions;
- (2) learning through observation that expands people's knowledge and skills;
- (3) self-regulation that helps people exercise self-directedness; and
- (4) self-reflection in which people evaluate the adequacy of their thinking and actions and "judge one's agentic efficacy to produce effects" (Bussey and Bandura, 1999).

SCT (Bandura, 1991, 2001) is relevant to our study because it has the power to explain the motivation behind eWoM as a "function of the reciprocal interaction involving behavior, cognition, and social environmental influences" (Lee *et al.*, 2012). In our context, we

consider satisfaction as a cognitive factor (Del Bosque and San Martín, 2008; Homburg *et al.*, 2006), trust as a social influence (Cho *et al.*, 2015) and risk as a behavior (Dowling and Staelin, 1994). This theory is the basis of the model developed by Rouibah *et al.* (2021) that will be used as a comparative research model between Kuwait and UAE.

Electronic word of mouth literature review

Originally, eWoM was defined as a “network phenomenon: People create ties to other people with the exchange of units of discourse (that is, messages) that link to create an information network while the people create a social network” (Dwyer, 2007, p. 64). Furthermore, Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) extend eWoM to:

Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions for commercial and non-commercial activity.

EWoM has increasingly attracted attention from academics, researchers and practitioners. Traditionally, studies have shown how WoM has played a critical role in a customer’s decision to purchase and in e-commerce (Richins and Root-Shaffer, 1988). The intention to purchase, in turn, is important and has many applications in the field of business (Onita *et al.*, 2022). Since the beginning of the Internet, researchers have explored the importance of eWoM with the help of information technology. Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) have explained that:

The advent of the Internet has extended consumers’ options for gathering unbiased product information from other consumers and provides the opportunity for consumers to offer their own consumption-related advice by engaging in eWoM.

Researchers advocate that eWoM is important in many dimensions. One is the spread of rumors (Mirbabaie *et al.*, 2021). Another is the marketing field because 62% of customers trust peer recommendations (Nilashi *et al.*, 2022).

(Rouibah *et al.*, 2021; Rouibah *et al.*, 2015) observed that prior s-commerce studies suffer from the following limitations:

- they focused more on customers’ intentions rather than their actual behavior;
- they do not follow the sequence of belief-attitude-behavior found in well-established theories such as TAM; and
- they do not integrate hedonic factor (perceived enjoyment) and utilitarian factor (perceived value) in their theoretical research models that are important to the customers’ actual decisions to purchase.

Therefore, a better understanding would help companies to direct their efforts toward better control that would lead to incremental improvements in actual purchases that would then hopefully have a positive effect on customer loyalty. Another important shortage in the previous studies is the lack of understanding the impact of enjoyment on eWoM. According to Cheung and Lee (2012) “research on why consumers engage in eWoM in online consumer-opinion platforms remains relatively limited”. Prior enjoyment studies focused on other dimensions such as enjoyment helping other customers (Tong *et al.*, 2007). Mainly, they treated enjoyment as an altruistic motivation (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Kankanhalli *et al.*, 2005; Tong *et al.*, 2007). Except Rouibah *et al.* (2021), none explored in-depth the impact of enjoyment as a hedonic factor on eWoM. We use eWoM to represent the expected social outcome. Table 1 gives a brief review of prior studies on eWoM, dependent factor, used theories and context.

Table 1. Brief review of eWoM literature

Study	Dependent factors	Theory	Context
Rouibah et al. (2021)	Behavioral intention	Value–Satisfaction–Loyalty	s-commerce
Ismagilova et al. (2020) Qahri-Saremi and Montazemi (2019)	Intention to buy eWoM adoption	Meta-analysis Meta-analysis	e-commerce Messages
Liang et al. (2021) Hong et al. (2017) Alnoor et al. (2024)	eWoM adoption eWoM adoption eWoM and intention to use	Meta-analysis Meta-analysis Social exchange theory	Communication e-commerce Intention to use of s-commerce
Li et al. (2024)	Negative-WoM and Positive-WoM	Meta-analysis	Consumer decision-making process

Source: By author

Research model

Customer satisfaction. CS is critical for the existence of organizations and their continued development. CS is not only measured by the product's value to customers or their feelings about the purchase but also to the atmosphere surrounding the purchasing process ([Biesok and Wyród-Wróbel, 2011](#)). Following [Rouibah et al. \(2015\)](#), we defined customer satisfaction as the degree to which a customer is satisfied with his purchasing from s-commerce.

CS is related to specific experiences compared to previous similar experiences. For a current transaction, CS increases if that the felt experience is better than the previous one. [Woisetschläger et al. \(2008\)](#) have identified that satisfaction with the social media community positively affects participation in it. According to the SCT, CS is the result of personal cognitive processes that are developed from the effects of external factors. Following [Rouibah et al. \(2021\)](#), we propose that CS has a direct effect on the use of eWoM in s-commerce. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H1. CS positively affects the eWoM for s-commerce.

Perceived enjoyment. PE refers to the value a customer receives in terms of subjective experiences of fun and playfulness ([Rouibah et al., 2021](#)). According to many scholars ([Hwang and Kim, 2007](#)), the influence of *affect* (enjoyment, hate, etc.) is neglected in the s-commerce research that tests an individual's decision-making and their reactions to using technologies. This is why after an in-depth literature review, [Sun and Zhang \(2015\)](#) called for paying more attention to the effects of affect factors. According to [Venkatesh et al. \(2012\)](#), hedonic is “fun or pleasure from using technology” and “the search for happiness, enjoyment, fantasy, awakening, and sensuality” ([Akram et al., 2021](#)).

Given that Instagram is a hedonic tool equipped with many features that increase the user's enjoyment – such as their profile, pictures, videos, sharing and interacting with others to ask for better recommendations and opinions ([Rouibah et al., 2021](#)) – we expect that CS will increase. This increased satisfaction will be transformed into more eWoM for s-commerce purposes-based Instagram. Thus, we replicate [Rouibah et al. \(2021\)](#) two hypotheses:

H2a. PE positively affects CS during s-commerce.

H2b. PE positively affects eWoM for s-commerce.

Perceived value. PV is defined as a consumer's overall evaluation regarding the utility of products and services based on his or her perceptions of what is received and given (Rouibah *et al.*, 2015). In a systematic review, Cui *et al.* (2018) consider PV to be among the most important perceptions that influence satisfaction, engagement, behavioral intention and the loyalty of customers. The customer's PV comes from their estimation of the importance of the product or service. The literature has shown that PV is a crucial motivational factor that affects CS and eWoM (Hajli *et al.*, 2015; Rouibah *et al.*, 2021; Zeithaml, 1988). Following, Rouibah *et al.* (2021), we hypothesize the following:

H3a. PV positively affects the CS during s-commerce.

H3b. PV positively affects eWoM for s-commerce.

Perceived risk. PR relates to the expectations of uncertainty and perceived consequences from the purchase of goods and services, fraud and product quality (Forsythe *et al.*, 2006; Rouibah *et al.*, 2021; Rouibah *et al.*, 2016). S-commerce differs from e-commerce in that the vendors on s-commerce platform are small companies with no official or legal business license. In such cases, PR is high, who may feel different risks (such as quality of product, lack of good feel of product, after-sale service, etc.). These feelings are logical, as these small companies lack the product expertise and return policies that official and large vendors have.

Given the high uncertainty avoidance characteristic of the Arab culture, Arab consumers who are happy with more face-to-face types of interactions will negatively perceive the impact of PR on PV and CS in s-commerce over Instagram. Accordingly, we follow Rouibah *et al.* (2021) and replicate the following two hypotheses:

H4a. PR negatively affects the PV during s-commerce.

H4b. PR negatively affects the CS during s-commerce.

Trust factors (propensity to trust and trust in Instagram). Trust is necessary to cope with PR inherent to s-commerce platforms and conduct business in an online environment. We included in our research model two types of trust: PT and TRIN. PT, also known as trust toward other people, refers to the extent of character that a person demonstrates in a consistent tendency to depend on others across a broad spectrum of situations and individuals (McKnight *et al.*, 1998; Rouibah *et al.*, 2021). While TRIN refers to the degree of people's trust in social media tools (here trust in Instagram) used to interact with other parties.

Some scholars (Bugshan and Attar, 2020) believe that the effects of negative factors (e.g. PR) surpass the effects of positive factors (e.g. trust factors). Unlike other scholars and studies who claim PT directly influences intention, we follow Rouibah *et al.* (2021) and posit that people with high PT will feel less risk-threatening and thus increase customer PV and CS. Also, normal people who trust Instagram technology will have high PV and CS too. Following Rouibah *et al.* (2021), we replicate the following four hypotheses:

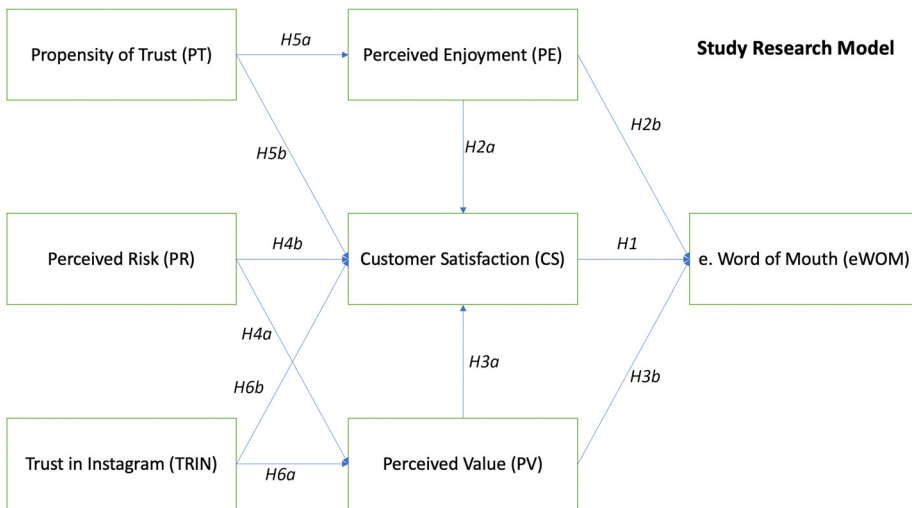
H5a. PT positively affects PE during s-commerce.

H5b. PT positively affects CS during s-commerce.

H6a. TRIN positively affects PV during s-commerce

H6b. TRIN positively affects the CS during s-commerce.

Based on the previous sections, we reused the research model of Rouibah *et al.* (2021) (see Figure 2).



Source: Figure courtesy of Rouibah, Al-Qirim, Hwang, and Pouri (2021)

Figure 2. Research model

Research methodology

In answering the research question, this study used a methodology based on a quantitative method that consisted of a survey questionnaire.

Sample and procedure of data collection

We reused well pretested, reliable and accurate items from Rouibah *et al.* (2021). The research instrument was available for both Arabic and English since these two languages are dominant in both Kuwait and the UAE. In addition, the research instrument was pretested in a pilot group of 10 Kuwaiti Instagram users and 5 Emirates. The research instrument was also reviewed by two information system professors to double-check it and to identify any deviations in meaning between the two languages. The population consists of all adults in Kuwait and the UAE. Data was collected through the online survey (Quatrics.com) based on random sampling, the snowball technique. The survey link was promoted by invitation e-mails to thousands of people who were asked to promote it in their networks. Participants contacted other friends, family members who were encouraged to answer the questionnaire and to distribute the uniform resource locator to others.

The original sample size was 1,716 (total from both countries). Before going further in the analysis, we went through a data pretest to double-check whether they reflected participants' seriousness in engagement and their full attention to the questionnaire. Thus, we first removed responses with missing values (respondents did not give their opinion at all and skipped many questions). Also, we tested the data to measure if the standard deviation was more than 0.4. Otherwise, the responses were removed. In total, we deleted 394 participations from the collected data leaving a total of 1,322 for further analysis.

The sample consisted of 1,132 Kuwaiti participants and 190 UAE participants. The reason for the large size difference is because of different legal systems of the two countries.

Items were reused from past validated scales to ensure content validity. [Table 2](#) shows the literature sources for the factors/items in the study.

Data analysis

Demographic data of the two samples (Kuwait and United Arab Emirates)

[Table 3](#) shows that the Kuwaiti sample comprises 194 males (17.2%) and 933 females (82.8%). In this sample, there were 727 students (64.7%), 305 people looking for a new job (27.2%) and 39 retirees (3.5%). The work status for the UAE sample was 118 students (62.8%), 41 looking for a new job (21.8%) and 24 retirees (12.8%). The distribution of the academic levels was 334 attended high school or lower (29.5%), 139 had high school diplomas, i.e. two years degree (12.3%), 609 had bachelor's degrees (53.8%), 31 had master's degrees (2.7%) and 18 had PhD degrees (1.6%). The distribution of academic levels for the UAE sample was 56 attended high school or lower (29.5%), 10 had high school diplomas (5.3%), 103 had bachelor's degrees (56.3%), 14 had master's degrees (7.4%) and 3 had PhD degrees (1.6%).

Assessing construct validity and reliability

We first assessed the *convergent validity* (measured by Cronbach's α) and discriminant validity of the structural model, which were achieved through factor analysis in conjunction with analysis of moment structure (AMOS). As shown in [Table 4](#), factor analysis resulted in seven factors that accounted for 73% of the total variance explained. We note that two items (PT1 and TRIN2) were deleted, as they do not meet the requirements. Also, each of the factors met the base criteria for retention as follows ([Hair, 2011](#)):

- items defining the various factors all had communalities greater than 0.50;
- extracted factors accounted for greater than 50% of the variance in their sets of items;
- all factors have eigenvalues greater than 1.0; (iv) all item loadings were greater than 0.50; and
- all factors are clearly interpretable. [Tables 4](#) and [5](#) show that these conditions are met.

[Table 5](#) shows the results of explained variance and reliabilities of study latent factors. The lowest value of coefficient Cronbach's α is 74%, which is more than the 0.73% required in behavioral studies ([Hair et al., 1998](#)). These high values witness that items reflect the factors they intend to measure. Therefore, data collected using the research instrument is reliable and valid.

[Table 6](#) presents the model's fitness measures. The results show that the research model is a good fit.

Model fit and model validation of the Kuwaiti sample

This study tested the research model and hypotheses using the AMOS software. The fit indices of the measurement model for the Kuwaiti sample show converged and reasonably fit indices (see [Table 6](#)).

[Table 7](#) shows the tested hypotheses, independent factors, dependent factors, path coefficients (betas, β s) and whether the hypotheses are significant or not. Of the 11 hypotheses, two associations were insignificant. These are *H3b* and *H5b*. The remaining nine hypotheses are statistically significant (0.5 or more). [Table 8](#) shows the β values for items per each latent factor (factor in the research model). The associations between the factors in the Kuwaiti sample are shown in [Table 7](#).

Table 2. Study items

Latent item	Abr.	Items	Source
PT	PT1	A high degree of trust exists in my family	Cheung and Thadani (2012); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	PT2	My friends are generally trustworthy	Cheung and Thadani (2012); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	PT3	People of my community trust each other	Cheung and Thadani (2012); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	PT4	Overall, I am living in a high trust society	Cheung and Thadani (2012); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
PR	PR1	I am worried that the price on Instagram may be higher than in the mall	Lim (2003); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	PR2	I am worried that purchasing from Instagram may take me too much time, including choosing products from a wide selection and a delay in shipment	Lim (2003); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	PR3	I am worried that products sold through Instagram are fake, copied, or imitated	Lim (2003); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	PR4	I am worried that the products I buy from Instagram do not meet my expectations due to being unable to touch them or try them in person	Lim (2003); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	PR5	I am worried about after-sale services based on purchasing on Instagram	Lim (2003); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	PR6	I am worried about the value of the product I purchase through Instagram does not meet its price	Lim (2003); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
TRIN	TRIN1	Instagram has safeguards to make me feel comfortable using it for e-shopping	Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021); Schaupp <i>et al.</i> (2010)
	TRIN2	I feel assured that legal and technological structures adequately protect me from e-shopping problems	Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021); Schaupp <i>et al.</i> (2010)
	TRIN3	In general, the internet is a robust and safe environment in which to e-shop	Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021); Schaupp <i>et al.</i> (2010)
PE	PE1	I have fun interacting with Instagram	Agarwal and Karahanna (2000); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	PE2	Using Instagram provides me with a lot of enjoyment	Agarwal and Karahanna (2000); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	PE3	I enjoy using Instagram	Agarwal and Karahanna (2000); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
CS	CS1	I am willing to use eWoM to recommend things to my relatives and friends	Lee (2014); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	CS2	I am willing to try new products introduced by eWoM	Lee (2014); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)

(continued)

Table 2. Continued

Latent item	Abr.	Items	Source
	CS3	Based on my prior experience, I am satisfied with my online shopping through Instagram	Murray and Howat (2002); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	CS4	Based on my prior experience, I think purchasing through Instagram is a wise choice	Murray and Howat (2002); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	CS5	Based on my prior experience, I am planning to repurchase through Instagram in the future	Murray and Howat (2002); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	CS6	Based on my past purchasing experiences, I will reuse Instagram to repurchase in the future	Murray and Howat (2002); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
PV	PV1	Compared to the fee I need to pay, the use of Instagram offers value for money	Forsythe <i>et al.</i> (2006); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	PV2	Compared to the effort I need to put in, the use of Instagram is beneficial to me	Forsythe <i>et al.</i> (2006); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	PV3	Compared to the time I need to spend, the use of Instagram is worthwhile to me	Forsythe <i>et al.</i> (2006); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
eWoM	eWoM1	When I am not sure about the quality of the product, I rely on eWoM recommendations to obtain information	Lee (2014); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	eWoM2	Whenever I required product information, I first seek eWoM recommendations on Instagram accounts	Lee (2014); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	eWoM3	I consider online customer reviews when I make a purchasing decision through Instagram	Lee (2014); Rouibah <i>et al.</i> (2021)

Source: By author

Figure 3 shows the effects of the associations for Kuwaiti users. It reveals that PT has an indirect effect on eWoM in s-commerce through the mediation of PT. PR has an indirect and negative effect on eWoM through the mediation of CS and PV. TRIN has an indirect and positive effect on eWoM in s-commerce via the mediation of CS and PV.

Model fit and model validation of the Emirati sample

The fit indices of the measurement model for the Emirati sample show converged and reasonably fit indices (see Table 9).

Table 10 shows the tested hypotheses, independent factor, dependent factor, path coefficients (betas, β s) and whether the hypotheses are significant or not for the Emirati sample. Of the 11 hypotheses, five associations were insignificant. These are H2b, H3b, H4a, H4b and H5b. The remaining six hypotheses are statistically significant (0.5 or more). Table 11 shows the β values for items per each latent factor (factor in the research model).

Table 3. Demographics of sample study

Item	Categories	Frequency		%	
		Kuwait	UAE	Kuwait	UAE
Gender	Male	194	33	17.2	17.4
	Female	933	157	82.8	82.6
Work status	Student	727	118	64.7	62.8
	Job seeker	305	41	27.2	21.8
	Retiree	39	24	3.5	12.8
	Not specified	52	5	4.6	2.7
Academic level	High school or less	334	56	29.5	29.5
	Diploma	139	10	12.3	5.3
	Bachelor	609	107	53.8	56.3
	MS	31	14	2.7	7.4
	PhD	18	3	1.6	1.6

Source: By author

Figure 4 shows the effects of the associations for UAE Instagram users. It reveals that PT has an indirect effect on eWoM in s-commerce through one path (PT → PE → CS → eWoM). PR has no effect (direct or indirect) on eWoM. TRIN has indirect and positive effect on eWoM during s-commerce through two paths (TRIN → CS → eWoM and TRIN → PV → CS → eWoM).

Table 4. Factor analysis test

Factors/items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PT2							0.720
PT3							0.866
PT4							0.801
PR3					0.841		
PR4					0.844		
PR6					0.828		
TRIN1						0.737	
TRIN2						0.785	
TRIN3						0.727	
PE1		0.838					
PE2		0.860					
PE3		0.845					
PV1			0.753				
PV2			0.840				
PV3			0.848				
eWOM1				0.839			
eWOM2				0.856			
eWOM3				0.678			
CS1	0.758						
CS2	0.772						
CS3	0.799						
CS4	0.803						
CS5	0.670						
CS6	0.702						

Source: By author

Table 5. Explained variance and Cronbach's reliability of latent factors

Factors	Variance explained (%)	Cronbach reliability (%)
PT	66	74
PR	73	81
TRIN	69	77
PE	81	88
PV	76	84
eWoM	72	81
CS	69	91

Source: By author

Table 6. Model's fitness measures for Kuwait

Fitness measurement	Kuwait	Acceptance threshold
Chi-square (CMIN)	1017.330	
Normed Chi-Square (PCMIN/DF)	4.274	4.0 or less
CFI	0.937	0.9 or more
TLI	0.920	0.9 or more
IFI	0.937	0.9 or more
AIC	1189.330	Smaller, the better
BCC	1193.218	Smaller, the better

Source: By author

Table 7. Significance and effect power of hypotheses for Kuwait

Hypothesis	Independent factor	Dependent factor	β -value	<i>p</i> -value	Decision
H1	CS	eWoM	0.42	0.02	Yes
H2a	PE	CS	0.248	0.03	Yes
H2b	PE	eWoM	0.090	0.05	Yes (minor impact)
H3a	PV	CS	0.261	0.03	Yes
H3b	PV	eWoM	–		No
H4a	PR	PV	0.090	0.05	Yes (minor impact)
H4b	PR	CS	–0.071	0.05	Yes (minor impact)
H5a	PT	PE	0.304	0.03	Yes
H5b	PT	CS	–		No
H6a	TRIN	PV	0.437	0.02	Yes
H6b	TRIN	CS	0.494	0.01	Yes

Source: By author

Results discussion

The results show some similarities, and some differences occur between the behavior of the sampled participants in the two countries (Kuwait and UAE, see [Table 12](#)). We can infer four main observations on the associations between factors among the two countries.

First, four associations in the research model are stronger in the UAE sample than those in the Kuwaiti sample. These are as follows: CS → eWoM, PE → CS, PV → CS, TRIN → PV.

Table 8. β values of research model's associations for the Kuwait sample

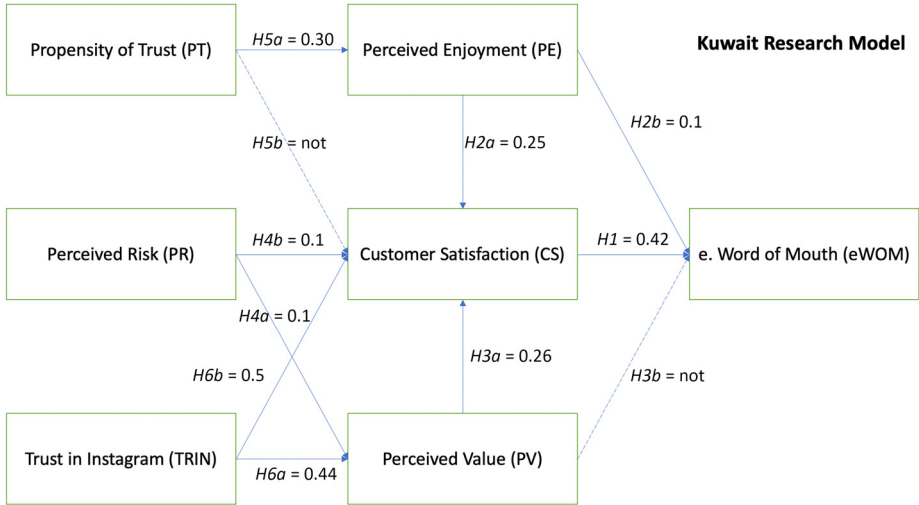
Latent factor	Items	β -value
PT	PT2	0.58
	PT3	0.79
	PT4	0.69
PR	PR3	0.61
	PR4	0.80
	PR6	0.48
TRIN	TRIN1	0.66
	TRIN2	0.71
	TRIN3	0.82
PE	PE1	0.82
	PE2	0.89
	PE3	0.85
CS	CS1	0.67
	CS2	0.68
	CS3	0.80
	CS4	0.78
	CS5	0.85
	CS6	0.85
PV	PV1	0.71
	PV2	0.83
	PV3	0.87
eWoM	eWoM1	0.83
	eWoM2	0.89
	eWoM3	0.55

Source: By author

In addition, four associations in the research model are stronger in the Kuwaiti sample than those in the UAE sample. These are as follows: PE \rightarrow eWoM, PR \rightarrow PV, PR \rightarrow CS; PT \rightarrow PE. In addition, two associations were insignificant for both samples. These are as follows: PV \rightarrow eWoM, and PT \rightarrow CS, and in one association (TRIN \rightarrow CS) the two effects are similar.

Second, the two samples exhibit dissimilarities in the significances of the weakest effects weight (β -value) in two associations. These are represented by *H2a* and *H5a*. They are the weakest among the other hypotheses. For the UAE sample, *H5a* (PT \rightarrow PE) is the weakest while the weakest for the Kuwaiti sample is *H2a* (PE \rightarrow CS). However, they are still roughly in the same range. For example, *H2a* is almost the same between Kuwait ($\beta = 0.25$) and the UAE ($\beta = 0.292$). This finding is similar to [Rouibah et al. \(2021\)](#), who found the association between PE and CS was also 0.25 (weakest association).

Third, the two samples exhibit similarities in the significance of the importance effects weight (β -value) in two associations. These are represented by the association between TRIN and CS (the strongest effect in the research model) followed by the association between CS and eWoM. These close similarities are perhaps related to the cultural effect since the two countries are categorized as collectivist (compared to individualistic) ([Hofstede, 2009](#)). In other words, the cultural and religious backgrounds of both societies are similar and many Kuwaitis and Emiratis are relatives ([Hopkyns and Zoghbor, 2022](#)). A total of 5 hypotheses (*H2b*, *H3b*, *H4a*, *H4b* and *H5b*) out of the 11 are insignificant (or of lower strength), except for *H2b* (PE \rightarrow eWoM), for both countries. Our results confirm the findings of other studies. These results lead to the conclusion that the two countries are very similar in terms of their eWoM adoption in



Source: By author

Figure 3. Kuwait research model with impact figures

Table 9. Model's fitness measures for UAE

Fitness measurement	UAE	Acceptance threshold
Chi-square (CMIN)	414.472	
Normed Chi-Square (PCMIN/DF)	1.919	4.0 or less
CFI	0.917	0.9 or more
TLI	0.894	0.9 or more
IFI	0.919	0.9 or more
AIC	580.472	Smaller, the better
BCC	604.618	Smaller, the better

Source: By author

s-commerce purposes based on Instagram. These results extend the studies of some scholars who believe that the similarities between GCC countries are greater than their differences (Hopkyns and Zoghor, 2022; Karolak and Allam, 2020; Younis *et al.*, 2022).

Fourth, unlike previous studies that found PE to be an important mediator between independent factors and intention to use new technologies in Arab countries (Rouibah, 2008; Rouibah *et al.*, 2021; Rouibah *et al.*, 2016) our study is the first to found that it does not play any role in s-commerce. Accordingly, it is possible that a high level of satisfaction reduced the effect of enjoyment perceived by customers, which requires more research investigation.

Conclusion, practical and theoretical implications

This study investigated the impact of three independent factors (PT, TRIN and PR) on eWOM for s-commerce purpose through the mediation of three factors (PE, PV and CS) based on the robust model of Rouibah *et al.* (2021).

Table 10. Significance and effect power of hypotheses for UAE

Hypothesis	Independent factor	Dependent factor	Impact	p-value	Significance
H1	CS	eWoM	0.54	0.02	Yes
H2a	PE	CS	0.292	0.03	Yes
H2b	PE	eWoM	–		No
H3a	PV	CS	0.287	0.03	Yes
H3b	PV	eWoM	–		No
H4a	PR	PV	–		No
H4b	PR	CS	–		No
H5a	PT	PE	0.208	0.05	Yes
H5b	PT	CS	–		No
H6a	TRIN	PV	0.606	0.01	Yes
H6b	TRIN	CS	0.494	0.02	Yes

Source: By author

Table 11. β values for research model's associations for the UAE sample

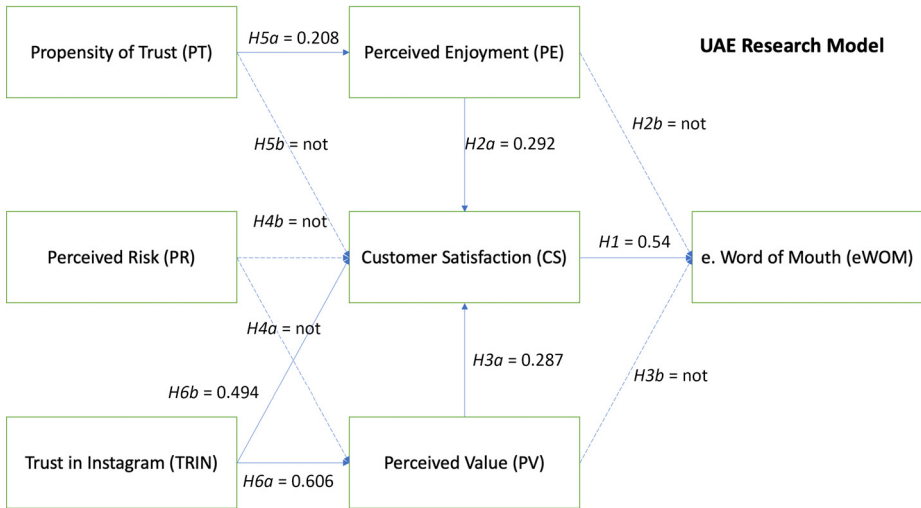
Latent factor	Item	β -value
PT	PT3	0.904
	PT4	0.800
PR	PR3	0.791
	PR4	0.842
	PR5	0.768
	PR6	0.779
	TRIN	TRIN1
	TRIN2	0.672
	TRIN3	0.769
PE	PE1	0.867
	PE2	0.794
	PE3	0.851
CS	CS1	0.733
	CS2	0.852
	CS3	0.847
	CS4	0.869
	CS5	0.851
PV	PV1	0.769
	PV2	0.829
	PV3	0.879
eWoM	eWoM1	0.870
	eWoM2	0.877
	eWoM3	0.777

Source: By author

Research contributions

Our study offers four main theoretical and practical implications.

The first theoretical implication is that it is among the few studies in the s-commerce field to compare the effect of antecedents and mediating factors on eWoM use in two Arab countries. In line with Rouibah *et al.* (2021), to the best of our knowledge, our study is among the few ones that focused on Instagram platform for s-commerce as opposed to other platforms (Rouibah *et al.*, 2021; Silaban *et al.*, 2023). Our study results show many factors that play a critical role in eWoM for s-commerce purposes.



Source: By authors

Figure 4. UAE research model with effect figures

The second implication is that the scarcity of literature on the subject of eWoM for s-commerce is an important motivation for scholars to correct that deficiency (Silaban *et al.*, 2023). In our study, we explore the use of eWoM in the context of the GCC that has received less attention (Bugshan and Attar, 2020).

The third implication is that many studies investigated eWoM in e-commerce such as tourism and marketing but have concentrated less on s-commerce. Furthermore, most of these studies have focused on the intention to use (Dincer and Dincer, 2023; X. Hu *et al.*, 2022; Zhou *et al.*, 2023) as opposed to the actual use (Rouibah *et al.*, 2021).

The last theoretical implication, and in line with Rouibah *et al.* (2021), our study contributed to enriching the literature on comparative studies between Arab countries related to eWoM in s-commerce and contributed to reduce the scarcity of research that uses models and theories to understand s-commerce adoption in two Arab countries.

From a managerial perspective, this study shows which factors (drivers and obstacles) drive/inhibit the use of eWoM for s-commerce purposes. As such companies may use these results to increase the use of s-commerce, which in turn may create more jobs, and therefore this study has a positive impact on the two countries (Kuwait and UAE). In addition, satisfaction plays the most important effect on eWoM for s-commerce in both countries and probably can be applied to other GCC countries such as Saudi Arabia that share similar cultural characteristics. It is even more important to know that Instagram is a cross-border application that the majority of Arab and multinational companies can use to promote their products. Many scholars have called for more efforts to understand customer behavior and how online companies disseminate knowledge about themselves (Rouibah *et al.*, 2021).

Limitations and future studies

This study suffers from the following three limitations:

Table 12. Comparative table between the significance of the two samples (Kuwait vs UAE)

Hypothesis	Independent factor	Dependent factor	β -value	Significance	Comparison (difference in β -value)
<i>H1a</i> [Kuwait]	CS	eWoM	0.42	Yes	0.12 [UAE> Kuwait]
<i>H1b</i> [UAE]			0.54	Yes	
<i>H2a</i> [Kuwait]	PE	CS	0.248	Yes	0.044 [UAE> Kuwait]
<i>H2a</i> [UAE]			0.292	Yes	
<i>H2b</i> [Kuwait]	PE	eWoM	0.09	Yes (minor impact)	0.09 [Kuwait> UAE]
<i>H2b</i> [UAE]			–	No	
<i>H3a</i> [Kuwait]	PV	CS	0.261	Yes	0.026 [UAE> Kuwait]
<i>H3a</i> [UAE]			0.287	Yes	
<i>H3b</i> [Kuwait]	PV	eWoM	–	No	Same [ns]
<i>H3b</i> [UAE]			–	No	
<i>H4a</i> [Kuwait]	PR	PV	0.09	Yes (minor impact)	0.09 [Kuwait> UAE]
<i>H4a</i> [UAE]			–	No	
<i>H4b</i> [Kuwait]	PR	CS	–0.071	Yes (minor impact)	–0.071 [Kuwait> UAE]
<i>H4b</i> [UAE]			–	No	
<i>H5a</i> [Kuwait]	PT	PE	0.304	Yes	0.096 [Kuwait> UAE]
<i>H5a</i> [UAE]			0.208	Yes	
<i>H5b</i> [Kuwait]	PT	CS	–	No	Same [ns]
<i>H5b</i> [UAE]			–	No	
<i>H6a</i> [Kuwait]	TRIN	PV	0.437	Yes	0.169 [UAE> Kuwait]
<i>H6a</i> [UAE]			0.606	Yes	
<i>H6b</i> [Kuwait]	TRIN	CS	0.494	Yes	Same
<i>H6b</i> [UAE]			0.494	Yes	

Source: By author

- (1) First, we did not focus on the difference between the effects of textual and graphical information on customers' decisions and trust in buying merchandise. [Zinko et al. \(2020\)](#) find that text may affect the decision to buy on s-commerce platforms. Furthermore, their results show that when a company provides an improper amount of text, images play a critical role in moderating the negative effect of text on customers' trust and intention to purchase. We, therefore, encourage future studies to investigate the role of eWoM in s-commerce based either on text and graphical information.
- (2) Second, our study focuses on Kuwait and the UAE. We ignored other GCC countries even though the mobile and internet penetration rates and s-commerce are booming. Accordingly, a future study could be initiated to study the potential differences that may occur among the six GCC countries. Although many studies claim that the similarities are obvious in Arab countries as we claimed previously, some differences also occur among them that still need to be explored and test the stability of the research model across the six countries of GCC.
- (3) Third, we compared the effect of size factors on eWoM in s-commerce across two Arab countries. However, we omitted to include cultural factors. Therefore, we encourage future studies to undertake comparative studies among Arab countries (including GCC and Northern African Arab countries) using cultural factors from a

well-known model (Hofstede) including power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs short-term orientation and indulgence vs restraint.

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