



Domino effect of parasocial interaction: Of vicarious expression, electronic word-of-mouth, and bandwagon effect in online shopping

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ABSTRACT

In an age where online shopping permeates daily life, the cascading influences originating from parasocial interactions play a pivotal role in steering consumers' purchase decisions. This research delves deep into the interplay of parasocial interaction, vicarious expression, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and the bandwagon effect, all converging towards influencing online purchase intention. Through two controlled quasi-experiments—with 232 participants in Study 1 and 252 in Study 2—we offer a fresh perspective rooted in parasocial relationship theory. Study 1 delineates how parasocial interactions heighten the impact of vicarious expressions, leading to amplified bandwagon effect and pronounced eWOM. The study further corroborates the mediating role of vicarious expression between parasocial interaction and the bandwagon effect. Study 2 sheds light on the cyclical nature of this process, illustrating that eWOM, in turn, reinforces the bandwagon effect, driving online purchase intention. These findings underscore the potent influence of parasocial interactions on online purchasing behaviors, suggesting that brands can strategically leverage such interactions to enhance eWOM and harness the bandwagon effect. Moreover, recognizing the cyclical reinforcement between eWOM and the bandwagon effect offers marketers a unique opportunity to amplify and sustain online purchase momentum.

1. Introduction

The bandwagon effect, first conceptualized by Leibenstein (1950) as the escalating product demand driven by perceived popularity, has perennially captivated the attention of marketing scholars (Agarwal et al., 2023; Yuhsiang and Lichung, 2024). Its initial conceptualization was rooted in face-to-face social groups, where tactile product experiences and interpersonal dialogues fueled its dynamics (Anantharaman et al., 2023). However, as our marketplaces have metamorphosed into digital realms, so too have the intricacies of this effect (Kumar et al., 2021; Yuhsiang and Lichung, 2024).

Today's digital-savvy consumers, besieged with an avalanche of information and endorsements, derive their purchase convictions from a myriad of sources, chiefly among them, online influencers (Bastrygina and Lim, 2023). These influencers, wielding enormous persuasive power, shape not just perceptions but also purchase propensities (Joshi et al., 2024; Shamim et al., 2024; Wong and Wei, 2023). Yet, an enigma

persists: while many consumers are inclined by these endorsements, not all traverse the chasm from mere inclination to actual purchase (Andonopoulos et al., 2023; Eastman and Iyer, 2023; Lim and Weissmann, 2023; Shah et al., 2024; Venciute et al., 2023). A looming question remains: does the transient and intangible nature of the digital realm catalyze fad-like tendencies, where consumers jump fleetingly from one trend to another without ever truly committing to a purchase? Addressing this question is imperative because if digital interactions merely induce transient trends without fostering sustainable purchase behaviors, then businesses need to recalibrate their marketing strategies. Understanding the depth and longevity of these tendencies can guide firms in channeling their resources more effectively towards transformative marketing practices (Lim, 2023b).

As we navigate this evolving landscape, the understudied domain of parasocial interactions (PSI) demands our attention. Distinct from mutual interactions, PSI emanates an illusion of intimacy, binding consumers to influencers or personas without a genuine two-way

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