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The Impact of Conformity Shopping Motivation on Electronic Word-of-Mouth: The Mediating Role of Perceived Value—An Empirical Study Based on the S-O-R Model

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Abstract. In the era of social media, consumers' purchase decisions are often influenced by external factors, leading to conformity in shopping behavior. Such conformity motivation may further shape their electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior. This paper examines the mechanism through which conformity shopping behavior influences eWOM and tests the mediating effects of functional value, emotional value, and social value. The study aims to enrich eWOM theory by integrating the roles of social motivation and perceived value, while also providing practical insights for brands seeking to leverage conformity effects in social media communication. Data were collected from 200 social media users via an online survey about their most recent shopping experiences. The results indicate that conformity motivation significantly promotes eWOM behavior, primarily through the perception of functional value. Emotional value did not exhibit a mediating effect, while social value showed a potential but insignificant mediating role.

Keywords: conformity motivation, consumer psychology, perceived value, electronic word-of-mouth(eWOM), S-O-R (Stimulus–Organism–Response) framework

1. Introduction

In the past, traditional mass media communication between brands and consumers was characterized by a one-way, one-to-many model, in which consumers had little voice. However, with the rise of social media, consumer purchasing behavior is no longer an isolated and linear decision-making process, but rather a complex and dynamic process profoundly shaped by social interaction and information exchange [1,2].

Platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and Weibo have gradually become important spaces where users discover products, express opinions, and influence others' purchase decisions. As a typical form of user-generated content, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has played an increasingly critical role in brand perception, product evaluation, and shopping decisions [3]. Consequently, it has become a key issue in marketing and consumer psychology research to understand whether consumers are willing to engage in eWOM after purchase and whether they choose to recommend or criticize a product.

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Existing studies have identified multiple antecedents of eWOM, such as product satisfaction, emotional arousal, and social norms [4,5]. However, insufficient attention has been paid to how purchase motivation and perceived value jointly influence eWOM. For instance, even when purchasing the same popular product, consumers may have completely unique: some are driven by brand attachment, while others act out of conformity. Moreover, whether the consumption experience meets expectations can significantly shape their attitudes and modes of expression. Thus, the interaction between purchase motivation and perceived value may constitute an important mechanism in explaining variations in eWOM behavior.

Building on this, the present study adopts the S-O-R (Stimulus–Organism–Response) framework to investigate how consumers' conformity motivation influences their eWOM behavior through perceptions of functional value, emotional value, and social value. The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to integrate purchase motivation and perceived value in order to enrich understanding of the antecedents of eWOM; (2) to empirically examine the mechanism of conformity motivation within the context of social media, thereby addressing the new trend of socialized consumer behavior; and (3) to provide practical insights for brand communication and public opinion management on digital platforms.

2. Theoretical foundation and research hypotheses

2.1. The S-O-R model

The S-O-R model was first proposed by Mehrabian and Russell [6]in the field of environmental psychology. The model emphasizes that the external environment (Stimulus, S) affects individuals' internal cognitive and emotional states (Organism, O), which in turn trigger observable behavioral responses (Response, R).

In the context of digital consumption and social media, the S-O-R model has been widely applied to explain the mechanisms linking environmental stimuli to consumer behavior. For example, Lin & Shen [7], drawing upon S-O-R theory and perceived value theory, found in their study of the Xiaohongshu platform that product characteristics, content marketing, and community factors can significantly enhance consumers' perceived value, which in turn increases their purchase intentions. Therefore, this paper argues that the S-O-R model can effectively capture the impact of consumers' conformity psychology on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior in social media contexts, as well as the mediating role of perceived value therein.

2.2. S — conformity shopping motivation

From the perspective of behavioral theory, consumer purchase decisions often result from the joint influence of external stimuli and internal psychological drivers [8]. In consumer motivation research, scholars typically classify motivations into functional, emotional, and social dimensions [9]. Among these, conformity motivation is a type of social motivation, defined as the tendency of consumers to imitate others' choices in order to gain acceptance or avoid alienation from the group [10]. Prior research has shown that conformity behavior is not only widespread among younger consumers but is also particularly salient in social media environments.

In e-commerce contexts, the influence of conformity on consumer behavior is especially evident. Wang et al. [11] found that as the number of product reviews on a platform increases, consumers are more likely to be influenced by group signals, leading to impulsive purchases. This suggests that conformity motivation affects not only purchase behavior itself but may also extend to post-

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purchase information expression, such as eWOM. Kumar & Pandey [12] further observed that subjective norms (e.g., social expectations and pressures) significantly influence consumers' green purchase intentions, indicating that consumers are more inclined to purchase eco-friendly products when influenced by others.

2.3. O — perceived value

Research in management and marketing has long demonstrated the critical role of perceived value in shaping consumer behavior [13]. Perceived value refers to consumers' overall evaluation of the utility of a product or service based on personal experiences [14]. Previous studies commonly conceptualize perceived value as a multidimensional construct, with the most widely accepted dimensions being functional value, emotional value, and social value [13,15].

Specifically, functional value emphasizes product functionality and practicality, such as efficiency, reliability, and cost-effectiveness. Emotional value highlights the emotional satisfaction and pleasure derived from consumption, such as enjoyment during use or novelty brought by the product. Social value is closely related to identity construction and social relationships.

Recent studies indicate that different value dimensions exert differential effects on consumption outcomes. For instance, Li & Zhang [16] found that perceived value has stronger predictive power for purchase decisions compared with customer satisfaction. Zhang et al. [17] reported that both functional value and emotional value play mediating roles in shaping purchase intentions for electric vehicles.

In summary, perceived value is not only a key antecedent of consumer decision-making but also a potential mechanism linking shopping motivation to subsequent word-of-mouth behavior, and thus warrants further exploration in the context of conformity-driven consumption.

2.4. R — electronic word-of-mouth communication

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) refers to consumers' voluntary sharing of product-related opinions, experiences, and evaluations on digital platforms, encompassing positive recommendations, neutral descriptions, and negative criticism [18]. Numerous studies have demonstrated that eWOM significantly affects brand attitudes, trust, and purchase intentions [19].

The generation of eWOM is also shaped by social norms and perceived value. Levy et al. (2021) noted that subjective norms exert a significant positive effect on consumers' willingness to engage in eWOM. Chen & Zhuang [20] found that luxury consumers display their social status on social media through images and comments, suggesting that eWOM functions not only as an information transmission tool but also as a means of identity construction. This implies that conformity motivation and perceived value may jointly influence the generation of eWOM, though research on this mechanism remains limited.

2.5. Research hypotheses

Based on the above literature review, this study develops the following framework (see Figure 1) and proposes the following hypotheses.

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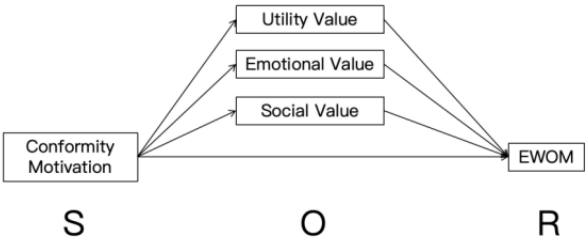

Figure 1. Research framework

In the model, the stimulus (S) is consumers' conformity motivation, the organism (O) is perceived value (including functional, emotional, and social value), and the response (R) is eWOM behavior.

H1: Conformity motivation has a significant positive effect on consumers' perceived value.

H2: Consumers' perceived value has a significant positive effect on their eWOM behavior.

H3: Conformity motivation has a direct positive effect on eWOM behavior.

H4: Perceived value mediates the relationship between conformity motivation and eWOM behavior.

H4a: Functional value mediates the relationship between conformity motivation and eWOM behavior.

H4b: Emotional value mediates the relationship between conformity motivation and eWOM behavior.

H4c: Social value mediates the relationship between conformity motivation and eWOM behavior.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Questionnaire design and measurement scales

All core variables in this study were adapted from established scales and measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The design is as follows:

Conformity Motivation was adapted from classical scales developed by Bearden & Etzel [10] and others, which measure consumers' tendency to purchase under the influence of others or due to product popularity. This scale captures the motivational drivers of consumers' purchase decisions shaped by social norms, group behavior, and prevailing trends. Three items were included: "During this purchase, I was influenced by the recommendations of friends or family members," "I chose to buy this product because many people were purchasing it," and "I purchased a product that was recognized or liked by others."

Perceived Value was measured with reference to the PERVAL framework proposed by Sweeney & Soutar [15], focusing on three value dimensions:

Functional Value: emphasizes product utility, functional benefits, and value-for-money. It was measured using three items: "This product is what I need," "This product is easy and convenient to use," and "This product meets my expected quality standards."

Emotional Value: captures the affective gratification and enjoyment during the consumption process. It was measured using two items: "Using this product makes me feel happy" and "Using this product makes me enjoy life more."

Social Value: reflects the extent to which consumers gain social recognition, self-presentation, and group affiliation through product use. It was measured with three items: "Using this product

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helps me create a good impression on others," "Using this product makes me more popular," and "Using this product helps me gain others' approval."

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) was adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. [18], measuring consumers' willingness and motivation to engage in eWOM communication on social media, covering dimensions such as information sharing, helping others, and seeking social reputation. Six items were used, including: "I want to help other consumers make better choices through sharing my shopping experience," "Communicating with people who have similar shopping interests makes me feel happy," "Sharing my shopping experience is a way for me to express my joy," and "I am satisfied with the product I purchased and am willing to share my positive experience to support the brand."

The survey was conducted through an online questionnaire. To avoid response bias, the questionnaire did not restrict product categories; participants were instructed to answer based on their own genuine and relevant consumption experiences. Respondents were asked to recall their most recent shopping experience and answer questions related to conformity motivation, perceived value, and eWOM in that context. Finally, demographic information such as gender, age, and education level was collected.

3.2. Sample selection and data collection

This study employed an online survey method. The questionnaire was distributed via Credamo, a professional online research platform, yielding 200 responses. After excluding invalid responses, 176 valid questionnaires were retained, resulting in a valid response rate of 88%. All participants were above 18 years of age and had prior experience using social media platforms (e.g., Weibo, Xiaohongshu, TikTok/Douyin).

4. Data analysis

4.1. Reliability and validity analysis

SPSS 27 was used to examine the reliability and validity of the questionnaire (Table 1).

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were applied to assess the internal consistency of the scales, with higher values indicating stronger consistency. Results show that the Cronbach's alpha for the Conformity Motivation scale was 0.723, and for the Perceived Value scale 0.738, both exceeding the 0.70 threshold, indicating good internal consistency. The eWOM scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.944, representing excellent reliability and very high internal consistency.

Furthermore, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity were conducted to assess construct validity. Conventionally, KMO values greater than 0.9 indicate superb factor analysis suitability, values above 0.8 are considered good, values above 0.7 acceptable, and values above 0.6 marginal. The KMO values for Conformity Motivation, Perceived Value, and eWOM scales were 0.671, 0.717, and 0.862, respectively, suggesting that the data were suitable for factor analysis. All three scales also showed significance at the $p < 0.001$ level, further confirming their appropriateness for factor analysis. In summary, the three scales demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity, providing a robust foundation for subsequent statistical analyses.

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Table 1. Reliability and validity analysis of each dimension

Dimension	Reliability Analysis	Validity Analysis		Number of Items
	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO	Significance	
Conformity Motivation	0.723	0.671	<0.001	3
Perceived Value	0.738	0.717	<0.001	8
EWOM	0.944	0.862	<0.001	6

4.2. Descriptive analysis

Among the respondents, 72 were male (40.9%) and 104 were female (59.1%), showing a relatively balanced gender distribution. In terms of age, the majority were between 20–30 years old (73.9%), followed by those aged 30–40 (19.3%), and those under 20 (6.8%).

Regarding education level, most participants were undergraduates (72.7%), followed by junior college students (16.5%), high school or equivalent (5.1%), master's students (4.5%), and doctoral students (1.1%); no respondents had education below junior high school. Overall, the sample primarily consisted of young, highly educated individuals, aligning with the demographic profile of mainstream online shoppers in China [21].

4.3. Correlation analysis

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between variables. Conformity Motivation showed a significant positive correlation with eWOM ($r = 0.296$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that conformity motivation directly enhances consumers' online word-of-mouth behavior. Overall Perceived Value was also significantly positively correlated with eWOM ($r = 0.456$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that higher perceived value of a product strengthens consumers' willingness to share or recommend it. These findings provide preliminary support for the refined S-O-R model.

Table 2. Pearson correlation results

Variable	Conformity Motivation	Utility Value	Emotional Value	Social Value	EWOM
Conformity Motivation	1				
Utility Value	.215**	1			
Emotional Value	.110	.432**	1		
Social Value	.555**	.109	.294**	1	
EWOM	.296**	.397**	.512**	.302**	1

4.4. Mediation analysis

The PROCESS macro was applied to examine the mediating mechanisms through which conformity motivation affects eWOM behavior, focusing on three potential mediators: functional value, emotional value, and social value. Results revealed distinct patterns across the three pathways.

Functional Value Pathway: Partial mediation was observed. Conformity motivation significantly influenced functional value ($\beta = 0.1211$, $p = 0.0041$), which in turn significantly predicted eWOM ($\beta = 0.9925$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect was 0.1202, and mediation was statistically significant. Notably, even after controlling for functional value, the direct effect of conformity motivation on

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eWOM remained significant ($\beta = 0.3521$, $p = 0.0018$), suggesting that functional value only partially mediates this relationship. Thus, conformity motivation enhances consumers' perception of product utility, which subsequently fosters online word-of-mouth communication.

Emotional Value Pathway: Mediation was not supported. Although emotional value strongly predicted eWOM ($\beta = 1.1075$, $p < 0.001$), conformity motivation did not significantly influence emotional value ($\beta = 0.0772$, $p = 0.1444$). The indirect effect was 0.0856 and statistically insignificant. This indicates that while emotional drivers shape consumers' eWOM behavior, they are not significantly linked to conformity motivation.

Social Value Pathway: Results were more nuanced. Conformity motivation had a highly significant effect on social value ($\beta = 0.5958$, $p < 0.001$), and social value significantly predicted eWOM ($\beta = 0.2953$, $p = 0.0221$). The indirect effect was 0.1759; however, the confidence interval [-0.0443, 0.4063] included zero, indicating non-significance. Nevertheless, since both X→M and M→Y paths were significant, this study suggests that a weak mediating effect may exist, but the statistical power was insufficient to detect it. Future research could verify this pathway with larger samples.

5. Conclusion

Based on the S-O-R model, this study explored the mediating role of perceived value in the relationship between conformity motivation and eWOM behavior. The study draws key conclusions across the three pathways. First, by increasing consumers' perception of functional value, conformity motivation primarily enhances eWOM behavior. Second, emotional value independently influences eWOM, but its effect is not connected to conformity motivation. Third, the social value pathway demonstrates potential mediation, but further empirical evidence is needed.

There are some theoretical contributions. This study applies the S-O-R model to the social media context, extending the application of conformity motivation and perceived value to eWOM research and providing empirical evidence for their relationships.

In terms of practical implications, brands can leverage conformity effects by emphasizing product functionality and social value to stimulate consumers' conformity-driven shopping motivations, thereby enhancing eWOM effectiveness.

This study faces limitations in sample scope and platform representativeness, and the mediating role of social value was not statistically significant. Future research should expand sample size or employ experimental methods to validate the findings.

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