

Understanding the Relationship Between Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) and Customer Retention in the Jordanian Telecommunications Industry

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to explore the influence of social media viral marketing factors on customer retention within the Jordanian telecommunications sector, specifically focusing on Umniah Company. An online survey was conducted, collecting data from 418 participants, which was subsequently analyzed through structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS 23 and SPSS 23 software. The overall results of the study underscore the significant role that social media viral marketing factors play in enhancing customer retention in the Jordanian telecommunications industry. More specifically, the findings revealed a strong correlation between electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) and customer retention. Notably, E-WOM was identified as the most influential factor in fostering customer loyalty.

Keywords: E-WOM; Customer Retention; Social Media; Telecommunication; Jordan.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations prioritize minimizing customer churn by focusing on building long-term relationships. Customer retention begins with the very first interaction and extends through every stage of the customer's journey (Abd Algani et al., 2021). Effective retention strategies consider this entire lifecycle, ensuring a seamless and positive experience (Abu-Shanab et al., 2016; Awad, 2018). Success in attracting and retaining customers hinges not only on the quality of products or services offered but also on delivering exceptional support to existing customers, fostering tangible value through the solutions provided, and cultivating a strong reputation within the market and beyond (Awad, 2016; Salman et al., 2018).

Recently, the Internet has witnessed an unprecedented marketing boom. A new type of smart advertising strategy is penetrating our daily lives more and more in the future (Awad, 2020). Unlike traditional television advertising, the new advertising type requires the participation of potential customers, and their presence in the World Wide Web to talk about a specific commercial product, interact with each other, and share their opinions about it. The goal is to create a spontaneous and viral chat (chat words grow and multiply like a real virus to be transmitted from the mouth of the other around a product in order to gradually attract the largest possible number of visitors to the network). The development of technology produces innovative ideas in almost every area of our lives. Technological developments also encourage developments in the business world, one of which is marketing activities (Awad, 2021).

Social media viral marketing serves as an innovative approach to promoting products within the realm of marketing communications. This strategy leverages the extensive reach of communication technologies, utilizing the interconnected nature of social networks to engage a large and diverse audience. Viral marketing on social media relies heavily on loyal customers who share their positive experiences and satisfaction with products, thereby

building trust and encouraging others to choose and use those products (Awad, 2023; Hammouri et al., 2022b). The ultimate goal of this method is to generate electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM), where customers willingly share their favorable opinions and recommendations with others (Alhomaid & Hammouri, 2025; Nusairat et al., 2021).

By adopting social media viral marketing, businesses can achieve significant results with minimal investment, as the strategy capitalizes on customer-driven word-of-mouth promotion (Al-Gasawneh et al., 2023; Raed et al., 2023b). This approach aims to enhance brand awareness, a crucial factor that influences consumer decision-making, particularly during the evaluation of alternatives. Customers tend to gravitate toward products that resonate in their minds over those that are less familiar. They also prioritize quality products at competitive prices. Social media provides a powerful platform for marketers to foster public trust and strengthen customer relationships, making it an effective tool for boosting brand recognition and loyalty (Al-Hammouri et al., 2022; Nusairat et al., 2024a).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Jordanian Telecommunication Companies' Background

The telecommunications sector in Jordan serves as a cornerstone of the nation's economy and continues to attract significant focus as the country aspires to solidify its role as a regional leader and exporter of advanced communication and IT solutions (Almajali & Hammouri, 2021). This sector has experienced substantial growth over the years, contributing 12% to the national GDP. By 2015, revenues from the IT sector had surpassed \$600 million, while the telecommunications industry generated over \$1.35 billion in total revenues. According to the Oxford Business Group, Jordan's telecom market is now considered both mature and saturated (Awad, 2025; Mansour et al., 2024). Data from the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) revealed a penetration rate of 155% during the third quarter of 2013, underscoring the high level of market engagement and connectivity within the country (Al-Gasawneh et al., 2022c; Majali et al., 2022; Nusairat et al., 2024b).

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) has become an increasingly influential factor in shaping customer perceptions and behaviors within the Jordanian telecommunications industry (Hammouri et al., 2022a; Mohammed et al., 2021). Consumers actively share their experiences, opinions, and service evaluations through social media platforms, online forums, review websites, and messaging applications, making digital communication an important source of information for both existing and potential customers (Hammouri et al., 2024a; Nusairat et al., 2022). Positive E-WOM can enhance a company's reputation, strengthen customer trust, and encourage customer retention, while negative online reviews or complaints can rapidly spread and adversely affect brand image and customer loyalty (Kilani & Hammouri, 2024; Majadly et al., 2024). Given the widespread use of digital platforms among Jordanian consumers, telecommunications companies increasingly monitor online feedback, engage with customers through social media, and implement digital customer relationship management strategies to improve service quality and foster positive online interactions (Hanandeh et al., 2023; Mansour & Heba, 2021). Consequently, understanding the role of E-WOM has become essential for telecommunications providers seeking to strengthen customer retention and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage in the Jordanian market (Hammouri et al., 2023b; Hanandeh et al., 2021; Nusairat et al., 2023).

Customer Retention

Customer retention is the capacity of a business or product to maintain its customer base over a defined timeframe (Almajali et al., 2021; Awad et al., 2019). It reflects the tendency of customers to remain loyal by repeatedly purchasing from or engaging with a business rather than switching to competitors or ceasing usage altogether (Al-Rawashdeh et al., 2023; Hammouri et al., 2024b). Customer retention embodies a strong, enduring commitment to repurchase or continue patronizing a favored product or service over time, even in the face of external pressures or marketing strategies designed to encourage switching. Aljabari et al. (2023) defined customer retention as maintaining the existing customer base by establishing good relations with all who buy the company's product (Al-Gasawneh et al., 2022b; Hanandeh et al., 2021 et al., 2024; Nusairat et al., 2024c).

Organizations prioritize minimizing customer loss, as retaining clients is integral to long-term success (Ahmad et al., 2024; Nusairat et al., 2020a). The journey of customer retention begins with the very first interaction and extends throughout the entire duration of the relationship. Effective strategies consider every stage of this lifecycle (Akhorshaideh et al., 2024; Hammouri et al., 2026; Hanandeh et al., 2023). A business's ability to draw in and keep customers depends not only on the quality of its products or services but also on how well it supports current clients, the tangible benefits customers derive from the solutions offered, and the reputation the organization builds within the industry and beyond (Akhorshaideh et al., 2023; Hammouri et al., 2021d; Khasawneh, 2023).

True customer retention goes beyond simply meeting expectations; it often involves exceeding them to transform customers into loyal advocates (al Freijat & Hammouri, 2022; Hechter & Awad, 2017). Fostering loyalty requires placing customer value at the heart of business strategy, rather than focusing solely on profit maximization or shareholder returns (Al Freijat et al., 2024). In highly competitive markets, consistent delivery of superior customer service becomes a critical differentiator (Abu-Shanab et al., 2019; Awad & Barak, 2018; Hammouri et al., 2022).

In the evolving landscape of Customer Success, retention emerges as a cornerstone objective (Al Khasabah et al., 2025; Nusairat et al., 2024d). It directly influences profitability, as satisfied customers are more likely to sustain long-term relationships and make recurring purchases (Al Shibly et al., 2025). Retention thrives when businesses meet or exceed customer expectations and cultivate enduring connections to drive loyalty and repeated buying decisions (Al-Dwairi et al., 2024; Hammouri et al., 2025). Customer retention is a pivotal topic in business economics, often explored through the lens of relationship marketing, which emphasizes the importance of cultivating and sustaining customer relationships over the long term (Al-Gasawneh et al., 2022a; Hammouri et al., 2020). Research consistently underscores the necessity of managing customer satisfaction as a critical step toward achieving retention. Satisfaction, as defined by Hammouri et al. (2023), reflects a customer's overall perception of and attitude toward a service provider. It represents an emotional response rooted in the alignment between what customers anticipate and what they ultimately experience, including the extent to which their needs and objectives are met (Awad & Barak, 2014). While customer retention serves as a long-term goal linked to satisfaction, the latter alone does not guarantee repeat business (Alsmadi et al., 2026; Hammouri et al., 2015). However, satisfaction remains an essential factor in fostering retention, as it lays the groundwork for stronger relationships and increases the likelihood of ongoing engagement (Altaher et al., 2024; Hammouri et al., 2016; Nusairat et al., 2020b).

E-WOM

Al-Zagheer et al., (2024) describe electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) as informal, internet-based communication directed at consumers, focusing on the features, benefits, or performance of specific products, services, or their providers (Awad et al., 2022; Raed et al., 2023a). Similarly, Bala'wi et al., (2024) defined E-WOM as an online extension of traditional word-of-mouth communication. Moreover, Barakat et al., (2022), defining E-WOM as any favorable or unfavorable feedback shared by past, current, or potential customers about a product or company, accessible to a broad audience and businesses through digital platforms (Awad & Barak, 2015; Hammouri & Abu-Shanab, 2020). The advent and widespread adoption of the internet have revolutionized how consumers access product information, allowing them to read reviews and feedback from others while also contributing their insights and opinions through E-WOM (Hammouri & Abu-Shanab, 2018). Moreover, Hanandeh et al., (2023) highlights that customer-to-customer knowledge sharing, a distinct aspect of E-WOM, not only directly influences customer loyalty but also exerts an indirect effect by enhancing the perceived value of a company's offerings (Chung et al., 2021; Hammouri & Altaher, 2020).

E-WOM possesses distinct characteristics that set it apart from traditional forms of communication. It frequently occurs between individuals with little or no prior connection, such as strangers or other consumers, and can be shared anonymously (Al-Zagheer et al., 2026a; Hammouri et al., 2025). This anonymity offers consumers the freedom to express their opinions more openly, without the concern of revealing their identity (Dabboor et al., 2021). The unique aspects of E-WOM create an environment where consumers are more inclined to share their experiences with others, leading to an increase in the volume of E-WOM (Bushara et al., 2023). Consequently, this dynamic enhances the likelihood that consumers will encounter others with expertise on specific products, enriching the content available on E-WOM platforms (Dallashah et al., 2024; Hammouri et al., 2021a).

E-WOM and Customer retention

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) refers to the exchange of opinions, experiences, and recommendations about products or services through digital platforms such as social media, online review websites, discussion forums, blogs, and e-commerce platforms. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth, E-WOM enables information to spread rapidly across a broad audience, making it one of the most influential sources of consumer information in the digital era. Consumers often perceive E-WOM as more credible and trustworthy than firm-generated promotional messages because it is based on the experiences of other users rather than organizational advertising. Positive E-WOM can strengthen a company's reputation, increase consumer confidence, and influence purchase decisions, whereas negative E-WOM can quickly damage brand image and reduce customer acquisition. Consequently, organizations increasingly monitor and manage online customer interactions to foster favorable E-WOM and maintain a competitive advantage (Hammouri, & Abu-Shanab, 2017a).

Customer retention refers to an organization's ability to maintain long-term relationships with its existing customers by encouraging repeated purchases and continued service usage over time. Retaining customers is widely

recognized as more cost-effective than acquiring new ones, as loyal customers tend to generate higher lifetime value, exhibit lower price sensitivity, and contribute to positive referrals (Hammouri et al., 2023). In highly competitive industries, such as telecommunications, customer retention has become a strategic priority because customers can easily switch to competing service providers offering similar products and pricing. Factors such as service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, perceived value, and positive Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) significantly influence customers' intentions to remain loyal to a company (Hammouri & Abu-Shanab, 2017b). Therefore, organizations that effectively cultivate positive customer experiences and encourage favorable online recommendations are more likely to strengthen customer retention and achieve sustainable business performance.

The expansion of online resources has significantly transformed how consumers seek information about products and services, giving rise to the phenomenon of electronic word-of-mouth (Al-Zagheer et al., 2026b; Hammouri et al., 2023a). Unlike traditional shopping, where customers can assess products directly, online users often rely heavily on the interactive dynamics of E-WOM to evaluate services before purchasing (Ghaith et al., 2023; Hammouri et al., 2021c). Moreover, Alkhaffaf et al., (2025) suggest that the proliferation of digital media has introduced a novel form of customer-to-customer engagement (Awad & Barak, 2016a). Platforms such as social networks, online forums, and consumer review websites have become central hubs for individuals to share experiences, opinions, and knowledge about various products and services (Hamad et al., 2025). In contrast to conventional advertising channels—such as television, radio, print, and direct sales—E-WOM has emerged as a more trusted and influential source of information. Consumers increasingly depend on peer-generated content when making purchasing decisions (Hammouri et al., 2023; Al-Zagheer et al., 2026c). Building on these insights, the researcher proposed the following hypothesis:

H: E-WOM has a positive and significant impact on customers' retention.

METHODOLOGY

To address the research questions and fulfill the study's objectives, this research adopts a descriptive quantitative approach, focusing on the collection of primary data. The study relies on the scientific method as the basis for analyzing and verifying the data within a quantitative framework. While there are various ways to apply the scientific method in research, most approaches in quantitative studies involve hypothesis testing to predict outcomes. These hypotheses are formulated based on specific variables, and sometimes theoretical concepts are tested as part of the research process. The population in this context refers to the entire group of individuals, objects, or events that the researcher aims to study and make generalizations about based on sample statistics. Population of this study comprises the customers of Umniah Telecommunication Company which are already Social Media users and is estimated at 2.4 million approximately according to the statistics of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority in Jordan (Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, 2022). Using the Purposed Sample technique for Sekaran, as long as the population is 2.4 million, then the appropriate samples number is 300. In this thesis, we used the results of 418 filled surveys. This study uses purposive sample technique and distributes 418. The survey was shared with Umniah customers via popular social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram. Following a pre-test of the questionnaire, data was gathered from users of Jordanian telecom companies, with a specific focus on Umniah. The link to the survey was then distributed to users on widely used platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Snapchat. The survey ran from April 15th to May 15th, 2023, spanning a period of approximately four weeks. Data collection took place through Google Forms over the course of this one-month period.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Before commencing data analysis, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the data is critical. This involves verifying that the information entered into the dataset is precise and that the resulting outputs are free from skewed or misleading correlations (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). This section outlines the essential data screening processes that must be conducted beforehand. These include identifying and addressing missing data, detecting and eliminating outliers, and confirming that the distribution of the data aligns with normality assumptions to uphold the integrity of the analysis. Figure depicts all the exogenous and endogenous variables together with their relative estimation errors in this study. The number of completed surveys is 418, and since Google Forms was used to fill out the survey, there are no missing values. Google Forms force respondents to provide an answer before continuing when they attempt to submit a Google Form without responding to a required question. This feature makes sure that form submissions from responses cannot be made with necessary field values blank.

Structural Models

The structural equation model constitutes the second critical phase in SEM analysis. After validating the measurement model, the structural model is developed by defining the relationships among the constructs. This model elucidates the connections between variables, specifically detailing how independent (exogenous) variables influence dependent (endogenous) variables. The assessment of the structural model begins with evaluating the overall model fit to ensure it adequately represents the data. This is followed by analyzing the hypothesized parameter estimates in terms of their magnitude, direction, and statistical significance. These relationships are visually represented through one-headed arrows in path diagrams. The final stage involves confirming the structural model by verifying the proposed relationships among the variables, ensuring they align with the study's framework and hypotheses.

Table 1: Path Analysis

Path	Estimate	S.E.	Beta (β)	Pvalue	Result
CR \rightarrow E-WOM	0.156	0.051	0.145**	0.004	Supported

The results indicated that the regression weight for E-WOM in the prediction of Customer Retention (CR) is significantly different from zero at the 0.01 level. Thus, H1 was supported. The standardized estimate of Beta was 0.145, indicating a positive relationship. It means, when E-WOM goes up by 1 standard deviation, Customer Retention (CR) goes up by 0.145 standard deviations; $\beta = 0.145$, CR = 3.048, $p < 0.01$.

CONCLUSION

The current study investigated the impact of social media viral marketing dimensions on brand image, E-WOM and customers' retention in the telecommunications industry. The present study extended this line of study by proposing a theoretical framework that incorporated brand awareness, brand trust and promotion which adapted as an additional direct determinant of achieving brand image and E-WOM, along with, customers' retention. This is to provide a better explanation and understanding of the social media viral marketing dimensions impact on E-WOM, along with which subsequently enhance the customers' retention in the telecommunications industry.

Regarding study question eight, "What is the impact of E-WOM on customer retention?" the proposed theoretical framework posits that E-WOM has a positive and significant effect on customer retention. This aligns with the findings of Rahman, Abir, Yazdani, Hamid, and Al Mamun (2020), who argued that effective and supportive E-WOM influences consumer decisions and enhances the interest in purchasing and the brand image of digital businesses. As the number of online companies continues to rise, leveraging E-WOM effectively can foster growth and success for these companies. Consequently, it is essential for businesses to harness E-WOM to boost product expertise, which in turn can shape customer expectations and ultimately influence retention.

The researcher concludes that this result reinforces the idea that customers increasingly depend on online reviews and peer recommendations when making purchase decisions. Positive E-WOM can enhance customer satisfaction, fostering greater loyalty and higher retention rates. Conversely, negative E-WOM can drive customers away, undermining brand loyalty and diminishing retention. Scholars and telecommunications industry leaders can explore new opportunities and address potential challenges by delving into various aspects of social media viral marketing, identifying strategies to secure a competitive edge. This study paves the way for innovative collaboration between academia and industry, fostering joint research that benefits both sectors. It also serves as a catalyst for future investigations into similar topics, encouraging further academic and practical exploration in this area (Samarah et al., 2026; Zubeidat et al., 2025).

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