



The Differential Impact of Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Anticipated Emotions: A Comparative Study of Moroccan University Students

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital environment, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become a key driver of young adults' purchase decisions. This study examines how online reviews shape anticipated emotions among university students when purchasing commonly consumed utilitarian and hedonic products. Drawing on a comparative qualitative approach, the research was conducted with two groups of Moroccan university students from the ENCG business schools in Settat and Tangier. The findings highlight significant differences in eWOM sources, decision-making styles, and emotional intensity associated with anticipated emotions. More specifically, the results reveal a clear polarization between students who prioritize objective evidence and those whose decisions are primarily guided by aesthetic and emotional cues.

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1. Introduction

In the ever-changing digital landscape, electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) has emerged as a central force influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors.

Defined as any statement, positive or negative, made by potential, current, or former customers about a product or company and disseminated via online platforms, electronic Word-of-Mouth encompasses a wide range of digital channels, including social media, review sites, and discussion forums (Elvira Ismagilova et al., 2020; Ouiddad & Sidmou, 2017). Its ubiquity has profoundly changed the way individuals seek information, evaluate alternatives, and ultimately make purchasing decisions across a variety of industries. This transformation highlights the need to better understand the multifaceted influence of eWOM in today's interconnected environment. (Alsaggaf & Althonayan, 2018; King et al., 2014).

At the same time, anticipated emotions—defined as the emotions individuals expect to experience as a consequence of their future choices—play a decisive role in decision-making processes (Bagozzi et al., 2016; Maduku, 2024). These emotions, such as regret, pride, disappointment, or relief, function as powerful affective compasses, guiding individuals toward decisions that are likely to generate positive future emotional states and away from those that portend negative emotions (Becker, 2021; Pappas et al., 2017). In digital environments, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) acts as a powerful catalyst of these anticipated emotions by exposing consumers to others' experiences and emotional expressions, thereby shaping expectations and influencing behavior prior to purchase.

This article explores the differentiated impact of eWOM on the anticipated emotions of university students. As digital natives, university students are particularly exposed to and sensitive to online information. Their decisions often involve significant financial and time investments, making them all the more vulnerable to the subtle influence of eWOM and the psychological weight of anticipated emotions (Elvira Ismagilova et al., 2020; Septianto et al., 2021). By focusing on this specific demographic group in a given cultural context, this study aims to highlight specificities that may moderate this impact, thus providing a comparative qualitative perspective that enriches the understanding of these phenomena (Kim & Johnson, 2013; G. G. Lee & Lin, 2005; Ummah, 2019).

This research seeks to make a significant contribution to the existing academic literature by providing an in-depth understanding of the complex interaction between eWOM and anticipated emotions in a context that has yet to be fully explored. In doing so, it contributes to identify practical implications for various

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stakeholders, enabling them to optimize their engagement strategies with potential consumers in the digital age. The knowledge gained from this study can be valuable for developing targeted communications that meet the emotional and informational needs of this specific audience.

This article is structured as follows. First, we provide an in-depth review of the literature on electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and consumers' anticipated emotions in order to situate our study within the existing theoretical framework. The second section presents the methodology adopted for our qualitative survey, detailing the data collection and analysis process. The third section presents the main results obtained, highlighting the influence of eWOM on the anticipated emotions of university students. Finally, the last section discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of our findings, while highlighting the limitations of the study and the prospects it opens up for future research.

2. Literature review: Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and anticipated emotions

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has established itself as a major source of information influencing consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

Research on eWOM has explored its various dimensions, such as volume, valence, credibility, and content quality. A high volume of eWOM tends to reflect its popularity and reinforces perceived credibility through the principle of social proof (Delmas et al., n.d.; Ghyoot et al., 2023). Emotional content, whether positive or negative (valence), generally follows predictable patterns: positive valence promotes favorable attitudes and purchase intention, while negative valence has a negative influence, pushing consumers toward avoidance (D. Park & Kim, 2008).

This emotional orientation of eWOM acts as a powerful lever for stimulating or inhibiting consumer engagement (T. Y. Lee et al., 2012; D. Park & Kim, 2008; Sundar, 2008). Source credibility and expertise remain decisive, as individuals are more strongly influenced by information originating from sources they perceive as reliable. Furthermore, content quality-particularly clarity, usefulness, and informativeness- plays a key role in reducing uncertainty and facilitating informed decision-making (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; D. Park & Kim, 2008).

- ◆ Anticipated regret (negative feelings expected as a result of a choice perceived as suboptimal or a missed opportunity);
- ◆ Anticipated pride (expected positive feelings associated with a successful or valued choice);
- ◆ Anticipated disappointment (negative feelings expected when the outcome does not meet expectations),
- ◆ Anticipated relief (positive feelings expected after avoiding a negative outcome or resolving a difficulty).

The literature highlights a close correlation between eWOM and these anticipated emotions. eWOM influences these emotions by exposing consumers to virtual and social experiences (Grimani et al., 2024; Maduku, 2024; Ummah, 2019). Thus, positive reviews can elicit anticipated pride or relief, while negative reviews can generate anticipated regret or disappointment. This influence operates through several psychological mechanisms (Kemper & Lazarus, 1992; C. Park & Lee, 2009b). By providing detailed accounts and testimonials of others' experiences, eWOM allows consumers to mentally simulate the emotional consequences of their own decisions (Hatfield et al., 2014; Meilers, 2000). This vicarious learning process, combined with attribution theory, where consumers attribute the successes or failures of others to specific factors mentioned in eWOM, directly shapes their expectations (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; T. Y. Lee et al., 2012).

According to emotional contagion theory, emotions are transmitted from one person to another, including through mediated exchanges (Hatfield et al., 2014; Hatfield & Rapson, 2010).

In the context of eWOM, the tone, language, use of emojis, and writing style of reviews can convey emotions that are then transmitted to readers, thereby modulating their anticipated emotions related to a product or service (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Elfenbein, 2012). For example, a review written with enthusiasm and using superlatives can generate anticipated excitement, while a neutral or critical tone can induce increased caution. In addition, eWOM often reduces the perception of risk and uncertainty, factors that usually fuel anticipated negative emotions (Filiari, 2015; Filiari et al., 2015; Raffaele et al., 2018). Social proof and the wealth of information provided reinforce consumers' confidence in their judgments (Ghyoot et al., 2023), thereby promoting positive anticipated emotions (pride, relief) and reducing those of regret or disappointment. The credibility of the source remains a determining factor, as information from reliable sources will have a greater impact on these anticipated emotions (Bagozzi et al., 2016; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Sang et al., 2024).

3. Research context: University students, Internet use, and information seeking

Today, university students embody the archetype of digital natives, perfectly mastering online tools for various purposes: studies, social communications, consumer information searches. They evolve in an environment where access to information is immediate and abundant. This dependence on digital media makes them particularly sensitive to the influence of eWOM (King et al., 2014; Tien et al., 2019), particularly because of their propensity to seek social validation and rely on the experiences of their online peers to guide their own choices (Niemeier & Pospisil, 2025; Sagha et al., 2022).

The search for information frequently involves consulting online reviews, recommendations, or opinions of other users (current or past) in order to evaluate the quality of a product or service (H. A. Lee et al., 2011; Mosteller et al., 2014) . Social networks also provide informal spaces conducive to discussion, sharing experiences, and seeking advice (Elvira Ismagilova et al., 2020; Gerlich et al., 2023) .

However, although the Internet is unrivalled as a source of information, it is not without its challenges: information overload forces users to differentiate between reliable and unreliable sources (Bawden & Robinson, 2009; Eppler & Mengis, 2004) . For university students, this overload can make it more difficult to filter out relevant and credible information, increasing their vulnerability to biased or unreliable opinions (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013) . This highlights the importance for them to develop critical skills in evaluating online sources and reinforces the role of anticipated emotions as a regulatory mechanism in the face of uncertainty (C. Park & Lee, 2009a; Seegebarth et al., 2019) .

This study focuses on university students in a Moroccan cultural context. This choice has a strategic advantage: it allows us to explore the cultural specificities that may modulate the impact of eWOM on anticipated emotions (Spiteri Cornish, 2020) . Local contexts, subtle cultural differences, and specific content not accessible elsewhere may contribute to these differentiated effects (Baek et al., n.d.; Chu et al., 2011; Hellofs & Jacobson, 1999) . A good understanding of these dynamics is essential for designing appropriate marketing strategies in a constantly changing context.

4. Methodology and empirical approach

4.1. Methodological approach

This analysis is part of a qualitative exploratory approach using semi-structured interviews to explore the relationship between word-of-mouth (WOM), anticipated emotions, and online purchasing behavior. This method was chosen because of the need to gain an in-depth understanding of consumers' representations, feelings, and rationales for action in a digital context where the shopping experience goes beyond purely functional considerations.

The analysis is based on a thematic approach combining content analysis and lexical analysis using NVivo software to identify the dominant themes, their interrelationships, and the specificities of the discourse collected.

4.2. Sample composition

The sample consists of 20 students evenly distributed between two national business schools in Morocco:

- ◆ ENCG Settat (ENCGS)
- ◆ ENCG in Tangier (ENCGT)

The participants are aged between 21 and 23 and are studying management or business. The sample consists of 20 students, comprising 11 women and 9 men. The aim of this choice is to compare populations that share a homogeneous socio-economic profile but may differ in their digital consumption habits and their relationship to online vies. These two schools were chosen because of their distinct geographical locations (Settat, an inland city; Tangier, a port city that is more open to the international community) and the assumption that these contextual differences could influence students' digital practices and sensitivity to online reviews, thus providing a relevant basis for comparative analysis.

4.3. Data collection

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and remotely (via audio or written responses) and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Three main questions guided the interview in order to allow for broad freedom of expression on purchasing journeys, review consultation practices, and the role of emotions. These questions focused on:

- ◆ Their online shopping habits and reasoning
- ◆ Their reactions to reviews, recommendations, and influencers
- ◆ The emotions felt or anticipated in this process

"The verbatim transcripts are anonymized and identified by the participant's gender (F for female, M for male), age, and institution, in accordance with the ethical principles of qualitative research."

4.4. Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed in full and encoded using NVivo (Gibbs, 2007) . Initial inductive coding revealed thematic nodes, which were refined in a second stage into analytical categories. This process involved repeated readings of the transcripts to identify key concepts and emerging patterns, followed by hierarchical categorization of the data (Braun, n.d.; Thomas, 2006) . Lexical analysis was used to identify the frequency and co-occurrence of terms, revealing the dominant semantic fields in the participants' discourse. The analysis also used visualization tools (node trees, cross-matrices, relationship maps, word clouds) to clarify the links between concepts (Leblanc, 2025; SIMONNET, 2016) . The number of references indicates the

frequency with which a theme or concept was mentioned or coded in the interviews. These figures reveal that WOM, decision criteria, and anticipated emotions are the most prominent themes in the students' discourse, highlighting their importance in the online purchasing process.

5. Results and in-depth analysis

5.1. General trends: decision-making criteria, WOM, and anticipated emotions

The thematic analysis highlights three key areas:

- ◆ the central role of word-of-mouth (WOM) in all its forms,
- ◆ the diversity of decision-making criteria used,
- ◆ the major role of anticipated emotions in purchase motivation.

The nodes most frequently used by participants (see NVivo) confirm the significance of these three dimensions:

Table 1. Distribution of References Across Identified Qualitative Theme

Theme	Number of references
Word-of-mouth (WOM)	80
Decision criteria	68
Purchase decision	23
Anticipated emotions (positive/negative)	40
Actual experience	21
Barriers	6
Social influence and online WOM	57
Types of reviews consulted	26
Relationship to trust	70

The thematic analysis highlights central themes (word-of-mouth, decision criteria, relationship to trust), intermediate themes (anticipated emotions, social influence, types of reviews consulted) and secondary themes (real-life experience, obstacles). Decision criteria constitute the main analytical core and are discussed in depth (Filieri, 2015; Hellofs & Jacobson, 1999).

5.2. Word-of-mouth: between cognitive and emotional reassurance

Word-of-mouth plays a pivotal role in purchasing decisions, but the forms it takes differ depending on the school. ENCGS students adopt a highly structured and thoughtful online purchasing behavior. Their decisions are mainly guided by rational criteria such as quality, brand reputation, customer service, and delivery. Word-of-mouth plays a role, but it is secondary and more focused on their immediate circle (friends, family).

Example of ENCGS verbatim:

- ◆ "Reviews are not the most decisive factor for me. I'm not the type to try out unknown products or follow trends. When I shop online, it's usually for products I know very well: for example, sunscreen, hygiene products, or items from a brand I already use and am sure of the quality of." (ENCGS, F, 22)
- ◆ "I only place an order when I've been reassured by several reliable sources of reviews, and these are usually reviews from people I know and close friends and family." (ENCGS, M, 23)
- ◆ "The rare times I do make a purchase, it's either because a friend or family member recommended the product or service—and I've seen or tried it at their house—or because I really need a product that I can't find near my home or that is only available online." (ENCGS, M, 23)
- ◆ "What really inspires confidence in me is word-of-mouth from my friends and family, or seeing someone I know using the product or testing it out in person. That seems much more authentic to me than anything you can find online." (ENCGS, F, 23)

Here, WOM is perceived as a tool for objectification: it provides evidence, reduces doubts, and limits the risk of dissatisfaction or regret. ENCGT students show greater openness to digital WOM, particularly through influencers, social networks, and online communities. Here, WOM is a lever for emotional and social projection, allowing students to project themselves into the user experience and identify with real-life, visual, and emotional testimonials. It contributes to emotional reassurance by validating choices based on feelings and belonging to a community.

Example of ENCGT verbatim:

- ◆ "Feedback influences me a lot, but not all of it in the same way. I'm not very sensitive to technical or generic reviews. What I'm looking for are very personal, almost intimate reviews that tell a story: 'I had trouble sleeping, then this pillow changed everything,' or 'I didn't think this cream would make me feel so confident.' (ENCGT, F, 23)
- ◆ "For me, every purchase is a little analysis project. I consider reviews to be an integral part of the product's characteristics, especially those from influencers or bloggers who review products in the same way as

weight, dimensions, or components. Ignoring reviews would be like ignoring part of the technical specifications." (ENCGT, M, 22)

- ◆ "Influencers' reviews carry even more weight for me because they really show how the product works, and I often rely on their reactions. If several influencers give a negative review or are disappointed, I don't even take the risk." (ENCGT, F, 22)
- ◆ "When I read a lot of positive feedback, I feel excited, confident, and even a little proud in advance, as if I'm making a good choice. But as soon as I see negative comments, especially if they are detailed or come from people who seem honest, I start to feel anxious and doubtful, and I lose the desire to buy. I tell myself that I will surely regret it if I take the risk." (ENCGT, M, 21)



Graph 1. Perceptions of word-of-mouth in the purchasing process – Word cloud (ENCG students in Settat)

The word cloud highlights the centrality of the concepts of "product," "purchase," "customer," "influencers," and "example" confirming the reliance on multiple sources of opinion in online purchasing decisions. The prominence of words related to trust and regret indicates that WOM operates simultaneously as a cognitive and emotional mechanism, contributing to both reassurance and doubt in the decision-making process (Mayzlin, 2011).

5.3. Anticipated emotions: a differential driver of behavior

Anticipated emotions play a strategic role in the purchasing process, but with significant nuances depending on the profile of the respondents.

Students at ENCG Settat prioritize emotions geared toward reducing regret or satisfaction at having made the "right choice." Pleasure comes after the fact from rational validation of the decision (good value for money, reliable brand, reassuring customer service). Purchasing remains fundamentally rationalized and aims to avoid disappointment.

- ◆ "I can feel excitement and enthusiasm at the idea of receiving a new product, and sometimes a pleasant surprise if the product is of better quality than I imagined. But the emotion I fear the most, and which greatly influences my decision, is regret. I'm afraid of feeling like I've wasted my money on something that wasn't worth it." (ENCGS, M, 23)
- ◆ "The excitement is linked to the idea of getting a good deal or receiving a nice product. But I always have some hesitation, for fear of being disappointed. This ambivalence pushes me to be more rigorous: rereading reviews, comparing prices, checking return policies." (ENCGS, F, 23)

These students seek security, proof, and reassurance before committing, reflecting low emotional involvement and a focus on risk avoidance.

Students at ENCG in Tangier mobilize more positive and projective emotions: excitement, pride, and the pleasure of anticipating a rewarding sensory or social experience. Purchasing is sometimes linked to a specific emotional state (euphoria, personal fulfillment). These students often mention the role of aesthetics and inspiring stories (stories, feedback) as triggers.

- ◆ "What matters to me is the human factor of the product: does someone recount an experience that resonates with my own? Did he/she have the same hesitations as me? And also, I love the ugly photos in

EWOM-related topic	ENCGS (occurrence of keywords)	ENCGT	Analysis
Sources of WOM	Friends/customers	Influencers/networks	Relational logic among ENCGS students vs. digital logic among ENCGT students.
Types of reviews consulted	Recommendations from friends and family	Influencers	Clear difference in channels of trust.
Impact of opinions/fear of regret	11	11	Universal fear, but more inhibiting among ENCGS students.
Relationship to trust	34	36	Rational vs. emotional trust.

Table 3. Comparison of decision-making criteria used in online shopping

Decision criteria	ENCGS (occurrence of keywords)	ENCGT	Analysis
Overall criteria	48	20	Students at ENCG Settat take a more structured approach.
Delivery	13	5	Greater logistical awareness in Settat.
Quality	15	4	Increased requirements for ENCG Settat students.
Brand/promotion	20	9	Reduction of uncertainty through branding.
Luxury	5	1	Stronger symbolic attachment among ENCGS students.
Customer service	10	4	Seeking reassurance after purchase.
Perceived value	Faible	Faible	Secondary criterion for both groups.

Table 4. Overall emotions

Emotional dimension	ENCGS	ENCGT	Analysis
Emotions (overall volume)	22	18	Comparable intensity, different nature.
Purchase decision	17	6	More thoughtful decision among ENCGS students.
Real-life experience	12	9	Past experience plays a greater role among ENCGS students.
Barriers	5	1	Psychological barriers are more prevalent among ENCGS students.

Table 5. Specific emotions (NVivo emotional node coding output)

Emotion	ENCG Settat (ENCGS)	ENCG Tangier (ENCGT)	Analysis
Pride	8	5	ENCGS students adopt a more cautious stance, while ENCGT students show greater enthusiasm.
Excitement	4	6	ENCGT students express more positive anticipation.
Pleasure	2	7	ENCGT students value the hedonic experience.
Satisfaction	5	3	More rational satisfaction among ENCGS students.
Regret	9	10	Universal fear of regret, inhibiting among ENCGS students.
Disappointment	5	2	Disappointment more often expressed by ENCGS students.
Hesitation	1	1	Similar.
Stress	2	2	Similar.
Guilt	4	1	Stronger among ENCGS students.
Mental fatigue	0	1	Slight cognitive overload among ENCGT students.

Cross-analysis of NVivo matrices highlights two distinct behavioral profiles.

Table 6. Online shopping behavior profiles of students: comparison between ENCG Settat students and ENCG Tangier students (NVivo summary)

Dimension / Theme	ENCG Settat profile	ENCG Tangier profile	Key differences / Observations
WOM	Favors traditional word-of-mouth (friends, family, forums).	Prefers digital word-of-mouth (influencers, social media).	ENCGT students are more exposed to digital social proof; ENCGS students are more relational.
Decision criteria	Rational analysis, multiple criteria, risk reduction.	More spontaneous decision, guided by emotion and aesthetics.	Rational vs. emotional orientation.
Anticipated emotions	More frequent negative emotions (guilt, regret, disappointment).	More frequent positive emotions (excitement, pleasure, pride).	Difference in emotional charge.
Life experience	Capitalizing on past experiences to limit uncertainty.	Less focused on past experience, more on emotional projection.	Taking the past into account vs. emotional anticipation.
Sources of trust	Close circle and direct relationships.	Influencers and digital networks.	Difference in building trust.
Purchasing decision	Thoughtful and structured.	More spontaneous and emotional.	Rational decision vs. impulsive/moderated by emotion.
Barriers	More numerous (fear of disappointment, of being scammed).	Fewer, greater digital confidence.	Stronger psychological inhibitions among ENCGS students.

The results are consistent with the distinctions established in the literature between utilitarian and hedonic consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Merle et al., 2022). They also confirm that digital WOM varies according to different uses: proof of expertise on the one hand, shared experience on the other.

6. General discussion: towards a critical reinterpretation of eWOM and anticipated emotions among young digital consumers

The aim of this research is not simply to confirm the role of eWOM in the construction of anticipated emotions, but also to explore how these dynamics vary according to the sociocultural characteristics of consumers. In this sense, the results obtained invite us to move beyond a univocal reading of the effects of eWOM on young Moroccan university students.

Behind the apparent divergence between utilitarian consumers (students at ENCG Settat) and hedonistic consumers (students at ENCG Tangier), a more nuanced interpretation of eWOM appropriation patterns emerges (HIND, 2019; Li et al., 2020). Electronic word-of-mouth is not limited to being a simple source of rational information or a simple emotional lever. It acts as an interface where, depending on the context, emotional expectations are constructed that respond to logics much more complex than a simple utility/pleasure dichotomy. Consequently, for ENCG Settat students, the use of WOM is not solely aimed at reducing risk: it contributes to a form of emotional control, where avoiding regret becomes central, thus revealing an emotional approach. In contrast, among ENCG Tangier students, eWOM seems to reinforce a positive emotional projection, where purchasing becomes a means of expressing identity and social affirmation through anticipated emotion.

These results invite us to reconsider the existing literature on eWOM, which too often focuses on generic and linear effects (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; T. Y. Lee et al., 2012). They demonstrate the importance of combining the theory of anticipated emotions with cultural, geographical, and generational specificities, all of which are largely neglected in global approaches to online behavior.

More broadly, this work suggests that eWOM should be considered not only as a technique of influence, but also as a cognitive and affective matrix where highly contextualized anticipated emotional scenarios are constructed. This observation paves the way for a renewed theoretical reflection: to what extent does eWOM become a vector for identity construction through the management of future emotions, rather than a simple source of information? This question goes far beyond the Moroccan context and raises questions about the changing relationship of new generations to digital consumption.

From a managerial perspective, these results argue for a segmented and contextualized approach to digital strategies. A single eWOM strategy is unlikely to be effective for all young consumers. Brands must integrate these differences into their practices: on the one hand, cultivating reliability, transparency, and

reducing uncertainty for rational consumers; on the other hand, investing in emotional narratives, immersive experiences, and collaborations with influencers for those seeking excitement and anticipated emotion.

Finally, this study invites us to think of eWOM management as a dialectical space, where mistrust and trust, information and emotion, control and projection coexist. It shows that the future of marketing lies not only in optimizing algorithms or influence techniques, but in a nuanced understanding of the emotional logic underlying digital decisions in specific cultural contexts.

Beyond traditional uses: paradoxical practices revealing new emotional dynamics

While this study mainly highlights two broad consumer profiles (rational/utilitarian vs. hedonic/emotional) in their relationship to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and anticipated emotions, certain emerging behaviors, although more marginal, are worth discussing.

Several participants report paradoxical practices that run counter to the expected uses of electronic word-of-mouth. Some deliberately avoid consulting online reviews in order to preserve a sense of exclusivity or uniqueness in their consumption choices. In this case, anticipated emotion is no longer based on social validation or reassurance, but on the pleasure of discovery and the emotional value attached to owning a rare or unknown product. This behavior reflects a form of identity construction, where emotional anticipation is driven by singularity rather than conformity (Ianni et al., 2023; Moawad et al., 2009).

These observations enrich our understanding of anticipated emotions by showing that they do not always aim to facilitate purchase decisions, but can also fulfill deeper psychological needs related to identity, distinction, and emotional self-regulation. They invite us to rethink eWOM not only as an influence mechanism, but as an emotional space that consumers may strategically use—or deliberately avoid—depending on the emotional outcomes they seek.

7. Conclusion

This research highlights the crucial role of anticipated emotions in the mechanisms of electronic word-of-mouth influence among young Moroccan consumers. It reveals that eWOM, far from being a simple source of rational information, is a powerful emotional trigger that influences purchase intent. The results highlight this target audience's sensitivity to emotions such as regret, fear of making mistakes, and the search for social validation.

Beyond its empirical contributions, this research enriches the debate on the integration of affective and cognitive dimensions in the analysis of online behavior. It invites us to rethink digital communication strategies by taking into account the role of anticipated emotions in the formulation of advertising messages and in the design of digital interfaces. However, like all exploratory research, this study has limitations that open the door to future investigations, both methodological and theoretical.

Limitations of the study and prospects for future research

Although this study provides an innovative perspective on the link between electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and anticipated emotions among young Moroccan consumers, it has several limitations that should be considered not as mere methodological weaknesses, but as conceptual points of tension that may open up new theoretical and empirical perspectives.

First, the geographical and generational restrictions of the sample (students from two Moroccan business schools, young and ultra-connected) limit the transferability of the results. These profiles share such homogeneous digital habits that it is legitimate to criticize any attempt to generalize to consumers with dissimilar digital behaviors, for example: generations not exposed to digital technology, less tech-savvy cultures, etc. Nevertheless, this limitation can also be seen as a strength, in that it highlights the structuring role of cultural and generational contexts in the formation of anticipated emotions. Comparative intercultural and intergenerational studies would thus make it possible to test the robustness and universal scope of the dynamics observed.

Secondly, although exclusively qualitative methodology is ideal for capturing the richness of discourse and emotions, it limits the possibility of establishing precise causal relationships between eWOM, anticipated emotions, and purchasing decisions. However, rather than constituting an empirical weakness, this constraint raises questions about the persistent gap between the depth of qualitative analyses and the often reductive standardization of quantitative models that dominate the literature. An ambitious research program would consist of articulating these two approaches in a mixed and abductive perspective, combining grounded theory and hypothetical deductive modeling.

Third, the study focuses on organic word-of-mouth of human origin, hypothesizing a differentiated effect between human eWOM and that of algorithmic origin (reviews generated by AI, chatbots, or automated narratives). This omission, far from being insignificant, reveals a theoretical blind spot in current research: how do consumers distinguish (or not) between human and algorithmic origins of reviews?

What differentiated effects do these new forms of discourse have on anticipated emotions and trust? At the same time, the atypical behaviors observed—such as the playful or cathartic use of shopping platforms—also deserve further study. Few studies have examined these paradoxical uses, where interaction with interfaces responds to complex emotional needs that go beyond transactional logic. An original avenue of

research would be to analyze these practices as digital emotional rituals, or as forms of compensatory consumption, drawing on frameworks from social psychology, the sociology of consumption, and digital culture studies. This approach would broaden our understanding of eWOM, not only as a tool for influence, but as a space for expressing and regulating contemporary emotions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participants' verbatim quotes

The verbatim excerpts presented below illustrate the students' perceptions and experiences relating to the various themes identified in the qualitative analysis. Only a few representative verbatim excerpts have been selected to illustrate the main points that emerged. The codes M and F indicate the gender of the participants, and their age and institution are specified to provide context for their comments.

Decision criteria / Product selection

- ◆ "I never buy a product that is everywhere or that 'everyone' has. On the contrary, I am always looking for something rare, original, offbeat, sometimes even a little strange... For me, a product becomes interesting when it has almost no reviews: that means it is still 'confidential'. (ENCGT, M, 21)
- ◆ "I mainly compare prices, because for me, a good price is still very important." (ENCGT, F, 21)
- ◆ "A good product must offer good value for money, be truly useful, and come with effective after-sales service. The price must be clear, with no hidden costs. Fast delivery is also a plus." (ENCGT, F, 23)

Purchasing behavior / Pre-purchase / Decision

- ◆ "Sometimes I create imaginary shopping carts just to reassure myself that, if I wanted to, I could treat myself. It's almost therapeutic." (ENCGT, F, 21)
- ◆ "Sometimes I put products in my basket just to imagine that I own them. It's like a kind of mental projection, a simulation." (ENCGS, M, 23)
- ◆ "Sometimes I'm really motivated at first, I place the order and choose cash on delivery, but then after a few hours or a day or two, I lose interest. When the delivery person calls, I don't answer, and I abandon the order" (ENCGS, M, 23).
- ◆ "Online reviews help me assess what I can expect from the product. Positive reviews suggest that the product is reliable, but I remain cautious. Negative reviews make me think: I check how many there are and whether they mention the same issues. This sometimes worries me, but it doesn't necessarily stop me from buying." (ENCGT, M, 23)

Anticipated emotions

- ◆ "My purchases are often triggered by a mixture of boredom and intense emotion. I'm looking for a little emotional comfort, sometimes even to feel regret and break out of my routine." (ENCGS, M, 23)
- ◆ "Positive reviews give me joy and pleasure, while negative reviews cause anxiety and anticipated regret." (ENCGS, F, 22)
- ◆ "Before buying, I feel a mixture of desire and doubt. I want to have a good product, but I'm afraid of being disappointed. Reviews help calm my doubts, but they're not enough to make me buy immediately. More often than not, I feel mistrustful of influencers' promises." (ENCGT, M, 23)

WOM and social influence

- ◆ "Reviews directly influence my mood: a positive comment makes me happy, a negative review makes me anxious. Instagram micro-influencers influence my purchase intentions the most." (ENCGS, F, 22)
- ◆ "Honestly, I don't really trust influencers. I know they're often paid to talk about products, so I take their opinions with a grain of salt." (ENCGT, F, 23)
- ◆ "I tend to start by looking for reviews on Google, Instagram, or Facebook to get a general idea." (ENCGT, F, 21)