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FROM DIGITAL RETAIL EXPERIENCE TO PURCHASE INTENTION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND TRUST AND THE MODERATING ROLE OF E-WOM

Mandala Bakti¹, Eko Marsolisdiono², Aksan³, Esti Kiki Sukran⁴, Silvani Arfita Utami Arfah⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} Akademi Manajemen Bisnis Kendari

correspondent author : mandayanda@gmail.com

ABSTRAK

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Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pengalaman ritel digital memengaruhi niat beli dengan mempertimbangkan peran mediasi kepercayaan merek serta peran moderasi *electronic word of mouth* (e-WOM). Dengan mengacu pada perspektif terpadu mengenai mekanisme pengalaman, relasional, dan pengaruh sosial, penelitian ini mengusulkan bahwa niat beli dalam ritel digital tidak hanya dibentuk oleh pengalaman konsumen terhadap platform, tetapi juga oleh kepercayaan dan informasi sosial di ranah daring. Data dikumpulkan dari 88 responden dan dianalisis menggunakan *partial least squares structural equation modeling* (PLS-SEM) dengan SmartPLS 4. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman ritel digital berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kepercayaan merek, sementara kepercayaan merek berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap niat beli. Namun, pengaruh langsung pengalaman ritel digital terhadap niat beli tidak signifikan. Temuan juga menegaskan bahwa kepercayaan merek memediasi hubungan antara pengalaman ritel digital dan niat beli, yang mengindikasikan bahwa pengalaman digital memengaruhi niat beli terutama melalui mekanisme berbasis kepercayaan. Selain itu, e-WOM secara signifikan memperkuat pengaruh kepercayaan merek terhadap niat beli, yang menunjukkan bahwa kepercayaan menjadi lebih efektif dalam mendorong perilaku ketika didukung oleh ulasan dan rekomendasi daring yang positif. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur ritel digital dengan menawarkan penjelasan yang lebih terintegrasi mengenai pembentukan niat beli melalui interaksi antara pengalaman digital, kepercayaan relasional, dan pengaruh sosial. Temuan ini juga memberikan implikasi praktis bagi peritel digital yang ingin meningkatkan konversi dengan secara simultan meningkatkan pengalaman platform, membangun kepercayaan, serta mengelola e-WOM.

Kata Kunci: Pengalaman Ritel Digital; Kepercayaan Merek; *Electronic Word of Mouth*; Niat Beli; Ritel Digital.

ABSTRACT

This study examines how digital retail experience influences purchase intention by considering the mediating role of brand trust and the moderating role of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Drawing on an integrated perspective of experiential, relational, and social influence mechanisms, the study proposes that purchase intention in digital retail is shaped not only by consumers' platform experience but also by trust and online social information. Data were collected from 88 respondents and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The results show that digital retail experience has a positive and significant effect on brand trust, while brand trust has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention. However, the direct effect of digital retail experience on purchase intention is not significant. The findings further confirm that brand trust mediates the relationship between digital retail experience and purchase intention, indicating that digital

experience affects buying intention primarily through a trust-based mechanism. In addition, e-WOM significantly strengthens the effect of brand trust on purchase intention, suggesting that trust becomes more behaviorally effective when supported by favorable online reviews and recommendations. This study contributes to the digital retail literature by offering a more integrated explanation of purchase intention formation through the interplay of digital experience, relational trust, and social influence. The findings also provide practical implications for digital retailers seeking to improve conversion by simultaneously enhancing platform experience, building trust, and managing e-WOM.

Keywords: digital retail experience; brand trust; electronic word of mouth; purchase intention; digital retail

INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly competitive digital retail environment, purchase intention has become a critical outcome because platform success depends not only on attracting traffic but also on converting digital interactions into actual buying intentions. In this context, digital retail experience has gained strategic importance, as consumers increasingly evaluate retailers through platform-based interactions rather than through physical encounters. Prior research shows that online customer experience is shaped by multiple dimensions, including information quality, ease of use, convenience, and interaction quality, all of which influence downstream consumer responses (Rose et al., 2012). Likewise, customer experience across the digital journey has been shown to shape consumer perceptions and behavioral outcomes in meaningful ways, making digital experience a core source of competitive advantage in retail settings ((Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) These insights suggest that digital retailers must go beyond technological functionality and deliver coherent, convenient, and high-quality experiences if they seek to stimulate purchase intention.

However, the relationship between digital retail experience and purchase intention is not necessarily direct. In digital retail settings, consumers often face uncertainty due to the absence of physical inspection, direct interpersonal interaction, and immediate product verification. As a result, a favorable digital experience may create a positive impression, but it does not automatically lead to a buying decision unless it is translated into stronger psychological assurance. This is why prior research increasingly emphasizes trust as a central mechanism in online purchasing contexts. Studies have shown that online trust significantly affects consumers' intention to buy, especially when digital transactions involve uncertainty and risk ((Jadil et al., 2022) In a related stream, trust has also been found to play a decisive role in sustaining purchasing intentions in social commerce and digitally mediated exchange environments ((Zhao et al., 2024) Taken together, these findings indicate that digital retail experience is likely to affect purchase intention through trust-related mechanisms rather than through a purely direct path.

Brand trust is particularly relevant in this context because it reflects consumers' belief that a brand is reliable, credible, and capable of fulfilling its promises in a digital environment. When consumers perceive a digital platform as user-friendly, informative, and professionally designed, they are more likely to infer that the focal brand is dependable. In turn, such trust reduces perceived uncertainty and increases readiness to purchase. This interpretation is consistent with prior research showing that user experience and trust jointly influence consumer responses in online shopping environments ((Bilgihan, 2016). More broadly, recent evidence also confirms that online trust remains one of the strongest predictors of purchase intention in digital settings, particularly when consumers evaluate whether a platform or brand can be relied upon in the absence of direct offline assurance ((Jadil et al., 2022). Thus, brand

trust can reasonably be positioned as a key explanatory mechanism linking digital retail experience to purchase intention.

Beyond internal evaluations such as trust, digital consumers are also heavily influenced by external social information. In this regard, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) has become one of the most influential sources of persuasion in online markets, as consumers frequently rely on reviews, ratings, and peer-generated recommendations before making purchase decisions. Research shows that e-WOM affects purchase intention by shaping information adoption, credibility evaluation, and confidence in the decision process ((Erkan & Evans, 2016). More recent meta-analytic evidence further demonstrates that online reviews exert a robust positive effect on purchase intention across different product and contextual settings, confirming that review-related cues remain central in digital commerce (Qiu et al., 2024). Importantly, this line of literature suggests that e-WOM may not only affect purchase intention directly, but may also reinforce the behavioral relevance of other psychological variables, particularly trust.

The state of the art therefore reveals notable progress in three closely related streams of research. The first stream focuses on digital or online customer experience as a driver of subsequent consumer outcomes ((Asraf, Hakim, et al., 2024; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Rose et al., 2012). The second emphasizes trust as a central determinant of online purchase intention and continued purchase behavior (Bilgihan, 2016; Jadil et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024). The third highlights the role of e-WOM and online reviews in shaping digital purchase decisions (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Qiu et al., 2024). Although these streams are theoretically connected, most prior studies have examined them in a fragmented way—either by focusing on the direct influence of digital experience on behavioral intention, the role of trust as an isolated predictor, or the influence of e-WOM as a standalone informational driver. Consequently, the literature still lacks a sufficiently integrated explanation of how digital retail experience is translated into purchase intention through brand trust and under what conditions that trust becomes more behaviorally effective.

This fragmentation points to two main research gaps. First, although prior studies acknowledge that digital experience matters, there is still limited evidence explaining how digital retail experience influences purchase intention through brand trust as a mediating mechanism. Second, while e-WOM has been widely studied as a direct predictor of purchase intention, its role as a moderating condition that strengthens the effect of brand trust on purchase intention remains underexplored in an integrated digital retail model. Addressing these gaps is important because consumer decisions in digital retail are not shaped solely by internal platform evaluations or external online information in isolation, but by the interaction between the two.

Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies in developing and testing an integrated model in which digital retail experience is positioned as an antecedent, brand trust as a mediating variable, and e-WOM as a moderating variable in explaining purchase intention. By combining experiential, relational, and social-information perspectives, this study extends prior research and offers a more comprehensive explanation of purchase intention formation in digital retail settings. Empirically, the study uses a quantitative approach with PLS-SEM to examine the proposed relationships among 88 respondents. In doing so, it aims to contribute not only to the digital retail literature but also to managerial understanding of how digital experience, trust-building, and e-WOM management can be aligned to strengthen consumer purchase intention. In the increasingly competitive digital retail environment, purchase intention has become a critical outcome because platform success depends not only on attracting traffic but also on converting digital interactions into actual buying intentions. In this context, digital retail experience has

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital retail experience

Digital retail experience refers to consumers' overall evaluation of their interactions with a retailer's digital interface throughout the online shopping process. In digital environments, customer experience is shaped by factors such as ease of navigation, information quality, convenience, and interaction fluency. Prior research has shown that online customer experience is not merely a functional attribute of a platform but a multidimensional construct that shapes subsequent cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses. In retail settings, a favorable digital experience can strengthen consumers' assessments of the retailer and increase the likelihood of positive downstream outcomes. This makes digital retail experience a central antecedent in understanding consumer behavior in online markets ((Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Rose et al., 2012).

Brand trust

Brand trust reflects consumers' confidence that a brand is reliable, credible, and capable of fulfilling its promises in a digital environment. Trust is especially important in online retailing because consumers face greater uncertainty due to the absence of physical inspection

and direct interpersonal interaction. In such contexts, trust reduces perceived risk and increases consumers' willingness to engage in transactions. Previous studies have consistently shown that trust plays a decisive role in digital commerce, both as a relational outcome of online interactions and as a direct predictor of buying intention. A positive digital experience can therefore become behaviorally meaningful when it is translated into stronger trust in the focal brand ((Bilgihan, 2016; Jadir et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024).

Purchase intention

Purchase intention represents consumers' readiness and willingness to buy from a focal retailer or brand in the future. In digital commerce, purchase intention is one of the most frequently used outcome variables because it captures the transition from evaluation to behavioral propensity. Research indicates that purchase intention is shaped not only by functional platform attributes but also by relational and informational factors, such as trust, perceived credibility, and review-based information. This suggests that purchase intention in digital retail is better understood as the result of an integrated decision process rather than as a purely immediate response to interface quality alone ((Jadir et al., 2022; Qiu et al., 2024; Zhang, 2024).

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM)

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) refers to consumer-generated reviews, comments, and recommendations shared through digital platforms. In online shopping environments, e-WOM serves as an influential source of social information because it helps consumers assess product and brand quality based on the experiences of others. Prior studies show that e-WOM affects purchase intention through information usefulness, information credibility, and information adoption. More recent meta-analytic evidence confirms that online reviews have a robust and significant influence on purchase intention across products and contexts. Thus, e-WOM is not only a direct informational cue but also a potential contextual force that may strengthen the behavioral relevance of trust in digital commerce ((Erkan & Evans, 2016; Qiu et al., 2024; Zhang, 2024).

State of the art, research gap, and study positioning

The state of the art suggests substantial progress in three related streams of research. The first stream focuses on digital or online customer experience and its consequences for consumer evaluation and behavior. The second highlights trust as a key driver of online purchase intention. The third emphasizes the role of e-WOM and online reviews in shaping digital purchasing decisions. Although these streams are theoretically connected, they are still often examined separately. Existing research has largely focused on direct effects or isolated mediating mechanisms, while fewer studies integrate digital retail experience, brand trust, purchase intention, and e-WOM within one unified framework. As a result, the literature still lacks a sufficiently integrated explanation of how digital retail experience is translated into purchase intention through brand trust and under what conditions that trust becomes more behaviorally effective. This study addresses that gap by positioning digital retail experience as an antecedent, brand trust as a mediator, and e-WOM as a moderator in a single model of purchase intention in digital retail.

Hypotheses Development

Digital retail experience is expected to positively influence brand trust because a platform that is easy to navigate, informative, and convenient signals competence and reliability to consumers. In digital settings, where direct physical verification is absent, such cues become critical for shaping beliefs about whether the retailer or brand can be trusted. Previous studies on online customer experience and trust support this logic by showing that experience quality

contributes to consumers' trust formation in online contexts ((Bilgihan, 2016; Rose et al., 2012). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Digital retail experience has a positive effect on brand trust.

Digital retail experience is also expected to positively influence purchase intention. A favorable experience can reduce friction in the shopping process, enhance perceived convenience, and make consumers more willing to proceed with purchasing. From this perspective, consumers who evaluate a digital platform positively are more likely to develop stronger purchase intention toward the focal retailer or brand ((Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Rose et al., 2012). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Digital retail experience has a positive effect on purchase intention.

Brand trust is expected to positively affect purchase intention because trust reduces perceived uncertainty and increases confidence in the transaction. In digital commerce, consumers often rely on trust to judge whether the retailer or brand is dependable enough to warrant a purchase. Prior studies consistently report that trust is one of the strongest predictors of online purchase intention and continued purchase intention ((Jadil et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Brand trust has a positive effect on purchase intention.

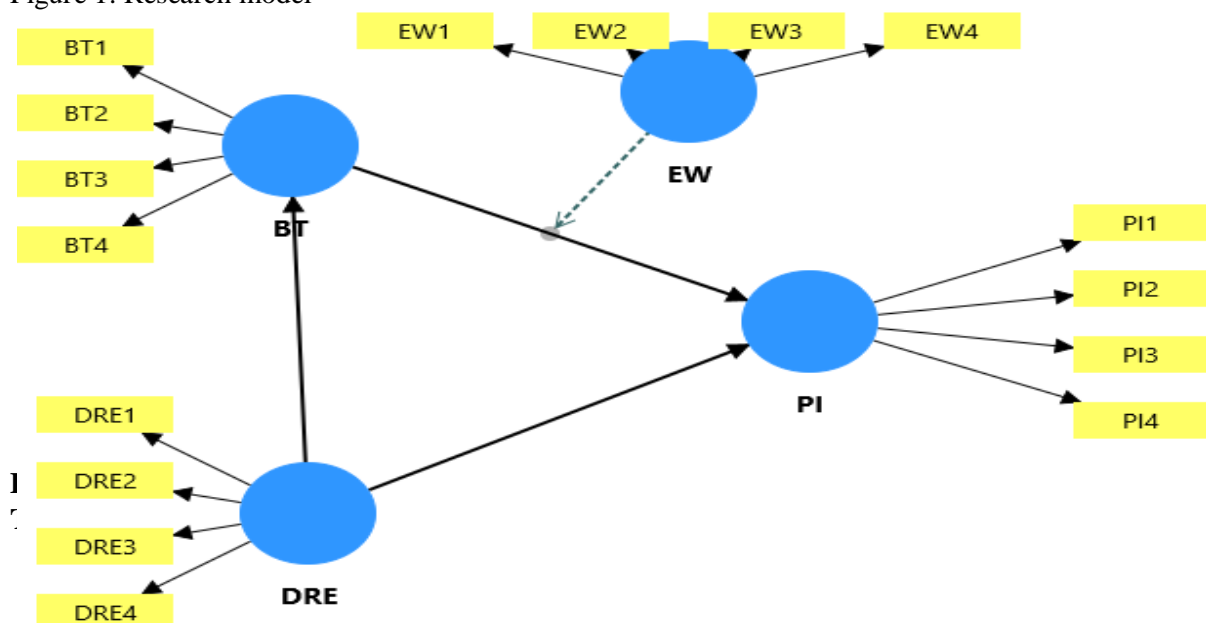
Brand trust is also expected to mediate the relationship between digital retail experience and purchase intention. A favorable digital retail experience may not directly generate buying intention unless it first fosters confidence in the brand. In other words, digital retail experience becomes behaviorally relevant when it is internalized as trust, which then drives consumers' intention to purchase. This mediating logic is consistent with prior digital commerce research that emphasizes trust as a key internal mechanism linking online experience-related factors to behavioral outcomes ((Bilgihan, 2016; Jadil et al., 2022) Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Brand trust mediates the effect of digital retail experience on purchase intention.

Finally, e-WOM is expected to positively moderate the relationship between brand trust and purchase intention. Trust may become more behaviorally effective when consumers are also supported by favorable online reviews, recommendations, and peer-generated evaluations. In this case, e-WOM acts as social validation that reinforces consumers' confidence in converting trust into buying intention. The literature on e-WOM and online reviews supports this expectation by showing that review-based information strengthens consumer confidence and significantly affects purchase intention ((Erkan & Evans, 2016; Hair et al., 2021). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: e-WOM positively moderates the effect of brand trust on purchase intention, such that the effect becomes stronger at higher levels of e-WOM.

Figure 1: Research model



METHODS

Research design and sample

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design to examine the relationships among digital retail experience, brand trust, e-WOM, and purchase intention in a digital retail context. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using purposive sampling, as only respondents with prior experience using the focal digital retail platform were considered eligible. A total of 88 valid responses were included in the analysis. This design is appropriate for examining perception-based constructs in digital commerce and for testing a structurally specified model involving both mediation and moderation effects ((Jadil et al., 2022; Rose et al., 2012).

Respondent characteristics

The sample consisted of users who had sufficient prior interaction with the focal platform to evaluate their digital retail experience, trust in the brand, exposure to e-WOM, and purchase intention. Respondent characteristics should be reported to provide contextual clarity regarding the composition of the sample.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	38	43.2%
	Female	50	56.8%
Age	17–25 years	30	34.1%
	26–35 years	32	36.4%
	36–45 years	16	18.2%
	>45 years	10	11.3%
	Occupation	Student	28
	Public/private employee	34	38.6%
	Entrepreneur	16	18.2%
	Others	10	11.4%
Shopping frequency	1–2 times/month	29	33.0%
	3–4 times/month	35	39.8%
	>4 times/month	24	27.2%
Customer duration	<1 year	26	29.5%
	1–3 years	37	42.0%
	>3 years	25	28.5%

Measures

All constructs were modeled as reflective constructs and measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Digital retail experience captures consumers' evaluation of the quality of their interaction with the retailer's digital platform, including ease of use, informativeness, convenience, and overall interaction quality. Brand trust reflects consumers' confidence in the brand's reliability, honesty, and dependability in the digital environment. e-WOM refers to the perceived usefulness, credibility, and influence of online reviews and recommendations. Purchase intention represents consumers' willingness and likelihood to purchase from the focal digital retailer in the future. The conceptualization of these constructs is consistent with prior work on online customer experience, digital trust, and e-WOM-driven purchase behavior ((Bilgihan, 2016; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Jadil et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024).

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for prediction-oriented research, can accommodate relatively small samples, and allows the simultaneous estimation of direct, indirect, and interaction effects in a single model (Hair et al., 2021). The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated through outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). HTMT is widely recommended for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based SEM ((Henseler et al., 2015). Second, the structural model was assessed using path coefficients, coefficients of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and bootstrapping results for direct, indirect, and moderating effects. In this study, brand trust was tested as a mediator between digital retail experience and purchase intention, while e-WOM was tested as a moderator of the relationship between brand trust and purchase intention.

RESULTS

The model was estimated based on 88 valid responses using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4. The results are reported in terms of the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model met the recommended psychometric criteria. All indicators showed satisfactory outer loadings, ranging from 0.773 to 0.885, and all loadings were significant at $p < 0.001$. Internal consistency reliability was also adequate, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.840 to 0.884 and composite reliability values ranging from 0.893 to 0.920. Convergent validity was established, as all AVE values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, ranging from 0.675 to 0.742.

Discriminant validity was supported by the HTMT criterion, with all values below 0.90; the highest HTMT value was observed between digital retail experience and brand trust (0.835). In addition, collinearity was not a concern, as the outer-model VIF values ranged from 1.567 to 2.648, while the inner-model VIF values ranged from 1.000 to 2.513. Overall, these results indicate that the constructs were reliable and valid for structural model assessment.

4.2. Structural model

The structural model showed moderate to substantial explanatory power. Digital retail experience explained 53.9% of the variance in brand trust ($R^2 = 0.539$), while digital retail experience, brand trust, e-WOM, and the interaction term jointly explained 64.7% of the variance in purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.647$). The model also demonstrated acceptable fit, with SRMR = 0.072 and NFI = 0.800.

Hypothesis testing showed that digital retail experience had a positive and significant effect on brand trust ($\beta = 0.734$, $t = 18.654$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Brand trust also had a positive and significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.526$, $t = 5.165$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3. However, the direct effect of digital retail experience on purchase intention was not significant ($\beta = 0.198$, $t = 1.801$, $p = 0.072$), indicating that H2 was not supported. The direct effect of e-WOM on purchase intention was positive but only marginal ($\beta = 0.176$, $t = 1.957$, $p = 0.050$). Importantly, the interaction effect between brand trust and e-WOM on purchase intention was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.300$, $t = 3.557$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5.

The mediation analysis further showed that the indirect effect of digital retail experience on purchase intention through brand trust was significant ($\beta = 0.386$, $t = 4.871$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting H4. Since the indirect effect was significant whereas the direct effect of digital retail experience on purchase intention was not, the results indicate an indirect-only

mediation pattern. In addition, the total effect of digital retail experience on purchase intention remained significant ($\beta = 0.584$, $t = 8.171$, $p < 0.001$).

To clarify the moderation effect, conditional effect analysis showed that the influence of brand trust on purchase intention was strongest at a high level of e-WOM ($\beta = 0.826$, $p < 0.001$), remained significant at the mean level ($\beta = 0.526$, $p < 0.001$), and became non-significant at a low level of e-WOM ($\beta = 0.225$, $p = 0.072$). A similar pattern emerged for the conditional indirect effect of digital retail experience on purchase intention through brand trust, which was significant at high e-WOM ($\beta = 0.606$, $p < 0.001$) and at the mean level ($\beta = 0.386$, $p < 0.001$), but not at low e-WOM ($\beta = 0.165$, $p = 0.079$). These findings suggest that both the direct trust–intention link and the indirect experience–trust–intention pathway become stronger when consumers are exposed to stronger e-WOM.

Table 2. Structural model results

Hypothesis	Path	B	t	p	Decision
H1	Digital Retail Experience → Brand Trust	0.734	18.654	<0.001	Supported
H2	Digital Retail Experience → Purchase Intention	0.198	1.801	0.072	Not supported
H3	Brand Trust → Purchase Intention	0.526	5.165	<0.001	Supported
H4	Digital Retail Experience → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention	0.386	4.871	<0.001	Supported
H5	Brand Trust × e-WOM → Purchase Intention	0.300	3.557	<0.001	Supported
—	e-WOM → Purchase Intention	0.176	1.957	0.050	Marginal

Overall, the results show that digital retail experience primarily influences purchase intention through brand trust rather than through a direct path. Moreover, e-WOM strengthens the effect of brand trust on purchase intention, indicating that trust becomes more behaviorally effective when supported by stronger online word-of-mouth.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that purchase intention in digital retail is primarily shaped through a relational and contextual mechanism rather than a direct experiential effect. Specifically, digital retail experience significantly enhances brand trust, and brand trust, in turn, positively influences purchase intention. However, digital retail experience does not directly influence purchase intention, suggesting that its impact operates indirectly through trust. Furthermore, e-WOM strengthens the relationship between brand trust and purchase intention, while also amplifying the indirect effect of digital retail experience on purchase intention. This overall pattern suggests that consumer behavior in digital retail is best understood as a process driven by experience, internalized through trust, and reinforced by social information.

Digital retail experience plays a critical role in building brand trust because it functions as a primary signal of reliability and competence in digital environments. When consumers encounter a platform that is easy to navigate, informative, and efficient, they are more likely to perceive the brand as professional and trustworthy. In the absence of physical interaction, consumers rely heavily on digital interface cues to evaluate whether a retailer is credible. This finding is consistent with prior research showing that online customer experience significantly influences trust formation by reducing uncertainty and enhancing perceived control during the shopping process (Bilgihan, 2016; Rose et al., 2012). More recent studies also confirm that user experience and platform quality act as key antecedents of trust in digital commerce settings (Asraf, Erwanto, et al., 2024; Wakchaure et al., 2023).

However, the non-significant direct effect of digital retail experience on purchase intention suggests that a positive experience alone is insufficient to trigger purchasing behavior. This result highlights that purchase intention is a higher-order outcome that requires more than favorable experiential evaluation. In digital contexts, consumers may appreciate a well-designed platform but still hesitate to make a purchase due to concerns about product quality, reliability, or transaction risk. This finding supports the argument that digital experience serves as an initial evaluation stage rather than a direct behavioral driver. Prior research has similarly shown that experience-related variables often require mediating constructs such as trust or perceived value to influence behavioral intention ((Asraf et al., 2023)

Brand trust emerges as a key determinant of purchase intention because it reduces perceived risk and increases consumers' confidence in the transaction. In digital retail, where uncertainty is inherently higher due to the lack of physical interaction, trust becomes a central mechanism that enables consumers to move from evaluation to action. When consumers trust a brand, they are more willing to believe that the product will meet expectations and that the transaction will be secure. This finding is strongly supported by recent meta-analytic evidence showing that trust is one of the most consistent predictors of purchase intention in e-commerce settings (Eun-Suk, 2025). Additionally, empirical studies confirm that trust directly influences consumers' willingness to purchase in online environments (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Qiu et al., 2024). The mediating role of brand trust further clarifies the mechanism through which digital retail experience influences purchase intention. The results indicate an indirect-only mediation pattern, meaning that digital retail experience affects purchase intention primarily through its ability to build trust. This suggests that consumers do not translate positive experiences into purchase intentions unless those experiences foster confidence in the brand. In other words, digital retail experience is meaningful only to the extent that it generates trust. This finding aligns with studies showing that trust acts as a key mediator in digital commerce, linking experiential or informational factors to purchase intention (Donovan et al., 1994; Robert J. Donovan et al., 1994). The result also reinforces the theoretical view that internal psychological states serve as the primary mechanism through which external stimuli influence behavior.

The moderating role of e-WOM provides further insight into the conditional nature of purchase intention formation. The findings show that the effect of brand trust on purchase intention becomes significantly stronger when e-WOM is high. This indicates that trust alone may not always be sufficient to drive purchasing behavior; instead, it becomes more influential when supported by positive social information. e-WOM acts as a form of social validation that reinforces consumers' beliefs and reduces uncertainty about their decisions. Prior studies consistently highlight that e-WOM enhances decision confidence by providing peer-based evaluations and experiences, which in turn strengthen behavioral intentions ((Erkan & Evans, 2016; Zhao et al., 2024)

Interestingly, the direct effect of e-WOM on purchase intention in this study is only marginal, suggesting that its primary role is not as a standalone driver but as a reinforcing mechanism. This implies that consumers may not rely solely on online reviews when forming purchase intentions; instead, they integrate e-WOM with their existing perceptions of trust. In this sense, e-WOM functions as a trust amplifier, enhancing the impact of brand trust rather than replacing it. This interpretation is supported by recent studies showing that e-WOM interacts with other psychological constructs, such as trust and perceived risk, to influence purchase decisions rather than acting independently ((Bullough et al., 2022; Erkan & Evans, 2016)

From an integrative perspective, the findings suggest that purchase intention in digital retail is formed through the interaction of three key mechanisms: experiential evaluation,

relational confidence, and social validation. Digital retail experience provides the initial stimulus that shapes consumers' perceptions of the platform. Brand trust translates these perceptions into a stable psychological state that supports decision-making. e-WOM, in turn, strengthens the link between trust and behavioral intention by providing additional social assurance. This layered process demonstrates that consumer decision-making in digital environments is both sequential and conditional, rather than immediate or linear.

This study contributes to the literature in several important ways. First, it demonstrates that digital retail experience does not directly lead to purchase intention, thereby challenging the assumption that improving user experience alone is sufficient to drive sales. Second, it highlights the central role of brand trust as a mediating mechanism that explains how digital experiences are translated into behavioral outcomes. Third, it positions e-WOM as a boundary condition that determines when trust becomes more or less effective in influencing purchase intention. By integrating experiential, relational, and social perspectives into a single model, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in digital retail contexts.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that digital retailers should focus not only on improving platform usability and interface quality but also on actively building and maintaining consumer trust. Investments in digital experience should be directed toward creating perceptions of reliability, transparency, and security, as these are the factors that ultimately drive purchase intention. In addition, retailers should strategically manage e-WOM by encouraging positive reviews and user-generated content, as these elements can significantly enhance the effectiveness of brand trust in influencing consumer decisions. In practice, this implies that successful digital retail strategies require the integration of experience design, trust-building mechanisms, and e-WOM management rather than focusing on any single factor in isolation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that purchase intention in digital retail is shaped primarily through a trust-based mechanism rather than through digital retail experience alone. The findings show that digital retail experience significantly strengthens brand trust, and brand trust, in turn, significantly increases purchase intention. However, the direct effect of digital retail experience on purchase intention is not significant, indicating that a favorable digital experience does not automatically translate into buying intention unless it is internalized as trust. The study also confirms that brand trust mediates the relationship between digital retail experience and purchase intention, suggesting that trust serves as the key psychological pathway through which digital experience becomes behaviorally meaningful.

In addition, e-WOM strengthens the effect of brand trust on purchase intention, indicating that trust becomes more effective when supported by favorable online social information. These findings contribute to the digital retail literature by offering a more integrated explanation of purchase intention formation through the interplay of digital experience, relational trust, and social influence. Practically, digital retailers should not focus solely on improving interface quality and platform usability, but also on building brand trust and actively managing e-WOM to reinforce consumers' buying intentions. Since this study is based on cross-sectional data and a specific sample context, future research is encouraged to examine this model in broader digital retail settings, use larger samples, and incorporate additional variables such as perceived value, satisfaction, or perceived risk to further enrich understanding of purchase intention in digital commerce.

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