

# The Role of E-WOM Communication impact to Consumer's Purchasing Intention to Healthy Food Products: An Empirical Study to Testing the Mediator and Moderator Variables

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The growth of information technology was significant to environment dynamic change. This study aimed to examine the impact of electronic Word Of Mouth (e-WOM) communication on purchasing decisions to healthy food products of working-age consumers in Bangkok, Thailand, and testing the mediator and moderator variables. The questionnaire was the tool to collect data from 385 consumers purchasing healthy food products. Non-probability sampling was done by purposive and descriptive statistics and regression analysis by entering for testing hypotheses. The result found that e-WOM communication impacts purchasing decisions of working consumers to healthy food products. Also, consumers' data exposure was a partial mediator variable, and technology acceptance was a moderated variable. The result can be used as a guideline for healthy food product businesses to develop marketing communication channels and enhancing consumer's acceptability of technology, leading to creating a marketing strategy for competitive advantage.

**Key words:** *E-Word of Mouth, Technology Acceptance, Data Exposure, Purchasing Intention.*

## Introduction

Recently, the growth of the health food business has occurred rapidly. This resulted in the consumer's focus on health care and behaviour that cares more about eating. As is commonly known, food is essential and essential for life, causing the body to grow and build immunity.

Consumers place more attention on making good food choices because it provides: health benefits, the good conscious shape of consumers, balancing the body, and reducing the risk of various diseases. However, healthy food is the need of consumers who love health and pay attention to health by eating a fit and healthy diet. But most of them are limited in time and have a hasty lifestyle of working-age people in urban society. Making people need healthy food. Both the natural and food obtained from processing into various products to increase the convenience of consumers and meet the different needs of consumers such as dairy products, which improve digestive and excretory systems and natural food produced through processes that are safe from chemicals (Kasikorn Thai Research Centre, 2017). Euromonitor International reported in 2017 that the health food and beverage market had a trend of continuous growth at 3.5% per year or about 187,000 million baht and found that most of the health-conscious consumers are concentrated in urban society. By choosing to eat healthy food from nature with the least processed, fresh, clean, and safe from various chemicals such as milk, cereals, vegetables, fruits, etc. It has a 21.7 percent market share when considering the health food market, and consists of health food and health drink. The health food market is divided into 54.00% health food market with a value of 99,900 million baht and 46.00% of the health drink market with a value of 86,700 million baht 5.9 per year.

The forecasting in 2022 increases the health food market to 213 billion baht, with significant supporting factors. Lifestyle with haste, take up more time with work. They were making consumers more stressed, with no time to exercise and take care of themselves. This caused them to seek products for health and well-being for themselves in their social life. Also, the government sector plays an essential part in promoting Thai people to take care of their health. Change in dietary habits, such as making healthy food choices. Reducing the amount of food containing sugar and fat, which is the leading cause and makes Thai people face various kinds of health ailments (Saowaphruek, 2018). Healthy food means that we eat and bring benefits for the body and the macronutrients essential to the body (Warathornphaibun, 2014). Consumption in the right proportions and choosing to consume safe food and quality from production processes and sources gives confidence in safety. Healthy food is due to the consumer's focus on the goal of nutritional consumption. It contributes to reducing the risk of various diseases and good mental health (Khumkaew, 2014). Consumers perceive the benefits of consuming healthy food as improving immunity and helping to reduce the risk of illness. As a result, the health food market is increasing. Mostly the working-age consumer groups will choose quality food that is safe, good for health to meet dietary needs, and an alternative for health-conscious people.

Therefore, the health food market is exciting and still has a continuous growth rate. Kasikorn Research Centre (2017) reported that working-age consumers, a group of potential consumers, have an income that can buy quality products. Significantly, the product selection that is beneficial to health gives essential information before purchasing products. The development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made

communication between consumers more convenient and faster. As a result, consumer behaviour has changed. Communicating through electronic media has played a role for consumers to get information about products and services, especially information that arises from sharing experiences about product introduction and benefits. It is an independent presentation of data without any business influence (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). Communication through electronic media (e-word of the mouth), like receiving information from friends to share, building confidence and empowering the news to have more credibility. Therefore, they tend to choose to use this media more and consumers' lifestyle to communicate on electronic media. It has become the primary choice in finding consumer information before the decision process to reduce the risk of purchasing or using the service (Flanagin et al., 2014).

As a marketing concept, e-word of mouth is a source of information. It is essential and influences people's behaviour in society (Floyd et al., 2014; Filieri et al., 2018; Nam et al., 2018) and directly influences consumers' purchasing decisions (Jeong & Koo, 2015; Baber et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2018; Mauri & Minazzi, 2013; Basi et al., 2016). Looking for information on electronic media in the form of product reviews and recommendations from people who have previously used the product will lead to over 93% of purchasing decisions (Fullerton, 2017; Ruiz-Mafe, Chatzipanagiotou & Curras-Perez, 2018). Therefore, getting information from only one manufacturer or seller is not enough. They stimulate the consumer to create demand and lead to buying decisions, resulting in word of mouth marketing communication on electronic media. The result of word of mouth marketing communication on electronic media has a significant influence on working-age consumers. With their lifestyle related to the use of electronic media in various such as social media on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and blogger, etc., as well as consumers today increasingly accept the use of technology for the benefit and ease of use (Davis, 1989; Nurittamont, 2017). No hassle in searching for information, allowing consumers to perform various tasks more efficiently. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of e- word of mouth communication on consumer's purchasing decisions for healthy food products, and testing the mediator and moderator variables. Also the critical research question of how e-word of mouth communication impacts purchasing decisions of healthy food products. The study aims to fulfil the e-word of mouth communication literature and testing model to dive into consumers' purchasing decisions. Based on several sources of data, is the critical research question of how e-WOM influences consumers' purchasing intention of healthy food products. This research aims to understand and fulfil the drives and outcomes framework of the e-WOM communication literature and testing.

## Literature Review

### *-E-WOM*

Developments in information technology, internet use and social media have become extremely widespread, impacting contact used and significantly preferred by consumers (Chan & Ngai, 2011). E-WOM has already been identified in marketing literature as an important topic in electronic marketing. Being the most widely used medium for sharing views and reviews on different goods and services available on the market (Cheung & Thadani, 2012), the most frequently used and preferred source of customer information (Zhu & Zhang, 2010), and the most effective source of customer information (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). It is efficiency and various beneficial results can be obtained (Cheung & Thadani, 2012) because with e-WOM as the additional communication: distribution is faster; you can reach a wider audience; correspondence via e-WOM is more continuous and more usable; the mail is tangible; and in most of its applications e-WOM electronic properties. E-WOM is of interest in both technical and academic marketing studies. In particular, clients tend to share their experiences by posting, commenting, referencing and analysing electronic service reviews (Sukaris, Hartini & Mardhiyah, 2019). Even for the user, e-WOM has greater credibility, empathy and value (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). The study described e-WOM as a positive comment made by potential, current and former customers about a product or company that is purposely designed to be heard or perceived by several individuals and organisations through online media (Henning-Thurau, 2004). In several studies, e-WOM's role in affecting consumer engagement, customer loyalty and purchase decision-making has been investigated (Gruen, Osmonbekow & Czaplewski, 2006; Kim, Lee & Hiemstra, 2004). Therefore, e-WOM is essential to channel consumer exposure to electronic marketing. This research focused on e-WOM communication as an essential role to encourage consumers' behaviour to data exposure and purchasing decisions. Therefore, the hypothesis is as follow:

H1: The e-WOM communication has a positive influence on purchasing intention.

### *Data Exposure*

Communication is the basic contact in social processes. In a society very complex, communication is even more critical. Information is an essential factor in decision-making in various consumer activities, where the demand for data increases when that person needs information to make decisions (Charles, 1973). According to Klapper (1960) the data selection process was selective exposure, selective attention, selective perception and selective retention. Today's online media, in which individuals are exposed to a diversity of messages anytime, anywhere, and from a great variety of sources on an increasing number of different media platforms (Vreese & Neijens, 2016). Data exposure is defined as the extent to which audiences have encountered specific messages or message content (Slater, 2004). It may include a wide range of attention of the media user, varying from no attention to

intensive engagement (Chaffee and Schleuder, 1986). The levels of concentration can also differ from pre-attention (unconsciously scanning the medium), concentrating attention (enough attention to decide what the material is about), interpretation (assigning meaning), and elaboration (generating personal ties and imagery) (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Smit, Neijens & Heath, 2013). A previous study indicated that exposure to information affects perceptible, cognitive and affective behaviour (TangTung & Nurittamont, 2019). It is the main reason for consumer decisions and leads to an increase of confidence in the validity of the decision (Fischer et al., 2010). Therefore, consumer data exposure was demand data via channel media for decision-making. Significantly, the purchase process has essential information and direction to online media data to purchase a product or service. This research focused on data exposure, does the customer need the information to make decisions and lead to purchasing intention of healthy food products. Thus, the hypothesis is as follow:

H2: Data exposure has a positive influence on purchasing intention.

### *Technology Acceptance*

Based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the philosophy of technology acceptance has correctly clarified the adoption of information technology in different contexts. Davis (1989) described the degree to which a person thinks they will be free of mental and physical efforts to use a particular method. And the person believes that it will increase productivity performance by using a particular way. The customer's embrace of technology and continuous use of a new product and service (Sefeena et al., 2011). Customers will have awareness, persuasion, decision and approval processes before they are prepared to accept a product or service (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971). The TAM definition indicated that two essential components are: 1) perceived ease of use as a degree of reliability of the individual that technology would support the use, and 2) perceived usefulness as a degree of reliability of the person that the use of technology will enhance service, improve performance by saving time, reduce costs, and can be used any time/place. There is a common consensus amongst electronic marketing researchers that the key determinant in predicting the acceptance of new technologies and adoption behaviour by a person, the attitude towards using technology, is right. Several studies found a strong and essential causal association between the acceptance of technology to intention actions and the intention to purchase goods and services (Mathieson, 1991; Nurittamont, 2017; Wei, Zhu, Xue & Chan, 2018; Cho, 2015). This research focused on technology acceptance plays a significant role in encouraging consumer's behavioural purchasing intention. Therefore, the hypotheses are as follow:

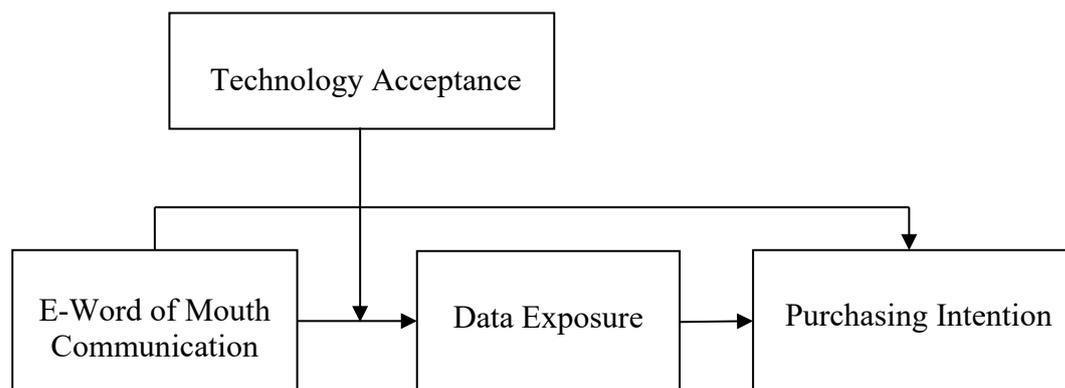
H3: Technology acceptance as a moderate has a positive influence of e-WOM communication on purchasing intention.

H4: Technology acceptance as a moderate has a positive influence of data exposure purchasing intention.

### *Purchasing Intention*

A marketing study has derived the concept of consumers' behaviour. The consumer's indication made decisions to use available resources such as time, money, and effort to purchase products (Sheppard, Hartwick & Warshaw, 1988). The purchasing intention is the consequence of various factors, such as attitude (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and predictor of satisfaction (Taylor & Baker, 1994; Oliver, 1980). Significantly, the research adopts the consumer behaviour concept to online channel buying. Therefore, purchasing intention is essential for understanding motivating factors to consumers' behaviour actions and buying decisions.

**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework Research



### **Research Methodology**

This research focused on the impact of e-WOM communication on consumers' purchasing of healthy food products in Bangkok, Thailand. The sample size for this study was followed by the concept of Cochran (1977) and totalled 385 respondents. A questionnaire was used as a primary data collection tool. In this research tool, each item was a measure on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (5). Moreover, the reliability of the measurements was evaluated by the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. The aim is to conduct a pre-test with 30 respondents before conducting the critical survey. The pre-test is to check the questionnaire to help identify possible issues in a small sample size. It is often essential to understand whether the respondents recognise the language material, sequence, style, ease or complexity of questions, and instructions for improving questionnaires. In the scales' reliability, Cronbach alpha coefficients between 0.70 – 0.93 are more significant than 0.70 in all construct (Nunnally & Berstein, 1994).

The researcher collected the data from 385 consumers purchasing healthy food products in Bangkok, Thailand by purposive sampling. The survey consumers were selected as the respondents in shopping at healthy food supermarkets such as Lemon Farm, Top Market, Villa Market, Food Land, et al. In this study, the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis is used to test the hypothesised relationships and estimate factors influencing the purchasing decision. OLS is an appropriate method for investigating the hypothesised association because independent and dependent variables were metric scales (Hair et al., 2006) and utilising statistically by computer software for research. Moreover, the testing mediator and moderator variables of this research based on the concept of Baron & Kenney (1986) has been popular to be used widely.

## Results

For the results of this study, to examine the impact of e- word of mouth communication on consumer's purchasing decisions for healthy food products, and testing the mediator and moderator variables. The descriptive analysis of this research from the total 385 consumers, the majority of respondents were female (83.30%), age between 25-35 years (44.30%), average monthly income between 20,001-30,000 baht (31.50%) and company employees (60.80%). Also, they have a purpose to purchasing fresh food, ready meal food and dry food products, respectively.

Table 1: The result of regression analysis of e-word of mouth communication impact on consumer's purchasing decision

E-Word of Mouth Communication	Consumer's Purchasing Decision			t	p-value
	$\beta$	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant (a)	2.47	0.25	-	9.81	0.00
E-Word of Mouth Communication	0.40	0.05	0.36	7.68	0.00***
R= 0.36		R <sup>2</sup> =0.23	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.22	SEE= 0.39	

\*\*p ≤ 0.05, \*\*\*p ≤ 0.01

In Table 1, the results showed that simple regression analysis by enter. The e-WOM has a positive impact on consumer's purchasing decision healthy food ( $\beta = 0.40$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) at the level of 0.01. Which can predict consumer's purchasing decision 22% (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.22$ ). Therefore, e-WOM communication has an impact on purchasing decisions of working-age consumers, and supports Hypothesis H1.

Table 2: The result of regression analysis to tested mediator variable between e-word of mouth communication impact on consumer's purchasing decision

Mediator Variables Testing	$\beta$	p-value
Step 1 E-word of mouth communication impact on consumer's purchasing decision	0.40	0.00***
Step 2 E-word of mouth communication impact on data exposure	0.52	0.00***
Step 3 Data exposure impact on consumer's purchasing decision	0.53	0.00***

\*\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$

In Table 2 the study focused on the mediated function of data exposure between e-WOM and purchasing decision. The results revealed that the paths among e-WOM to purchasing decision, e-WOM to data exposure, and data exposure to purchasing decision were positive ( $\beta = 0.40$ ;  $P < 0.01$ ,  $\beta = 0.52$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ;  $\beta = 0.53$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) respectively. The findings comparison 3 steps based on the concept of Baron & Kenney (1986) indicate that the influence of word-of-mouth marketing communication on electronic media and consumer exposure of news data influenced the decision to purchase health products of working-age consumers in Bangkok. Therefore, data exposure was a mediator variable (Partial Mediator Variable) due to the significant increase in the impact to be investigated, and supports Hypothesis H2.

Table 3: The result of regression analysis to tested moderator variable between e-word of mouth communication impact on data exposure

Mediator Variables Testing	$\beta$	p-value
Step 1 E-word of mouth	0.15	0.00***
Technology acceptance	0.42	0.00***
Step 2 E-word of mouth	0.25	0.00***
E-word of mouth x Technology acceptance	0.75	0.00***

\*\* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$

In Table 3 the study focused on the mediated function of data exposure between e-WOM and purchasing decision. The results revealed that: the step 1 the e-WOM and technology acceptance impact to data exposure ( $\beta = 0.15$ ;  $P < 0.01$ ,  $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ); and step 2 the e-WOM interacted to technology acceptance influence on data exposure were positive ( $\beta = 0.25$ ;  $P < 0.01$ ,  $\beta = 0.75$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). The comparison 2 steps based on the concept of Baron & Kenney (1986) indicate that the influence of e-WOM communication influenced to data exposure of consumer's health product when technology acceptance interacted the effect.

Therefore, technology acceptance was a moderator variable (Partial Moderator Variable) due to the significant increase in the impact to be investigated, and supports Hypothesis H3.

## Discussion

This study focused on the impact of e-WOM communication on consumers' purchasing decisions for healthy food products in Bangkok, Thailand. The study indicated that the e-WOM is marketing communication on electronic media. It influences purchasing decisions of consumers significantly at the 0.01 level and consistent with Baber et al., (2016); Lin et al., (2018); and Mauri & Minazzi (2013). Their word of mouth communications on electronic media is the communication that consumers communicate information and exchange knowledge between consumers (Thengsuk & Nurittamont, 2019). Provides information about products from people who have previously used their history, which is independent, no trade-in, a trader is more likely to trust the information they receive (Mehrad & Mohamadi, 2017). Especially working-age consumers, a group of consumers who have the behaviour of searching for news information from various forms, will bring the information obtained from the search and evaluate whether a product is quality and useful. Therefore, e-WOM is a communication channel that can be easily accessed by working-age consumers with the information received that builds confidence and reliability and leads to purchasing healthy food products among working-age consumers.

Data exposure was the mediated relationship between e-WOM communication and purchasing decision for testing the mediator variable. Consistent with Chumphu & Sampatthawanit (2018) and McCombs & Becker (1979) this research found that consumer data exposure was the essential factor on supporting attitude, consumer decision-making play activities, and purchasing products. Therefore, data exposure should be easy, and enjoyable. It is also consistent with a Hunt & Ruben study (1993). The factors that affect data exposure are compelling and engaging forms of communication in which e-WOM communications was the most effective way to get information. Communication that working-age consumers understand the data communicated between consumers, thus resulting in social behaviour. Also, data exposure influenced purchasing decision products of working-age consumers (Floyed et al., 2014; Filieri, Raguseo & Vital, 2018; Nam et al., 2018) the group of people who use communication on electronic media. They mostly searched for information from e-WOM communications, share experiences and exchange information, which is a communication that is easily accessible today. It is also a communication that encourages consumer behaviour. As a result, consumers are exposed to information and this leads to purchasing decisions. Therefore it can be concluded that consumer data exposure is a transmission factor of influence between e-WOM marketing communication and the decision to buy healthy food products of working-age consumers in Bangkok. Finally, testing the moderator variable, technology acceptance was the moderated relationship between e-WOM communication and data exposure, which is consistent with an Eagly & Chaiken (1993)

study. There is an inclination towards the adoption of technology and has a positive attitude towards using technology that leads to exposure to information. And it is consistent with a Schiffman & Kanuk study (2009) that addresses the viewpoint of acceptance technology adoption. There will be a tendency to lead to learning to adjust the behaviour by satisfaction. Therefore, the adoption of technology is an essential factor that leads to consumer exposure behaviour. Consumers will develop a positive attitude by learning through direct experience and exchanging experiences with others. Working-age consumers accept technology, especially the use of technology for communication on electronic media to search the information that consumers take is easy. The benefits of using communication technology on electronic media create a positive attitude towards the use of technology and lead to exposure of that information. Therefore, technology acceptance is a moderator variable. It had a stimulating influence between e-WOM and direction of working-age consumers' knowledge about health food products.

## **Conclusion**

The contributions of this research indicated are both theoretical and managerial. The theoretical contribution is that this study attempts to examine the impact of e-WOM communication on purchasing decisions for support marketing literature review. This study investigates direct and indirect links among e-WOM, data exposure and consumers' purchasing decisions about healthy food products in Bangkok, Thailand. In summary, the findings show that the hypotheses are accepted. It means that e-WOM communication is essential for promoting data exposure and contributing to consumer buying decision behaviour as an independent variable. Therefore, e-WOM can achieve the response of consumer expectation, perceived information and purchasing behaviour action. The consumer's experience sharing through the electronic channel will create higher satisfaction than other mediums with more excellent reliability, image and reputation.

For the managerial contribution, this study enhances healthy food products provider's understanding of the role of e-WOM, data exposure, technology acceptance on influence on consumer's purchasing decision. In the growth of communication technology and competition in healthy products, it is becoming increasingly challenging to respond to customer needs and achieve business goals. The business attempts to find the best practice to create effective marketing strategy on the electronic channel. In the marketing place, the marketing director must be effectively managed and utilise the factors which emphasise the consumer's purchasing decision. Also, the healthy food product providers will be enhancing the excellent experience of customers on consumed healthy food products towards the customers' attitudes and product acceptance, which will increase the level of customer satisfaction and purchasing decision. This empirical study helps to create solutions to business problems that provide the foundation for the business's achievement to the competition through the benefit of e-WOM. The entrepreneur of healthy food products should provide valuable resources and expand their business's capability to encourage building effectiveness and creating new opportunities



in the market. The entrepreneur should engage in e-WOM as one of many channels to explain data to consumers in the marketing.

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