

The influence of electronic word-of-mouth in business research: identifying main topics and actors

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper investigates how the research on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has evolved and improved over time by examining the literature published in high-impact academic journals and using scientific production methods to identify its essential information, recent trends, and directions.

Design/Methodology: To visualize and conduct scientific production analysis of eWOM research using the Web of Science database and the VOSviewer science-mapping tool, this study analyzed 1,449 papers related to eWOM, published from 2012 to 2022 in Business Economics, identifying influential authors, areas, and journals. It also examined the thematic and intellectual structure of eWOM research by completing the co-occurrence of keywords, co-authorship, citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-citation analysis.

Findings: The analysis reveals that eWOM research has significantly increased across various disciplines. It draws attention to prominent scholars, influential publications, and leading countries. It also outlines six central themes of eWOM research, including digital landscape, ratings and perceived quality, and customer-centrism.

Originality: This paper analyzes the scientific production of eWOM research, a fast-growing and influential field that affects both consumers' purchasing decisions and companies. It uses a comprehensive and complete science-mapping analysis of the eWOM literature based on a large and updated dataset of papers. It offers a thorough overview of the field's research, emphasizing current developments, patterns, and trends while proposing new and relevant avenues for future research and offering significant implications for businesses and academics. It also advances the identification

and improvement of the research network involving countries, authors, and published works.

Keywords: Electronic word-of-mouth, (eWOM), science mapping, scientific production analysis

La influencia del boca a boca electrónico en la investigación empresarial: identificación de temas y actores principales

Resumen

Propósito: Este artículo investiga cómo ha evolucionado y mejorado la investigación sobre el boca a boca electrónico (eWOM) a lo largo del tiempo, examinando la literatura publicada en revistas académicas de alto impacto y utilizando métodos de análisis de producción científica para identificar su información esencial, tendencias recientes y direcciones futuras.

Diseño/Metodología: Para visualizar y realizar un análisis de la producción científica sobre el eWOM, utilizando la base de datos Web of Science y la herramienta de mapeo científico VOSviewer, este estudio analizó 1,449 artículos relacionados con eWOM publicados entre 2012 y 2022 en el campo de Economía Empresarial. Se identificaron autores influyentes, áreas temáticas y revistas destacadas. También se examinó la estructura temática e intelectual de la investigación sobre eWOM mediante el análisis de co-ocurrencia de palabras clave, coautoría, citación, acoplamiento bibliográfico y co-citación.

Resultados: El análisis revela que la investigación sobre eWOM ha crecido significativamente en diversas disciplinas. Resalta a académicos prominentes, publicaciones influyentes y países líderes. Asimismo, identifica seis temas centrales de la investigación sobre eWOM, incluyendo el panorama digital, las valoraciones y la calidad percibida, y el enfoque centrado en el cliente.

Originalidad: Este artículo analiza la producción científica sobre eWOM, un campo de rápido crecimiento e influencia que afecta tanto las decisiones de compra de los consumidores como a las empresas. Utiliza un análisis completo y exhaustivo del mapeo científico de la literatura sobre eWOM basado en un amplio y actualizado conjunto de datos de artículos. Ofrece una visión completa del campo, destacando los desarrollos, patrones y tendencias actuales, mientras propone nuevas y relevantes vías para investigaciones futuras y proporciona importantes implicaciones para empresas y académicos. Además, avanza en la identificación y mejora de la red de investigación que involucra a países, autores y trabajos publicados.

Palabras clave: boca a boca electrónico, (eWOM), mapeo científico, análisis de producción científica.

1. Introduction

Today's digital environment is heavily reliant on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Jasrai et al., 2024), which is defined as "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 via the internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p39). Over the past two decades, eWOM has undergone significant transformation, profoundly influencing contemporary consumer behavior and reshaping marketing strategies in both consumer and industrial markets (Liu et al., 2024). In this connected era, consumers readily share thoughts and experiences on diverse online platforms, allowing information to spread quickly and globally while assisting others in making decisions (Baber et al., 2024). These platforms include well-known social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Alnoor et al., 2022); review websites including Google Reviews and TripAdvisor; and discussion forums like Quora (Kraiwanit, 2021). As a result, customers now have the means to easily evaluate products, services, locations, applications, and more (Alnoor et al., 2022). In addition, these eWOM platforms contain reviews from both familiar individuals, such as friends and family members, and unfamiliar users who have personally tried or used a specific service or product (Iqbal et al., 2022).

The opinions of others strongly influence consumers' purchasing decisions. However, the effectiveness of these opinions depends on other factors, including credibility, content type (detailed and informative reviews), content quality (well-written and unbiased), and the platform used (Chakraborty 2019; Khwaja et al., 2020).

eWOM research has attracted a lot of interest in recent years, as shown by the increasing number of academic papers that have investigated this topic (Alnoor et al., 2022; Donthu et al. 2021b; Fahmy & Ragab, 2022; Verma & Yadav, 2021; Xiao et al., 2022). Various studies have revealed different factors that motivate consumers to engage in eWOM platforms, such as seeking guidance, satisfaction with products or services, involvement with brands, a desire to help others by sharing expertise and knowledge, and a sense of belonging to a community (Babić Rosario et al., 2019; Ismagilova et al., 2020). Furthermore, scholars are studying eWOM in greater depth to understand the nature of eWOM and its wide-ranging effects on various variables. eWOM content has a significant influence on shaping the opinions, perceptions, and behaviors of others (Alnoor et al., 2022). Positive eWOM can result in stronger purchase intentions, enhanced brand image and loyalty, and improved company reputation (Kübler et al., 2019; Ahmad et al., 2020; Alnoor et al., 2022). On the other hand, negative eWOM can

harm a company's reputation and cause customers to lose trust (Gerdt et al., 2019). At the same time, unfavorable eWOM can benefit businesses by helping them discover areas for improvement, learn more about customer preferences, and make the necessary adjustments to increase customer satisfaction (Kübler et al., 2019; Vermeer et al., 2019). Therefore, effective management of eWOM is essential, given its direct impact on reputation (Kim & Kim, 2019).

In total, 1,449 articles published in the Web of Science (WoS) database between 2012 and 2022 were analyzed, using the VOSviewer software tool. VOSviewer is widely recognized in academic publications, showing that its impact, presence, and potential for enhancing reliability and credibility in scholarly articles is substantial (Kirby, 2023; Tomaszewski, 2023). This software not only allows for the extraction and identification of valuable information—such as the most frequent keywords used as well as influential authors, publications, and countries (Nees Van Eck and Waltman, 2022)—but also serves as a guide for shaping future research in this field by exploring and identifying clusters or groups of related keywords and significant works in the literature (Tomaszewski, 2023).

The purpose of this paper is to conduct an analysis and visualization of the scientific production of the literature on eWOM development from 2012 to 2022, aiming to uncover its past, present, and future research directions and thereby respond to the following research questions (RQs). RQ1: What are the most influential contributors to the literature on eWOM? What is the emergence of eWOM? RQ3: Which key thematic areas of eWOM has the literature explored? RQ4: What are the avenues for more impactful future research in the field of eWOM?

This analytical tool enhances the ability to identify connections with other themes, fostering the understanding of eWOM literature. As emphasized by Denyer and Tranfield (2009) and Ivanov et al. (2019), bibliometric studies are much more than just a tool: They empower researchers to gain profound insights into the evolution, thematic diversity, and interconnections within eWOM literature and other academic domains. In other words, by analyzing existing academic works and their conclusions, analysis of scientific production sheds light on the details of eWOM, uncovering the mysteries of this ever-changing topic and facilitating the creation of major thematic clusters.

The present research has contributed to the literature by providing a more comprehensive and updated review of the literature on eWOM. Using the WoS database and a broader set of keywords that reflect the changes and advancements of eWOM concepts over time, this study covers the

period from 2012 to 2022 and, as noted, employs VOSviewer software for bibliometric networks, such as co-authorship, co-occurrence, citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-citation, to analyze the dynamics, latest developments, and trends in this field of study. Moreover, it generates a new cluster analysis that reveals the main themes and topics of eWOM research. Furthermore, it aims to address the gaps and limitations of previous reviews of the literature by adopting a more comprehensive and updated approach.

For instance, the paper by Donthu et al. (2021b) covered a shorter and less recent period of 2018–2020 and used the Scopus database and the keyword co-occurrence network only, which may have limited the scope and depth of the analysis. The paper by Bhaiswar et al. (2021) covered a longer but again less recent period of 2000–2020 and used the co-word and co-citation networks only. This may lack the comprehensive scope and depth needed for a thorough review. The paper by Verma and Yadav (2021) also covered the period of 2000–2020, used citation analysis only, which may have imposed limitations on the analysis, and employed a different software for the thematic evolution.

The research is organized as follows: the introduction provides an overview of the study and its objectives. Section 2 presents a thorough analysis of the related literature, including essential background information, such as definitions of eWOM, its types, and its forms; an exploration of factors influencing trust in eWOM content; and management strategies for eWOM. Section 3 outlines the methodology and research strategy, the data sources, and the analytical tools used. Section 4 presents and discusses the findings of the analysis of scientific production, including publication trends, productive research areas and journals, co-authorship, keyword co-occurrence, citations, bibliographic coupling, and co-citation networks. The study concludes with a summary of the research findings, its implications and limitations, and suggestions for further research on eWOM.

2. Literature review

Most reviews are now available on the internet worldwide. People trust recommendations and opinions shared on e-WOM platforms more than other information sources. This affects several variables, including customer satisfaction, loyalty, and reputation. Therefore, businesses must develop e-WOM management strategies to maintain their reputation, build customer loyalty, and improve their overall performance.

2.1 Definition of electronic word-of-mouth

With the rapid expansion of social media and the pervasive use of smartphones, eWOM has become ubiquitous (Pang et al., 2024). e-WOM is a

relatively new concept that emerged with the advent of the internet and the growth of online platforms that allow consumers to share their opinions and experiences about products, services, brands, or companies with a wide and diverse range of people. The concept is derived from traditional word-of-mouth (WOM), which is still one of the oldest and most influential forms of consumer attitudes toward product adoption. Yet despite the growing importance and popularity of eWOM, there is a lack of consensus regarding how to define and measure it among scholars and practitioners. Different authors have proposed different definitions based on various perspectives and criteria, such as the nature, source, content, and outcome of the communication. This has resulted in controversy and confusion in the conceptualization of e-WOM, which hinders the development of a clear and complete theoretical framework and empirical research. To illustrate this point, the following two tables present some of the definitions of e-WOM that have been proposed in the literature, categorized into two major categories: eWOM as a form of consumer communication, and eWOM as consumer-generated communication. Tables I and II also highlight the similarities and differences between the definitions.

Table I
Definition of electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) as a form of Consumer Communication

Authors	Definition of electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) as a form of Consumer Communication
Dellarocas (2003)	E-WOM is a type of digital communication platform that allows people to share their own experiences and opinions on various topics online. It influences people's behavior, especially their purchasing decisions.
Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004)	E-WOM is "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 via the Internet". Consumers engage in E-WOM for different reasons, interest in the service/ product, the desire to assist others, seeking advice, and taking action against a company associated with a negative experience.
Park et al. (2007)	E-WOM messages arise naturally from consumer experiences and are not planned or created by companies. However, some companies use artificial intelligence to generate fake reviews and comments about their offerings on online platforms, which undermines trust in the company.
Chen and Xie (2008)	E-WOM is a way to gain information about brands and make decisions. Customers seek E-WOM messages (feedback and information offered by others) about items and services to compare their pros and cons before buying.
Kim and Ko (2012)	E-WOM involves utilizing social media to share information about a brand or product. It enables to establish and maintain relationships with consumers, leading to enhanced customer loyalty and satisfaction.

Source: Own elaboration

Table II
Definition of electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) as Consumer-Generated Communication

Authors	Definition of electronic Word-of-Mouth as Consumer-Generated Communication
Babić Rosario et al. (2019)	E-WOM is “the consumer-generated, consumption-related communication that uses digital tools and is directed primarily to other consumers”.
Khaoula Akdim (2021)	E-WOM refers to “a new form of social communication that involves both information seeking and information sharing with customers”.
Zhang et al. (2021)	E-WOM information is “opinions expressed by current, former, or potential customers about products, services, brands, or companies that are available on online platforms”.

Source: Own elaboration

2.2 Types and forms of eWOM

eWOM can be classified into three types based on the valence or tone of the messages: positive, negative, or neutral (Vermeer et al., 2019; Flavian et al., 2020). Positive e-WOM expresses favorable information, satisfaction, acknowledgments, compliments, or recommendations (Vermeer et al., 2019). On the other hand, negative eWOM entails comments or reviews expressing dissatisfaction or complaints (Vermeer et al., 2019). Finally, neutral eWOM includes any comments, questions, or suggestions that do not fall into either the positive or negative categories (Vermeer et al., 2019).

The type of eWOM that consumers post online depends on various factors related to the product or service quality, price, delivery, and brand value (Ahmad & Laroche, 2017). In turn, the type of eWOM that consumers read online affects their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward the product, service, or brand (Ho et al., 2021; Flavian et al., 2020). Positive eWOM motivates readers to follow the recommendations and inform others about the benefits, while negative eWOM draws readers attention to the problems and drawbacks. Neutral eWOM can have different effects depending on the readers’ needs or expectations.

Researchers have highlighted that eWOM allows consumers to obtain trustworthy information about brand, products, or services that are not provided directly by companies (Verma & Dewani, 2021). It may unfold on different online platforms, each with its distinct environment (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Some of the most common forms of eWOM are:

- Social media platforms offer a more casual and conversational environment in which users can comment and share ideas and personal experiences with friends and followers (Alnoor 2022), as well as recommend various products, services, or places, by sharing posts

or stories with hashtags (#), tags (@), and direct links. Other users can interact with the posts by liking, sharing, or commenting with text or emojis (Siddiqui et al., 2021).

- Discussion forum platforms provide a more interactive environment where individuals can represent real experiences, converse, and join discussions on various topics related to products, services, brands, and more (Kraiwanit, 2021).
- Review websites allow users to provide ratings and reviews for products, services, brands, locations, applications, and so on, as well as reading the ratings and reviews submitted by other users (Kamble et al., 2020; Kim and Hyun, 2021).
- Blogs provide a more personal form of eWOM by allowing bloggers and users to write and publish their personal experiences and opinions on the topic of their choosing (Cheung & Thadani, 2012), such as the places they have visited and the characteristics of products or services they have used.
- E-commerce websites offer a more transactional and evaluative environment where users can purchase products or services online and offer their thoughts and feedback to advise other potential buyers (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

2.3 The focus of electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) research

eWOM has been a popular topic of research within various disciplines, such as marketing and management. Some of this research has focused on understanding the antecedents of e-WOM and the processes that underlie its influence on consumers' perceptions and purchasing decisions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Babić Rosario et al., 2016). Among the key variables studied regarding people's perceptions are eWOM content and quality, platform, source, product type, and culture.

The content of online reviews influences consumers' trust by affecting the accuracy, consistency, and clarity of the messages, and the variety of reasons and arguments that support their claims (Chakraborty, 2019; Khwaja et al., 2020). The platforms where feedback is posted and read also affect consumers' trust by influencing the credibility, interactivity, and functionality of the online environment (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Chen, 2016, Abdullah et al., 2022). Moreover, the source, characteristics, and motivations of the eWOM reviewer, including their expertise, experience, reputation, and relationship with the viewers, influence the trust of others (Le et al., 2022). The attributes or nature of the product or service that are the subject of e-WOM messages, such as complexity, risk, involvement, and visibility, may may affect trust (Hong et al., 2017). Besides the similarity or

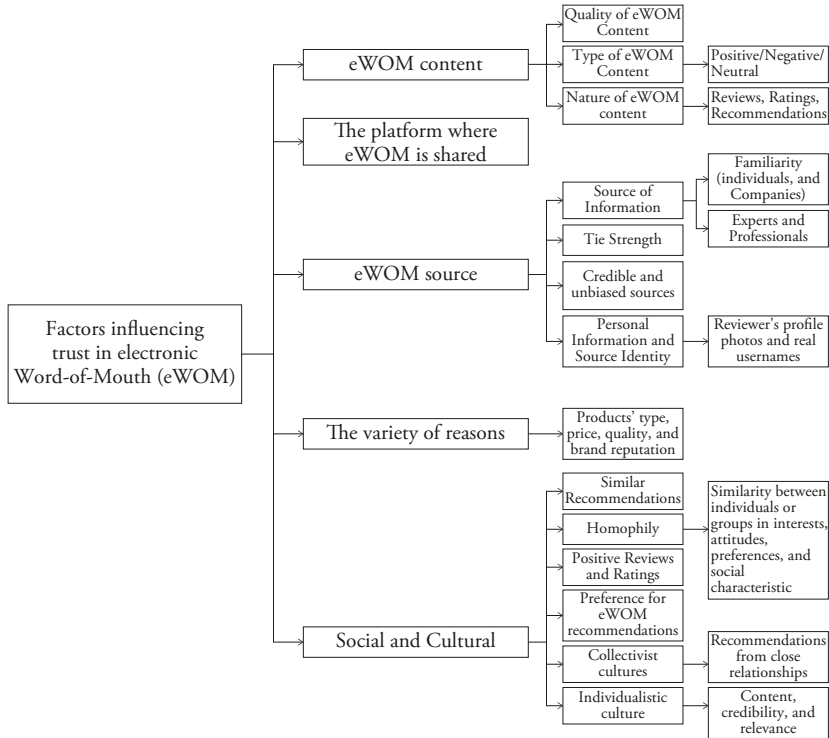
homophily between the e-WOM provider and reader (Lis, 2013), collectivist cultures trust recommendations of close relationships while individualistic cultures prioritize the content, credibility, and relevance, all of which also influences consumers (Pezzuti & Leonhardt, 2021). Figure 1 summarizes the main factors influencing trust in e-WOM.

Another focus of eWOM research has been to understand the strategies that companies use to manage eWOM. These strategies aim to increase brand awareness and image and to reduce negative eWOM by creating positive brand perception among consumers, maintaining a positive reputation, and remaining competitive in today's market (Vermeer et al., 2019). Some of the most common strategies are:

- Responding to customers' feedback in an appropriate and timely manner, addressing their issues, and offering solutions to their complaints (Vermeer et al., 2019).
- Thanking customers for leaving a positive review to show that their support is appreciated and encouraging them to leave positive recommendations on other platforms.
- Sponsorship or partnering with bloggers and influencers so they can share their brand experiences with their followers,
- Providing personalized recommendations or replies using chatbots and voice assistants (Kübler et al., 2019; Li et al., 2021),
- Censoring negative reviews by deleting, hiding, and editing them.

However, these strategies are subject to some challenges and limitations, such as the credibility and authenticity of the sponsored or collaborative posts, as well as the potentially negative reactions from consumers who may perceive the posts as biased and dishonest (Tsao & Mau, 2019; Khaoula Akdim, 2021).

Figure 1
Factors influencing trust in eWOM



Source: Compiled by authors.

3. Methodology

The study carried out an analysis and visualization of scientific production in this field to explore research trends related to eWOM. Visualization is a way to measure the quality and trends of scientific publications, and its use in academic research and published literature analysis methods (Ninkov et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2020) has increased exponentially in recent years. Donthu et al. (2021a) provided an overview and guidelines on how to conduct a bibliometric analysis, which led to many new insights and discoveries. Researchers have applied this quantitative approach in various fields of business and management, eWOM among them. For instance, Wang et al. (2022) conducted a bibliometric review of eWOM research and identified the main topics in this area by analyzing co-citation and keywords. However, their study focused mainly on quality improvements and did not consider other aspects and dimensions of eWOM research. In

contrast, the present study covers a wider range of eWOM research and analyzes additional bibliometric indicators, such as co-authorship, citation, and bibliographic coupling, which show the relationships and trends within the e-WOM research domain. This allows for a more in-depth and comprehensive analysis of e-WOM research and its evolution over time. Similarly, Mukhopadhyay et al. (2022) compared eWOM research on hospitality and tourism with other business fields.

To select the relevant literature, this study relied on the WoS database as the main source for the literature review due to its extensive coverage of academic and scientific publications. The WoS website also provides access to more than 12,000 high-impact journals, as well as articles, book chapters, and other sources of scientific information, as noted by Reuters (2014). In addition, its advanced search features make it easy to discover pertinent and excellent studies that have been published in reputable journals.

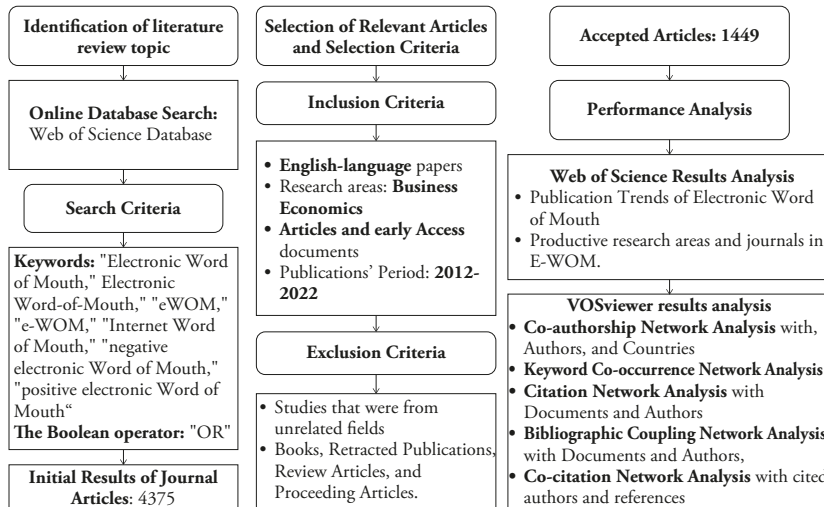
This is particularly important for the present eWOM study because the field is constantly expanding with the introduction of digital technologies and platforms. Using the WoS assists not only in refining the search criteria and obtaining more precise results but also in identifying significant authors and publications that have a major impact on eWOM. Consequently, researchers can discover studies that address their research objectives and be informed of current trends. **“Electronic Word of Mouth,” “Electronic Word-of-Mouth,” “eWOM,” “eWOM,” “Internet Word of Mouth,” “negative electronic Word-of-Mouth,” “positive electronic Word-of-Mouth”** were the keywords used to carry out the search. The researchers also utilized the Boolean operator “OR” to broaden the search criteria and encompass research that contained the specified keywords.

Initially, 4375 articles were identified in the search results. Subsequently, various inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure alignment with the research objectives and relevance. This study focused on English-language papers published between 2012 and 2022 within the research areas of Business Economics, excluding studies from unrelated fields. After applying these criteria in Web of Science, 1718 articles meeting the specified conditions were obtained. Only articles and early access documents were included, while books, retracted publications, review articles, and proceeding articles were excluded to eliminate duplicates and irrelevant publications. This refined the dataset by removing 269 articles, resulting in a curated set of 1449 articles for analysis. The search results were then exported to CSV format files for further analysis.

VOSviewer, as noted, is a popular scientific production analysis program (Waltman et al., 2010), allows users to create networks of publications,

authors, research, countries, and keywords by connecting items using links such as co-authorship, co-occurrence, citation, bibliographic coupling, or co-citation (Nees Van Eck & Waltman, 2022). This exposes clusters or groups of related terms and significant works in the literature. Figure 2 summarizes the methods used in this study.

Figure 2
Methodology steps



Source: Compiled by authors.

4. Results and discussion

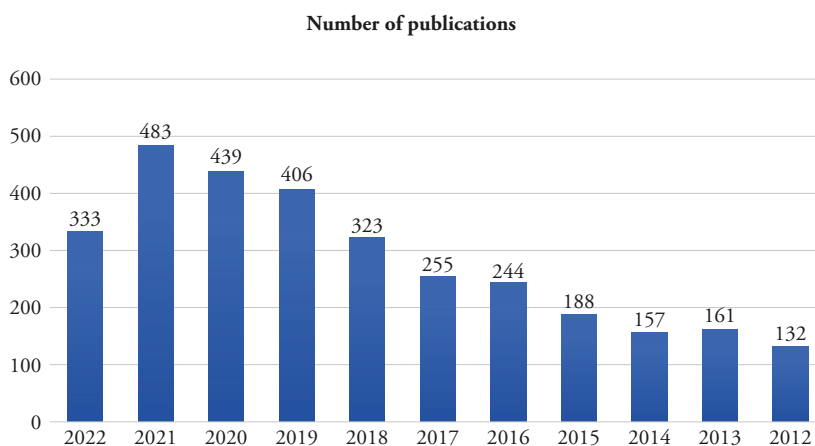
The analysis of scientific production is a useful tool to evaluate scientific literature and assess how it affects research within the academic community (Shen et al., 2022). It involves the employment of statistical and mathematical methods to analyze different publication types, such as articles, books, and other media (Pritchard, 1969). By examining bibliographic information such as authors, countries, publications, and keywords, scientific production analysis enables us to identify collaboration patterns, research trends, and contributions in particular fields (Van Nunen et al., 2018).

4.1 Publications Trends in eWOM

The analysis of publication numbers for eWOM demonstrates that scholarly interest in this field started to gather force in 2012. From then until 2015, the number of eWOM research publications increased slowly. However, since 2016, there has been a more rapid increase in the number of publications addressing eWOM, and they nearly doubled in 2018. The field continues

to grow, with the greatest number of publications, 207, recorded in 2021. This shows a significant increase compared to previous years. Although there was a decrease in 2022, with 333 publications, that number is still high. Similarly, publications increased in 2020 compared to 2019. Thus, the trend in eWOM has been upwards over the years, implying that research has continued to focus on eWOM-related topics. Figure 3 illustrates these publication trends.

Figure 3
Publications trends in eWOM



Source: Web of Science
Date: 04/06/2023

4.2 Productive research areas in eWOM research

Through the analysis, this study identified the productive research areas that have received the most attention and have had a significant impact on the development of eWOM research. Business Economics was found to be the most productive area, with 1449 publications. Table 3 illustrates the other productive research areas in eWOM.

Table III
Top research areas in E-WOM research

Research Areas	Number of publications
Business Economics	1449
Computer Science	160
Social Sciences Other Topics	140
Information Science Library Science	88

Source: Web of Science
Date: 04/06/2023

4.3 Productive journals in eWOM research

According to the number of papers published within a journal, the Journal of Business Research has published the most studies in the eWOM field (56). Table 4 provides further details.

Table IV
Top Journals in E-WOM Research

Journals	Number of Articles	2022 Journal Impact Factor	Country of Origin	Publisher
<i>Journal Of Business Research</i>	56	Q1: 11.3	USA	Elsevier science inc
<i>Internet Research</i>	46	Q2: 5.9	England	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd
<i>Journal Of Retailing and Consumer Services</i>	42	Q1: 10.4	England	Elsevier sci ltd
<i>International Journal of Advertising</i>	35	Q2: 6.7	England	Routledge journals, Taylor & Francis ltd

Source: Web of Science and Journal Citation Report
Date: 04/06/2023

The VOSviewer program assists in obtaining more bibliometric dimensions: specifically, co-authorship, co-occurrence, citations, bibliographic coupling, and co-citation analysis.

4.4 Co-authorship analysis

This analysis examines the relationship and collaboration between authors, and countries in academic publications.

4.4.1 Author co-authorship analysis

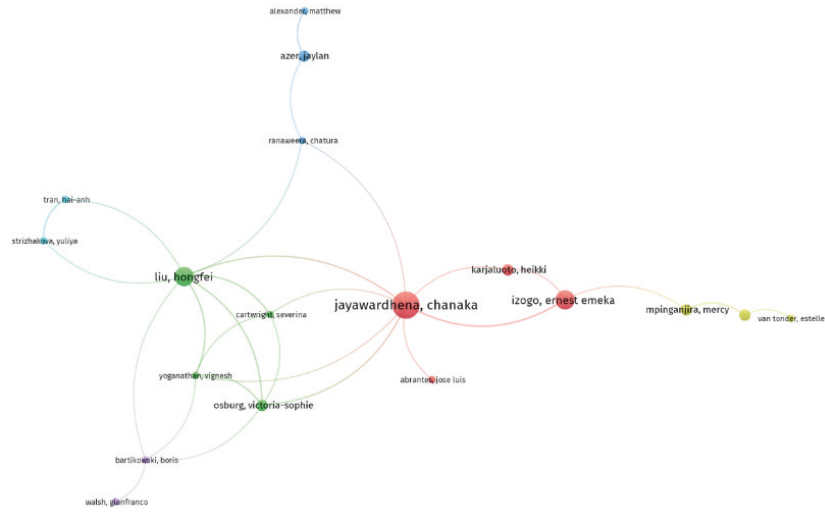
The study considered authors who had authored a minimum of two published documents. Their corresponding circle size reflects the number of documents they have authored, while the proximity between the circles indicates the degree of relatedness in terms of co-authored documents on eWOM. The network visualization map in Figure 4 illustrates researchers who have collaborations with other researchers based on the number of documents on eWOM that each has authored.

This study included 446 authors out of 3,566 in the analysis. This means that there was a considerable number of co-authors researching eWOM. However, the largest set of connected items consists of 18 items, as some of them were not connected within the network. Additionally, the network map reveals the presence of six clusters, each of them assigned a distinct color and consisting of a varying number of authors: red (4), green (4),

blue (3), yellow (3), purple (2), and light blue (2), with 28 links and a total link strength of 39.

Notably, authors Jayawardhena Chanaka, Izogo Ernest Emeka, and Liu Hongfei have contributed a significant number of documents: 7, 5, and 5 respectively. Complementary information is provided in Table 5. Furthermore, Figure 4 highlights their strong relationship with each other as well as other collaborative relationships among the authors in different clusters.

Figure 4
Authors' co-authorship network analysis on e-WOM



Source: VOSviewer

Table V
Top 5 co-authors in E-WOM publications and their citations

Authors' name	Publications	Citations	Average publication year	Average citations	Total link strength
Jayawardhena Chanaka	7	239	2018	34	12
Izogo Ernest Emeka	5	101	2020	20	5
Liu Hongfei	5	87	2020	17	12
Karjaluo Heikki	3	150	2019	50	2

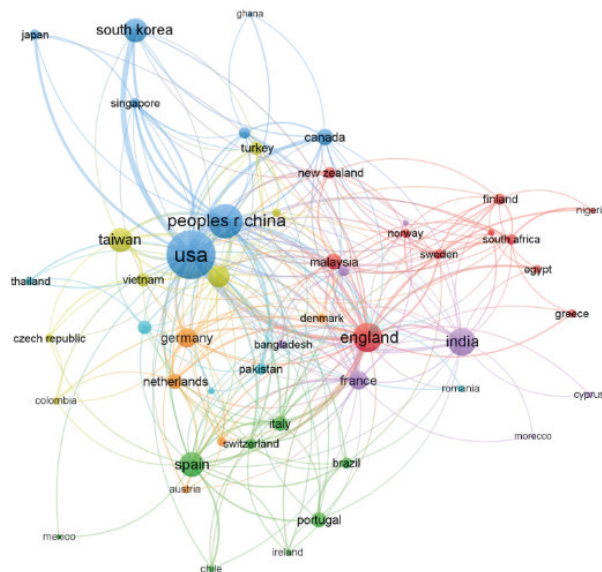
Source: VOSviewer

4.4.2 Country-level co-authorship analysis

The study determined a minimum of 3 documents and 40 citations for each country to use in the co-authorship analysis. Countries are represented as nodes in Figure 5, which are based on the total number of documents on eWOM published in each of them, and the lines connecting them show the connections between these countries.

The study only included 52 out of 75 countries in the network map. The remaining countries also have relevant research publications, but they were not included in the co-authorship map because they do not have connections with other countries. The network map also shows the existence of seven clusters, each with a unique color, covering several countries: red (11), green (8), blue (8), yellow (7), purple (7), light blue (6), and orange (5), with 296 links and a total link strength of 716.

Figure 5
Country-level eWOM co-authorship network analysis



Source: VOSviewer

It can be seen from the figure that the USA leads with the highest number of research documents and citations, followed by China, England, India, and Spain. Table 6 and Figure 5 provide more details about these countries' publications and citations, as well as their co-authorship network.

Table VI
Top countries in E-WOM publications and their citations

Countries	Documents	Citations	Total link strength
USA	421	17446	214
Peoples R China	200	6400	145
England	140	6204	105
India	124	2564	28
Spain	99	2445	33

Source: VOSviewer

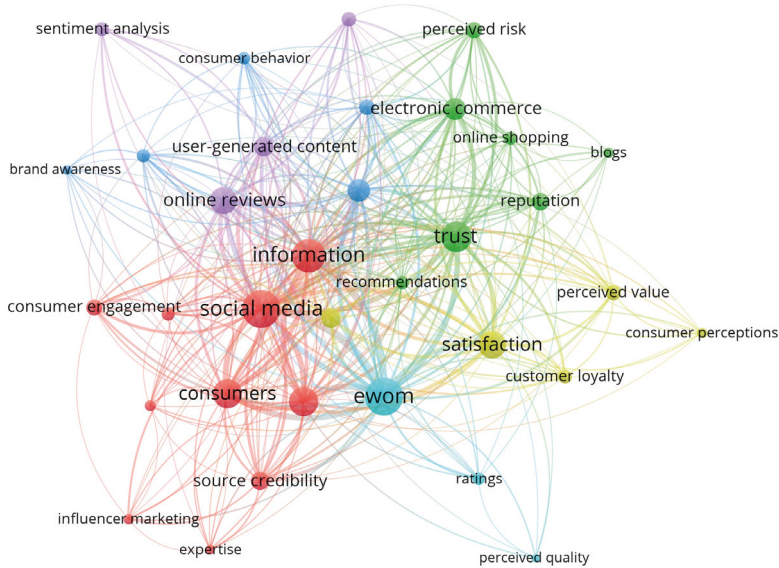
4.5 Keyword co-occurrence analysis

Co-occurrence analysis, also known as co-word analysis, examines the frequency of keywords appearing together in research papers (Whittaker 1989). It allows identification of the most frequently used terms in a particular field.

The analysis focused on keywords with a minimum of seven occurrences for the co-occurrence analysis. Figure 6 illustrates the co-occurrence network visualization map related to e-WOM. Items (keywords) are represented as nodes, and their corresponding size reflects the number of times the keywords have been used. The links show the connections between the keywords. Nodes that are close to each other represent keywords that are frequently connected or appear together.

Among the 5319 keywords, those that were duplicated were removed during the analysis, and those with the same meaning included 34 keywords that were connected in the analysis. The network map also shows that there were six clusters, each with a different color and varying numbers of keywords: red (10), green (7), blue (5), yellow (5), purple (4), and light blue (3). There were also 354 links and a total link strength of 2844. Table 7 provides additional information on the keywords associated with the term “e-WOM” and their occurrence frequency.

Figure 6
eWOM keyword co-occurrence network visualization map



Source: VOSviewer

Table VII
Co-occurrence keywords associated with E-WOM

Keywords	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
Social Media	385	666
E-WOM	384	753
Information	279	538
Trust	219	456
Communication	195	380
Consumers	192	352
Satisfaction	175	314
Online Reviews	155	318
Purchase Intention	103	253
Electronic Commerce	89	185

Source: VOSviewer

Each cluster shown in Figure 6 represents an important theme. Studies within the red cluster in the lower-left area of the visualization focused mainly on the digital landscape, with key themes including the impact of

social media platforms on shaping consumer behavior and engagement. Additionally, they examined the effectiveness of different communication strategies in virtual communities. Within this cluster, researchers also analyzed topics such as the influence of source credibility on consumer perceptions and choices. Notably, the close proximity of the keywords “source credibility,” “influencers,” and “experts” indicate a strong correlation within the eWOM research landscape. This suggests a significant interest in understanding how the trustworthiness of information sources, particularly when recommended by influencers and experts, impacts various aspects of decision-making processes and the dissemination of information online.

The green cluster in the top-right area of the visualization demonstrates a notable interconnectedness across several key themes. It underscores the significance of e-commerce dynamics and the online shopping process. These two central elements of the digital marketplace closely interconnect. The analysis of this cluster also encompassed several key factors influencing the digital marketplace, including trust, blogs, recommendations, and reputation. The keyword “trust” emerged as the most frequent term, underlining its importance in making the digital market trustworthy and the success of e-commerce platforms. Additionally, the presence of keywords like “blogs” and “recommendations” serves as a strong indicator of the influential role these factors play in the decision-making processes of online shoppers, significantly impacting the perceived risks associated with online shopping and contributing to shaping consumer choices in this digital world. Furthermore, this presence emphasizes the importance of business reputation in the context of attracting and retaining online customers.

The light blue cluster situated in the lower-right area of the visualization revolves around the interaction between “e-WOM,” “ratings,” and “perceived quality.” These keywords are closely related and often appear together in the analyzed articles. This cluster is centered on understanding how high or low ratings and online reviews influence consumers’ perceptions of product or service quality. Researchers in this cluster also focused on online review credibility and consumer trust in e-WOM.

Studies in the yellow cluster, located in the right area of the visualization, focused on topics centered on the customer. An essential keyword within this cluster is “satisfaction,” which is closely associated with customer loyalty. This suggests that researchers are particularly interested in studying the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty, as well as strategies and factors to sustain this relationship. Furthermore, studies in the cluster examined how consumers perceive the worth and benefits they receive from using products or services. Additionally, they explored the importance of

providing experiences that customers often share online, influencing their purchasing decisions.

In the upper area of the visualization, the blue cluster represents research within the domain of marketing and consumer behavior. This includes topics like how consumers recognize and recall brands, consumer preferences, their behavior in the marketplace, as well as their purchase intentions and decision-making processes. Researchers within this cluster also analyzed important factors in marketing, including brand awareness and image, which have a significant impact on consumer choices and the inclination to buy.

In the upper-left area of the visualization, the purple cluster focuses on research related to reviews and feedback posted on the internet. This research explored topics such as analyzing the emotions and opinions expressed in user-generated content, (such as online reviews/comments and social media posts). Additionally, studies in this cluster investigated how users perceive the value of the information shared regarding products, services, locations, apps, and more, as well as their assessments of their quality and utility based on online reviews.

4.6 Citation analysis

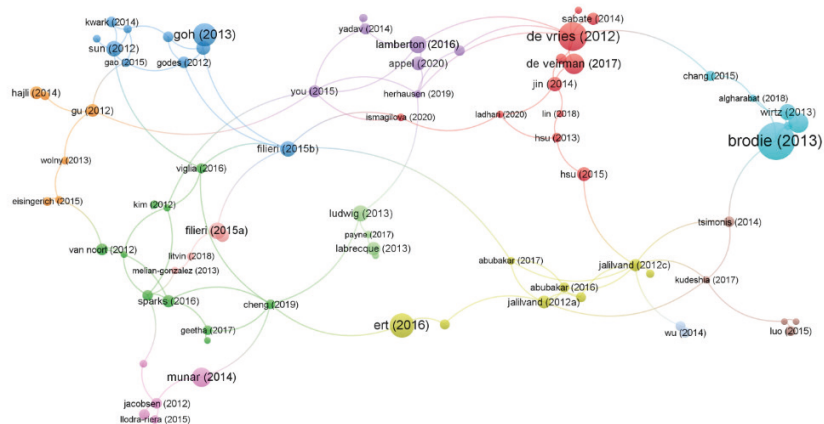
This analysis examined the relationships between documents, authors, and countries based on the citations associated with them in a specific field.

4.6.1 Document citation analysis

Documents included in the citation analysis were limited to those with a minimum of 100 citations. The connections between the eWOM publications are shown in Figure 7, where the authors of the documents are represented as nodes, their corresponding size reflects the number of citations, and the links represent the relationship between the documents' citations. Nodes that are closer together are more frequently cited together, suggesting a stronger citation relationship.

Of a total of 1,450 documents, 111 were included in the study and 75 items form the largest linked set (33 documents are not connected within the network). Moreover, the network map identified 12 clusters, each with a different color and a different number of documents: red (11), green (10), blue (10), yellow (8), purple (7), light blue (6), orange (6), brown (5), pink (5), light pink (4), light green (4), and sky blue (2), with a total of 112 links. The publication by Brodie et al. (2013) is the most cited publication with 1,484 citations, followed by De Vries et al. (2012), with 970 citations. Table 8 provides further information about the most cited publications and their total link strengths.

Figure 7
eWOM document citation network map



Source: VOSviewer

Table VIII
the highly cited publications in E-WOM

Authors	Title	Year	Journal	Citations	Total link strength
Brodie et al.	"Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis".	2013	Journal of Business Research	1484	184
De Vries et al.	"Popularity of Brand Posts on Brand Fan Pages: An Investigation of the Effects of Social Media Marketing".	2012	Journal of Interactive Marketing	970	217
Ert et al.	"Trust and reputation in the sharing economy: The role of personal photos in Airbnb".	2016	Tourism Management Volume	742	65
Goh et al.	"Social Media Brand Community and Consumer Behavior: Quantifying the Relative Impact of User- and Marketer-Generated Content".	2013	Information Systems Research	704	358

Source: VOSviewer

4.6.2 Author citation analysis

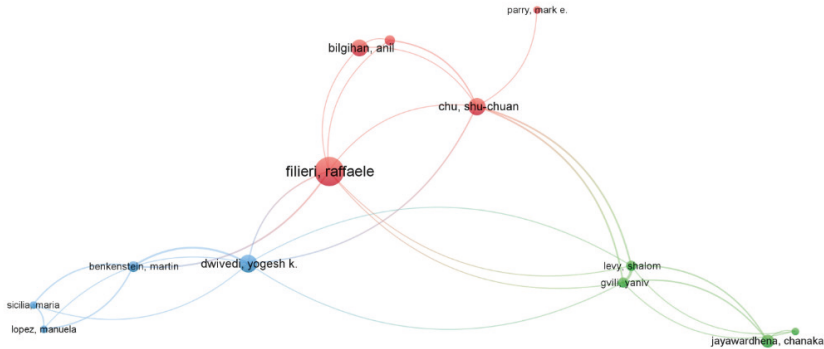
In the citation analysis, consideration was given to authors with a minimum of 5 documents and 100 citations. Figure 8 shows the citation relationships among authors on e-WOM, where nodes represent the authors, links indi-

cate the citation relationships, and corresponding sizes reflect the number of citations. Nodes that are close to each other represent authors who are often cited by similar sources.

Out of the total 3566 writers in the study, 13 authors were considered due to their interconnectedness with each other. The network map shows the existence of three clusters, each assigned a unique color and including a different number of authors: red (5), green (4), and blue (4), with 28 linkages and a total link strength of 53.

Filieri Raffaele is the author with the highest number of citations (860). Table 9 provides more information about the authors' citation numbers, publications, and total link strength.

Figure 8
eWOM author citation network map



Source: VOSviewer

Table IX
the highly cited authors in E-WOM

Author	Documents	Citations	Total Link Strength
Filieri Raffaele	9	860	10
Dwivedi Yogesh K.	5	395	12
Chu Shu-Chuan	7	386	13
Bilgihan Anil	6	364	3

Source: VOSviewer

4.7 Bibliographic coupling analysis

This section details the assessment of similarities between documents, authors, and countries based on their shared references within a specific research discipline.

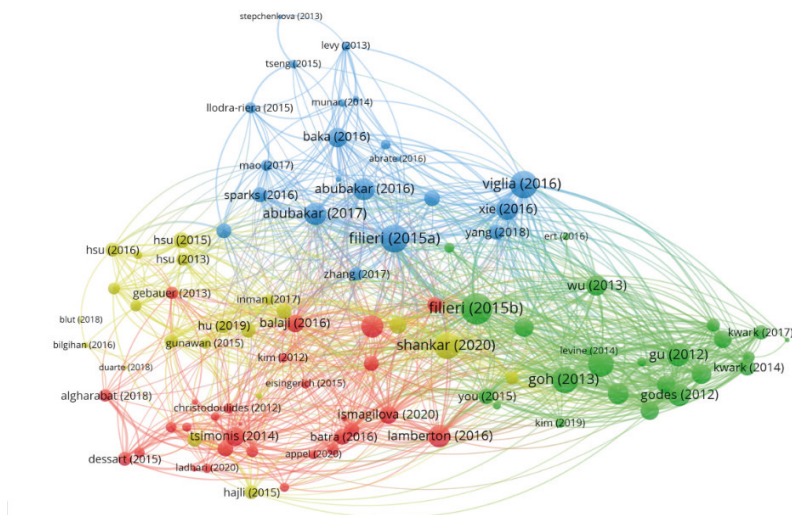
4.7.1 Bibliographic coupling analysis

This study considered documents with a minimum of 100 citations for the documents' coupling analysis. Figure 9 illustrates the bibliographic coupling relationships between studies related to e-WOM, in which the documents (author name and date of publication) are represented as nodes, their corresponding size describes the number of total link strengths, and the links represent bibliographic coupling relationships between documents. Nodes that are close to one other represent documents that share common references.

This study included the authors of 95 articles who were linked to each other in the study, out of 1,450 papers. The network map shows the presence of four clusters, each with its own color and a different number of authors: red (29), green (24), blue (21), and yellow (21), with 2,480 links and a total link strength of 6,183.

Notably, the publication by Filieri et al. (2015b) is highly influential, with a significantly high total link strength of 361 and connections to 82 other publications. This means that it shares many common references with other publications, which further emphasizes its importance within the network. It is followed by Filieri et al. (2015a) and other publications. Table 10 provides additional details on these publications.

Figure 9
eWOM document bibliographic coupling network analysis



Source: VOSviewer

Table X
Top documents in the total link strength in E-WOM

Authors	Title	Journal	Links	Total link strength	Citations
Filieri (2015b)	“What makes online reviews helpful? A diagnosticity-adoption framework to explain informational and normative influences in e-wom”.	Journal of Business Research	82	361	252
Filieri (2015a)	“Why do travelers trust TripAdvisor? Antecedents of trust towards consumer-generated media and its influence on recommendation adoption and word of mouth”.	Tourism Management	81	313	412
Viglia (2016)	“The influence of e-word-of-mouth on hotel occupancy rate”.	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	71	304	560
Shankar (2020)	“How do electronic word-of-mouth practices contribute to mobile banking adoption”.	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	79	295	124

Source: VOSviewer

4.7.2 Author bibliographic coupling analysis

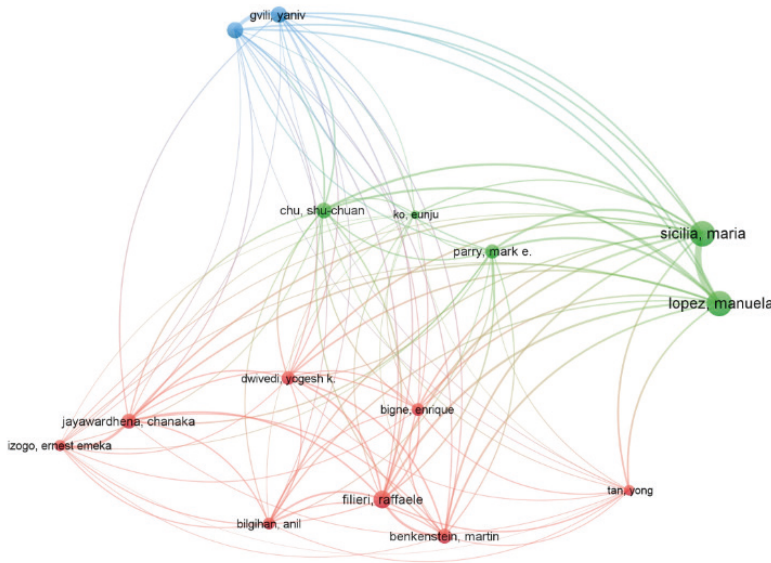
Authors with a minimum of 5 documents and 100 citations were considered for the author coupling analysis. Figure 10 depicts bibliographic coupling connections between authors on eWOM, where writers are represented as nodes, their corresponding size indicates the total number of link strengths, and the links represent bibliographic coupling relationships between authors. Nodes that are close to each other represent authors who share common references.

This analysis took into account 15 related authors out of the total of 3,566 authors. Furthermore, the network map shows the existence of three clusters, each with a distinct color and a different number of authors; red (8), green (5), and blue (2), as well as 105 links and a total link strength of 9,941.

Notably, the authors Manuela Lopez Manuela and Maria Sicilia are highly influential, with a high total link strength of 3,334 and connections

to 14 other authors. Thus, they share many common references with other writers, emphasizing their relevance within the network. Table 11 provides more details about the top authors.

Figure 10
eWOM author bibliographic coupling network analysis



Source: VOSviewer

Table XI:
Top Authors in total Link strengths in E-WOM

Authors	Link	Total link strength	Documents	Citations
Lopez Manuela	14	3335	8	108
Sicilia Maria	14	3335	8	108
Filieri Raffaele	14	1647	9	860
Gvili Yaniv	14	1400	5	166

Source: VOSviewer

4.8 Co-citation analysis

Co-citation analysis is the process of citing two publications that are cited together in the same article (Small, 1973).

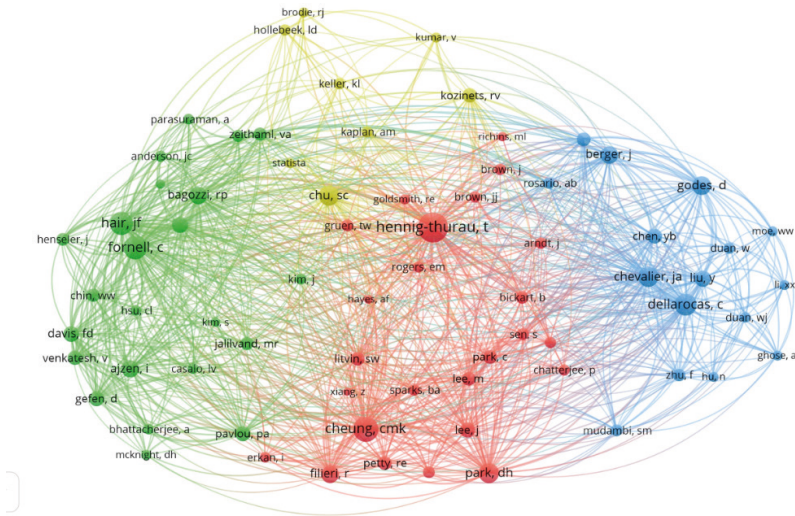
4.8.1 Cited author co-citation analysis

This study included authors with at least 100 citations for the co-citation analysis. Authors are depicted as nodes in Figure 11, whose corresponding size represents the number of total link strengths, while links show co-citation relationships among eWOM writers. Authors who are regularly cited together in the articles are represented by nodes that are close to each other.

Out of the 32,722 authors in this analysis, 72 were interconnected within the network. The network map indicates the existence of four clusters, each with a unique color and different numbers of authors: red (25), green (23), blue (16), and yellow (8), with 2548 links and a total link strength of 81,031.

Notably, Hennig-Thurau Thorsten is highly influential, with a high total link strength of 7,772 and connections to 71 other authors. He has a significant number of co-citations, highlighting his significance within the network, and is followed by Christy M.K. Cheung. Table 12 provides more information about the co-citation authors.

Figure 11
eWOM author co-citation network analysis



Source: VOSviewer.

Table XII
Top co-cited authors in total link strength in E-WOM

Authors	Total Link Strength	Links	Citations
Hennig-Thurau Thorsten	7772	71	704
Cheung Christy M.K	5756	71	443
Fornell Claes	5219	71	426
Hair Joseph F	5162	71	470

Source: VOSviewer

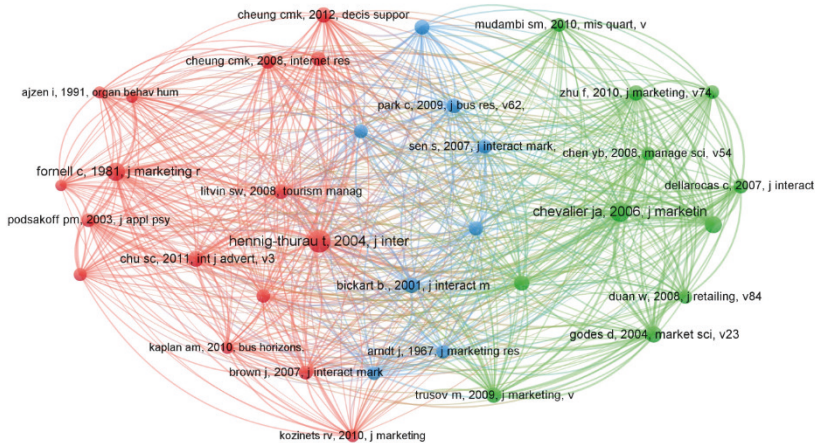
4.8.2 Cited reference co-citation analysis

This analysis considered cited references with a minimum of 100 citations for the cited reference co-citation analysis. Figure 12 illustrates the co-citation relationships among cited references on e-WOM, where nodes represent cited references, their corresponding size reflects the number of total link strengths, and the links represent co-citation relationships between cited references. Nodes that are close to each other describe cited references that are often cited together in the articles.

Out of a total of 56,170, the analysis took account of 35 cited references that are connected within the network. The network map reveals that there are three clusters, each assigned a distinct color and consisting of a varying number of cited references: red (16), green (11), and blue (8, with 595 links and a total link strength of 15,515).

The article by Hending-Thurau T. (2004) is highly influential, with a significantly high total link strength of 2,910, connections to 34 other papers, and the most cited reference (506). This shows it to be a significant and highly cited paper within the network. It is followed by the paper of Chevalier Ja, 2006, with 2,255 total link strengths and connections to 34 other papers. Table 13 provides more details regarding the co-citations of the mentioned references and other references.

Figure 12
eWOM cited reference co-citation network analysis



Source: VOSviewer

Table XIII
Top 10 Co-cited references in total link strength in E-WOM

Cited Reference	citations	Total link strength	Links
Hennig-Thurau Thorsten, 2004, J Interact Mark, V18, P38, Doi 10.1002/Dir.10073	506	2910	34
Chevalier Ja, 2006, J Marketing Res, V43, P345, Doi 10.1509/Jmkr.43.3.345	344	2255	34
Fornell C, 1981, J Marketing Res, V18, P39, Doi 10.2307/3151312	353	1806	34
Liu Y, 2006, J Marketing, V70, P74, Doi 10.1509/Jmkg.70.3.74	199	1540	34

Source: VOSviewer

5. Conclusion, implications, limitations, and future research

The study entailed a systematic literature review of eWOM with a particular focus on highlighting the primary results of the bibliometric indicators, including co-occurrence of keywords, co-authorship, citation analysis, bibliographic coupling analysis, and co-citation relationships. Through rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria, 1,449 relevant papers published between 2012 and 2022 were reviewed.

According to the analysis, the most productive year for eWOM publications is 2021. Co-authorship analysis showed that Jayawardhena Chanaka (author analysis) and the USA (country analysis) have produced the highest number of documents in eWOM research publications. The research conducted by Jayawardhena and colleagues has made foundational contributions to the understanding of eWOM, particularly in industries such as tourism, hospitality, and online retail. Their work on emotional intensity as a key driver of eWOM-giving intention (Liu et al., 2021) and the role of service recovery in eWOM-triggered scenarios (Liu et al., 2019) highlights crucial factors that influence consumer behavior in digital environments. However, the evolving landscape of new technologies, such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and AI-driven customer engagement tools, presents opportunities to extend these findings. For example, future research could explore how emotional engagement in eWOM might differ in immersive VR experiences, where emotional intensity may be heightened. Similarly, the role of compensation and promptness in online service recovery could be examined in real-time, AI-driven support systems. Authors such as Jayawardhena, who have extensively studied eWOM, are well-positioned to lead future explorations into how these dynamics operate in new digital spaces, providing further insights into consumer-firm relationships across media. Keywords that are frequently associated with eWOM include social media, information, and trust. This allows researchers to better understand the theoretical framework within eWOM so that companies can create effective strategies to manage eWOM and use it to their benefit. The article authored by Brodie et al., titled “Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis,” is the most cited, while Filieri Raffaele is the most cited author within the field of eWOM. Bibliographic coupling analysis has shown that the publication by Filieri et al. (2015b) shares many common references with other publications, while Manuela Lopez Manuela and Maria Sicilia share many common references with other writers. Finally, co-citation analysis showed that Hennig-Thurau Thorsten and his article are the most cited authors and references.

This qualitative analysis has made significant contributions to both theory and practice in the field of eWOM. The study offers a rich, multidisciplinary perspective on eWOM, emphasizing its significance in the digital age. It underscores eWOM’s role as a dynamic intersection of technology, marketing strategies, and consumer behavior, providing a nuanced understanding of how digital platforms facilitate consumer communication and decision-making processes. It also emphasizes the worldwide relevance of eWOM research by highlighting the global distribution of scholarly con-

tributions. It showcases the diverse cultural and geographical contexts in which eWOM operates, contributing to a more globalized understanding of consumer behavior in the digital marketplace. The research also enriches the theoretical discourse on eWOM by providing a historical context. It explains eWOM mechanisms by offering different insights into how eWOM content affects consumer responses and by evaluating them thematically in terms of their main topics, actors, and evolution. In this way, the paper serves as a valuable resource for scholars seeking to build upon the existing body of knowledge in the realm of digital consumer engagement, allowing them to stay updated on the current and latest trends and developments in eWOM, refine their understanding, and explore new areas for future research. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of advanced analysis techniques, such as VOSviewer, in mapping out the intellectual structure of eWOM research and thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of its findings.

This study also offers valuable insights for businesses. It emphasizes the value of paying attention to the quality, source, platform, and nature of eWOM messages, as these factors affect the trustworthiness and persuasiveness of online feedback. It also highlights some possible factors that encourage customers to share positive or negative feedback. Moreover, it stresses the importance of responding to their feedback in a timely and professional manner to show them that they value their opinions and are prepared to adapt according to their preferences to continuously improve. This is essential for eWOM's role in marketing strategies and its increasing business reach and influence, as well as building brand reputation and customer loyalty. In addition, the research provides other insights into how managers can effectively manage eWOM, including censorship, sponsorship, and collaboration with bloggers, fans, and influencers to leverage their personal experiences and influence consumer decisions. On the other hand, this study raises awareness of the significance of evaluating how these strategies work and affect different situations and platforms, as they may be subject to different problems and limitations, such as the trustworthiness of the sponsored or collaborative posts, as well as the possible negative feedback or responses from consumers who may think that the posts are fake and dishonest.

A possible limitation of this study could result from using solely the WoS database as a data source, which may exclude pertinent papers from other sources. Another limitation is that VOSviewer relies on a single set, which may limit the study's comprehensiveness and representativeness of the bibliometric analysis. Additionally, this article focuses on the scientific

production of eWOM research in business and management research areas, which are the most relevant and influential fields for eWOM research, whose findings can be useful for other disciplines as well. However, it does not compare the results with other fields, which may limit the generalizability of the results for the broader academic community.

Future Research Directions

The authors' strong interest in eWOM in recent years (Alnoor et al., 2022; Fahmy & Ragab, 2022; Herzallah et al., 2022) and the continuous progression of technology highlight the need for ongoing research in this area and for constantly updating our understanding of eWOM.

While many studies have examined the impact of eWOM platforms on eWOM content (Abdullah et al., 2022), there is a gap when it comes to investigating platform-specific analyses, exploring the distinctive features of each of them, and examining their influence on eWOM dissemination. For instance, both Instagram and TikTok are broadly similar social media platforms, but they differ in certain key respects. TikTok enables users to share videos about products they use, emphasizing their benefits or disadvantages. These videos remain available for a long period unless they are deleted by the user. In contrast, Instagram users might rely on temporary stories that disappear after 24 hours, unless they are saved as highlights or reels. Thus, scholars may gain insights by understanding the differences in platform-specific features and how they affect the reach, accessibility, and durability of eWOM content and influence its dissemination and effectiveness.

Many researchers have highlighted the importance of credibility in eWOM content (Chakraborty 2019; Khwaja et al., 2020) for its acceptance and adoption by others. Some studies have focused on developing methods to detect fake eWOM. For example, Salminen et al. (2021) conducted research on the effectiveness of machine-learning classifiers in detecting fake reviews on online products. It is worth mentioning that some companies may use artificial intelligence (AI) to generate high-quality and personalized reviews to influence customers' perceptions of their products or services. In this sense, an important area for future research could be the exploration of strategies to prevent and effectively manage fake eWOM that are generated by both humans and Artificial intelligence.

Exploring the relationship between virtual reality (VR) experiences in virtual showrooms and eWOM engagement could be another area for investigation in eWOM to further explore its impact on consumer behavior (Chu and Kim, 2018). The analysis reveals key opportunities and gaps in the field, particularly in how platforms like Instagram and TikTok, offer

distinct functionalities that influence the dissemination and longevity of eWOM content. This understanding can drive future research to focus on platform-specific characteristics, addressing the need for tailored marketing strategies that capitalize on these unique features. Furthermore, emerging technologies such as AI and virtual reality (VR) present promising areas for applied research. AI-generated reviews, for instance, raise concerns about fake eWOM, necessitating the development of robust detection and management strategies, while VR showrooms provide a unique context in which to study consumer engagement and trust in online reviews.

In light of these findings, future research should focus on understanding how technological advancements reshape consumer behavior and eWOM dynamics across different platforms and industries. For instance, scholars could investigate the role of immersive VR experiences in influencing eWOM engagement or explore the impact of AI-generated reviews on consumer trust. Additionally, expanding studies to include diverse age groups and the effect of influencers and vloggers on brand loyalty and recognition could offer valuable insights into how different demographic segments interact with eWOM. These research avenues not only address existing gaps but also offer practical implications for businesses seeking to enhance their digital marketing strategies in the evolving technological landscape.

Researchers can further expand the analysis eWOM by employing a variety of modern qualitative methodologies and social media analytics approaches. Techniques such as neuromarketing, eye-tracking, electroencephalogram (EEG), and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) can provide deeper insights into consumers' emotional and cognitive responses to eWOM. Additionally, advanced text mining, sentiment analysis, content analysis, and text regression can be used to analyze large-scale social media data, offering a more precise understanding of consumer sentiment and behavior. Experimental methods, including A/B testing, field-scenario experiments, and multi-experiment techniques, allow for testing different variables in controlled environments. Sampling strategies such as random, snowball, and judgmental sampling enhance the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, knowledge graphs and inductive logic programming techniques can be utilized to map and predict relationships between eWOM components, providing new avenues for data-driven insights. By integrating these modern methodologies, researchers can open new fields of analysis and gain a comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in the evolving digital landscape.

Previous research has focused on the influence of eWOM on Generation Z consumers (Xiao et al., 2022). Future research may examine how eWOM

influences consumers' purchasing behavior in other age groups (non-Gen Z). This research direction will give significant insights into potential differences in purchasing patterns among different consumer segments, enabling companies to optimize their marketing strategies.

Existing papers have examined the influence of collaboration with influencers as an effective marketing and eWOM management strategy (Khaoula Akdim 2021; Tsao & Mau, 2019). Moreover, studies show that viewers favor reviews that include videos because they help them better understand the product or service being evaluated (Orús et al., 2016). To advance current knowledge, future studies could look into the impact of vlogger content on consumers' brand-related behavior. This could involve determining whether exposure to vlogger content improves consumers' ability to remember and recognize brands compared to other forms of advertising. Studying whether vlogger content increases brand preference and loyalty among their audience over other marketing strategies would also be interesting.

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