

A Study on Role Of E-Word of Mouth in Consumer Preferences in the Food Industry

ZAARAA KHAN G, MBA, Jerusalem College of Engineering, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

AKILA S, Assistant Professor, MBA, Jerusalem College of Engineering, Chennai.

Abstract

The study titled, “The Role of E-Word of Mouth (E-WOM) in Consumer Preferences in the Food Industry,” examines how online reviews and ratings influence consumer food choices. Using a descriptive research design, data were collected from 100 respondents through structured questionnaires and analyzed using percentage analysis, correlation, regression and weighted average method.

The findings show that food quality perception strongly affects how often people order food online, while ratings have less impact. A positive link was found between trust in review honesty and resistance to negative comments indicating that genuine reviews build confidence. Swiggy is the most preferred platform for food reviews, followed by Instagram, Google Reviews and Zomato. Overall, the consumers value authentic reviews and food quality more than ratings proving that E-WOM plays a key role in shaping food-related decisions.

Keywords: E-Word of Mouth (E-WOM), Consumer Preferences, Online Reviews, Customer Trust, Food Quality, Social media platforms, Purchase decision.

Introduction:

In today’s digital world, the people rely heavily on online reviews and ratings before making food-related decisions. Whether it’s choosing a restaurant, ordering through delivery apps or trying new café. Online feedback has become a trusted source of information. This growing trend highlights the importance of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM) which means the process of sharing experiences, opinions and recommendations about products or services through digital platforms.

Unlike traditional word of mouth which spreads through personal conversations, E-WOM travels faster and reaches a wider audience through online platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, Instagram and Google Reviews. These platforms allow customers to share their real experiences instantly and helping others to make informed decisions. For many consumers reading online reviews has become a routine step before deciding what to eat or where to order from.

The food industry today faces intense competition with numerous options available to consumers. In such an environment, online reviews and ratings play a vital role in shaping perceptions. A few positive reviews can

enhance a restaurant's reputation and attract more customers, while negative feedback can discourage potential buyers. This makes E-WOM not only a reflection of customer satisfaction but also a powerful marketing tool that can help to influence the brand image and sales.

Moreover, trust plays a key role in how consumers interpret online reviews. When customers find that are reviews genuine and credible they are more likely to try a product or service despite a few negative comments. On the other hand, fake or misleading reviews can reduce trust and damage a brand's reputation. Therefore, understanding how customers perceive and respond to E-WOM is essential for businesses in the food sector.

This study aims to explore the role of E-WOM in shaping consumer preferences within the food industry. It focuses on how online ratings, customer trust and perceptions about the food quality affect consumer decisions. Additionally, the research identifies which platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, Instagram or Google Reviews the customers prefer the most when checking food-related reviews. By analyzing these factors, the study seeks to highlight the growing importance of E-WOM as a key influence on modern consumer behaviour and food industry marketing strategies.

Objectives:

Primary Objective:

To analyze the role of E-WOM in consumer preference in the food industry.

Secondary Objectives:

1. To analyze how the online ratings influence consumer food choices.
2. To examine the effect of reviews on customer trust in food brands.
3. To identify which platform (Zomato, Swiggy, Google Reviews, Instagram etc.) customers prefer for checking food reviews

Review Of Literature:

Electronic word of mouth (E-WOM) has become an influential factor in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the digital marketplace where purchasing decisions are increasingly driven by online interactions and reviews. Research has shown that E-WOM significantly enhances consumer trust and directly influences buying behavior, demonstrating its critical role in brand image and purchase intention (Aslam, Farhat, & Arif, 2019). However, much of the existing work has taken a broad approach, overlooking the specific dynamics of platform-based consumer behavior, especially within the food delivery industry. Addressing this limitation, the present research focuses on how online reviews and ratings on platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, Instagram, and Google Reviews shape consumer trust and food-ordering behavior.

Trust has been consistently identified as a central mediator between E-WOM and purchase intention. Studies have shown that trust, when strengthened by credible and authentic E-WOM, leads to higher online purchase intentions, particularly through social media interactions (Di Virgilio & Antonelli, 2017). The rapid spread and accessibility of online word-of-mouth further amplify its influence on consumer decision-making, demonstrating how digital reviews reach wider audiences and affect purchasing choices in real time (Liu et al., 2022). This immediacy and reach are particularly relevant to food delivery services, where consumers rely on instant feedback from other users before making a purchase decision.

Social media platforms have further intensified the effect of E-WOM on consumer preferences. Research among Instagram users revealed that E-WOM and social media marketing enhance food brand image and significantly increase purchase intentions (Kartika & Pandjaitan, 2023). Moreover, the credibility and quality of reviews—along with their recency and volume—have been found to play a decisive role in influencing consumer perceptions, particularly for food-related products (Nora Abdullah, 2020). These findings highlight the growing significance of user-generated content in determining the trustworthiness of online information and its impact on purchase behavior in the food sector.

Consumer motivations for engaging with online reviews also reveal important behavioral insights. Millennials, for instance, often read restaurant reviews not only for information about product quality but also for social interaction and validation, with minimal gender differences in this behavior (Haro-Sosa et al., 2024). This indicates that online reviews fulfill both informational and social needs, reinforcing the communal aspect of decision-making in digital consumption contexts. Additionally, factors beyond E-WOM, such as price sensitivity and environmental concern, have been shown to influence purchase intentions. Research on sustainable food choices suggests that these elements interact with E-WOM to shape consumers' willingness to buy, with environmental awareness partially mediating this relationship (Yohana et al., 2024). These multidimensional influences informed the inclusion of variables like food quality and review credibility in the current analysis.

The role of website and platform design has also been acknowledged as a significant factor in facilitating the impact of E-WOM. Studies have found that high-quality, user-friendly website content enhances consumer trust and purchase intention, with E-WOM serving as a bridge between website experience and buying behavior (Ikram et al., 2020). The structure and accessibility of review systems on platforms such as Swiggy and Google Reviews thus play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and encouraging repeat purchases.

Comparative research between traditional word-of-mouth and E-WOM confirms that digital reviews have a stronger and faster influence on consumer decisions due to their broader reach and ease of dissemination (Albarq & Aldoghan, 2020). This reinforces the growing dominance of E-WOM in modern marketing environments, particularly in industries where immediacy and convenience drive consumer choice. Furthermore, studies focusing on social media platforms like Facebook show that E-WOM can have both positive and negative effects depending on user engagement. Consumers, however, often overlook negative feedback when they perceive the

overall review environment as trustworthy (Shashikala & Thilina, 2020). This finding underscores the complex interplay between perceived authenticity, review tone, and consumer trust in online food-ordering decisions.

Collectively, the literature illustrates that E-WOM is not only a driver of purchase intention but also a multifaceted construct shaped by review quality, social validation, platform design, and consumer trust. Despite extensive research across various industries, limited attention has been paid to platform-specific consumer behavior in the food delivery sector. By addressing this gap, the present study contributes to a deeper understanding of how online reviews and

ratings across multiple platforms influence consumer trust, food-ordering frequency, and overall purchase behavior.

Research Methodology:

Research design

The study titled “The Role of E-Word of Mouth (E-WOM) in Consumer Preferences in the Food Industry” employs a descriptive research design to examine how online reviews and ratings influence the consumer’s food choices. The main objective of this research is to identify the impact of E-WOM on customer trust, perception of food quality and the choice of digital platforms consumers rely on before placing online food orders. By using a descriptive approach, the study aims to provide a depth understanding of existing consumer behavior patterns without manipulating any variables.

Sample design

A total of 100 respondents were selected through a random sampling technique to ensure a diverse representation of participants from various age groups, genders and the income levels. This method helped me capture a realistic picture of how diverse groups of people interact with online food platforms and make choices based on reviews. The sample included individuals who regularly order food online and actively engage with the digital platforms for reviews and ratings.

Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire distributed to the users of popular online food platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato and Instagram. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions and Likert scale items designed to capture respondent’s opinions on the reliability of online reviews, the influence of ratings on their food choices and their preferred platforms for checking food-related feedback. Questions were carefully framed to ensure clarity, simplicity and relevance thereby reducing the chances of misinterpretation and improving the quality of the data collected.

Secondary data was collected from reputable journals, research papers and credible online sources related to E-WOM, consumer behavior, digital marketing and the food industry. This helped me in building a theoretical

foundation, understanding existing trends and validating the insights obtained from primary research. Secondary data also provided context regarding how online reviews have historically influenced consumer decision-making and the evolving role of digital platforms in shaping preferences.

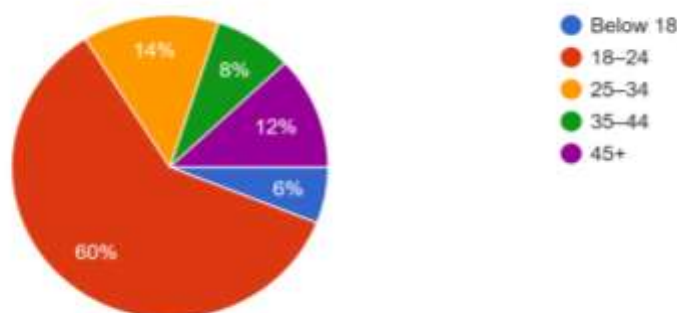
For data analysis, the study utilized a combination of Percentage Analysis, Correlation, Regression and the Weighted Average methods. Percentage Analysis was used to summarize demographic details and general trends, while Correlation analysis helped in identifying the strength and direction of relationships between variables such as review trust and ordering behavior. Regression analysis was applied to understand how specific factors like perception of food quality or platform popularity influences the consumer's online ordering decisions. The Weighted Average method was used to determine the overall impact of different factors on consumer preferences.

Through this methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how online reviews and ratings shape consumer choices, how they build or diminish customer trust and which digital platforms are most influential in the online food ordering process. The findings are expected to offer actionable insights for marketers, platform managers and restaurant owners to enhance customer engagement and satisfaction through effective digital strategies.

Data Analysis

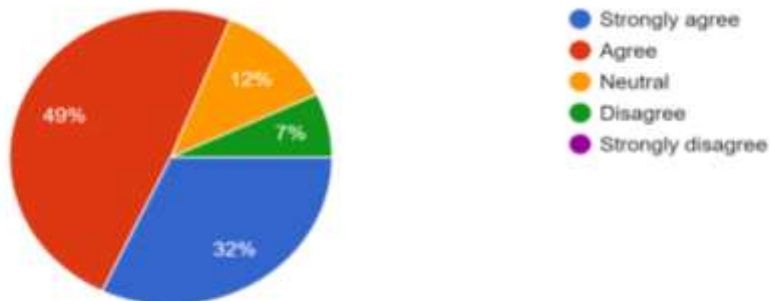
Percentage Analysis: Percentage analysis is used to understand the basic details of the respondents such as their age, gender, occupation and the income levels. and to see how their opinions differ about E-Word of Mouth (E-WOM) in the food industry. It helps show what percentage of people have positive or negative views about online reviews, ratings and how these factors influence their food choices.

Percentage Analysis for Age of the Respondents



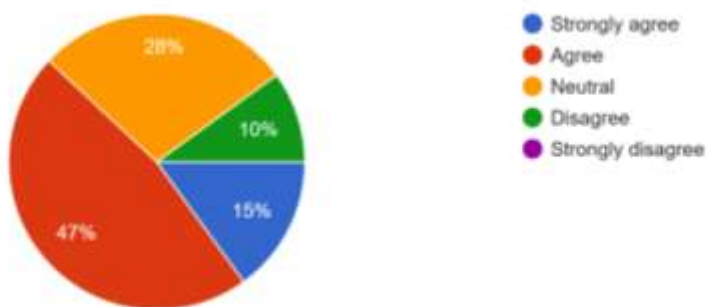
Inference: Most of the respondents (60%) are between 18-24 years old showing that young adults form the majority of participants in this study. This indicates that younger people are more active in using online food delivery apps and rely more on reviews and ratings before ordering the food. Only a small number of respondents (20%) are above 35 years suggesting that older age consumers are less influenced by the online reviews compared to younger ones.

Percentage Analysis for Influence of High Ratings



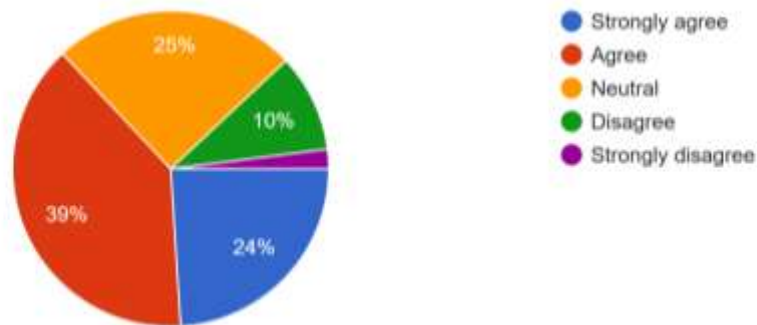
Inference: A large number of respondents (81%) agree that high ratings influence their food choices. This shows that most people tend to trust restaurants or food items with better ratings when ordering online. Only a few respondents (7%) disagree which means ratings play an important role in how most consumers decide what to eat and from where to order.

Percentage Analysis on Choices Not Affected by Few Bad Reviews



Inference: Most people (62%) feel that a few bad reviews don't really affect their choices, showing that they tend to trust their own judgment when making decisions. Only a small number (10%) admit that negative reviews can influence them, while some (28%) are unsure. This suggests that while most consumers stay confident despite a few bad opinions, also there's still a portion who remain cautious or undecided.

Percentage Analysis for Trust in App Reviews



Inference: Most respondents (**63%**) **trust app reviews**, showing that people generally rely on them when choosing a restaurant or ordering food online. However, about a quarter (25%) are unsure and a small group (12%) do not trust them at all. This suggests that app reviews play an important role in influencing user's decisions and some still approach them with caution.

Correlation Analysis:

Correlation analysis helps to find out how closely two things are related and whether one affects the other. In this study, it is used to see how consumer's trust the honesty of online reviews and how it is connected to their ability to ignore a few bad reviews when making decisions. The aim is to understand if people who believe reviews are honest are more likely to stay positive and still make a purchase even when they come across some negative comments.

HYPOTHESIS

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between consumers' belief in the honesty of reviews and their ability to remain unaffected by a few negative comments.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant relationship between consumers' belief in the honesty of reviews and their ability to remain unaffected by a few negative comments.

Correlations

		Believe in review honesty-	Choices not affected on few bad reviews
Believe in review honesty	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.257
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.010
	N	100	100
Choices not affected on few bad reviews	Pearson Correlation	.257	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	
	N	100	100

INTERPRETATION:

* Positive correlation ($r = 0.257$, $p = 0.010$) found. Since the **p-value = 0.010**, which is **less than 0.05**, we **reject the null hypothesis**.

* Indicates that consumers who believe online reviews are honest are less likely to be influenced by a few negative reviews while making their purchase decisions.

Regression Analysis:

Regression analysis helps to understand how one or more factors influence a particular outcome. In this study, it is used to examine how perception about food quality and influence of high ratings affect the frequency of ordering food online. The aim is to identify which factor has a stronger impact on consumer's online food ordering behaviour and to understand whether good food quality or high ratings play a bigger role in shaping their purchase decisions.

HYPOTHESIS

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant effect of food quality perception and high ratings on the frequency of people ordering food online.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant effect of food quality perception and high ratings on the frequency of people ordering food online.

Coefficients (Frequency of ordering food online)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.09	.25	.00	4.36	.000
Perception about food quality	.22	.08	.27	2.80	.006
Influence of high ratings	.14	.09	.15	1.57	.119

INTERPRETATION:

* Regression results show that perception about food quality ($p = 0.006$) has a significant positive influence on the frequency of ordering food online, while influence of high ratings ($p = 0.119$) does not have a significant impact.

* This means consumers who have a positive perception of food quality tend to order food online more often, whereas high ratings alone do not strongly affect their buying decisions

Weighted Average Analysis:

Column1	VERY FREQUENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	NEUTAL	RARELY	NEVER	TOTAL	RANK
GOOGLE REVIEW	15	48	3	22	12		
	75	192	9	44	12	332	3
INSTAGRAM	22	45	4	21	8		
	110	180	12	42	8	352	2
SWIGGY	22	42	5	20	11		
	110	168	15	80	11	384	1
ZOMATO	16	39	10	23	12		
	80	156	30	46	12	324	4

Weighted average analysis is used to identify which option or platform people prefer the most by giving more weight to frequent choices. In this study, it helps to find out which online platform consumers use most often to

check food reviews before making a purchase. The main goal is to understand which source such as Swiggy, Instagram, Google Reviews or Zomato has the strongest influence on consumers when deciding where to order food online or to dine in.

INTERPRETATION:

* The weighted average results show that Swiggy ranks first, meaning it is the most preferred platform for checking food reviews before ordering online.

* This indicates that consumers rely more on Swiggy for genuine and updated reviews compared to Instagram, Google Reviews, and Zomato.

Findings

The study showed that online reviews and ratings really shape the way people choose food and decide where to order from. Most respondents said they always check reviews before placing an order which shows that e-WOM has a big influence on their preferences. People tend to trust reviews that are detailed and honest much more than just seeing star ratings. Food quality also plays a huge role if the food is fresh, tasty and looks good the people are more likely to order from that place again and again. Interestingly, while high ratings do catch attention, it's the content of the reviews that really affects decisions.

When it comes to platforms, Swiggy came out on top as the most trusted source for reviews, followed by Instagram, Google Reviews, and Zomato. This shows that people often rely on food delivery apps more than social media when deciding what to order. The study also found that when reviews seem genuine, people are less likely to be discouraged by a few negative comments, meaning trust and honesty in reviews play an important role in keeping customers confident.

Suggestions:

To make the online food experience better the restaurants and delivery platforms should encourage customers to leave honest, detailed feedback after every order or visit. Verified reviews help other customers make smarter choices and build trust. At the same time, restaurants need to focus on maintaining high food quality, good taste, hygiene and presentation are key to keeping customers coming back.

Platforms should highlight real and detailed reviews rather than just focusing on star ratings. Features like “verified customer” badges or sorting reviews by recent orders can make reviews more trustworthy. Restaurants

and apps should also engage with customers on social media through polls, Q&As or feedback posts which helps to build a stronger connection and makes people feel heard and valued.

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