Factors affecting WoM among telecommunications network users in Indonesia

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the factors influencing WOM (word of mouth) among telecommunications network users in Indonesia. This study has eight dimensions of constructive variables: Service Communication, Quality Service, Relational Value, Trust, Satisfaction, eWOM, fWOM, and Positive Emotional Experience. This study was conducted in a single service setting, and therefore, the results cannot be generalized. Data collected to support the initial variables were distributed to telecommunications network users in Indonesia through 286 Google Forms questionnaire respondents. This investigation used SmartPLS 4 due to its robustness in testing predictive models. This research guides telecommunications service managers in developing and managing user-provider relationship networks. Specifically, this paper shows how business references can be generated and used to build customer retention from various relationship-building strategies. The study shows that service providers who deliver quality services, design superior value, and provide reliable information are better positioned to build strong relationships with customers and, ultimately, to foster Positive Emotional Experiences for both users and providers.
Keywords: eWoM, service quality, satisfaction

Introduction

The telecommunications industry in Indonesia has experienced rapid growth in recent decades, driven by increased mobile phone and internet penetration across the country. With a population of over 270 million, Indonesia is one of the largest telecommunications markets in Southeast Asia. Three major operators, namely Telkomsel, Indosat Ooredoo, and XL Axiata, dominate most of the market share. Telkomsel leads with a market share of around 60%, followed by Indosat Ooredoo (around 25%) and XL Axiata (around 15%) (Buulolo, 2022). These operators compete fiercely to expand their service coverage and improve network quality, especially with the launch of 4G technology and preparations for 5G adoption. Internet penetration in Indonesia reached more than 73% in 2021 (Wulanningrum, 2021).

In this competitive industry, customer satisfaction and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) play a crucial role. Litvin et al. (2008) emphasize that eWOM includes various reviews, recommendations, and opinions posted online by consumers. Studies show that eWOM can have a significant impact on the purchasing decisions of potential customers, as reviews and recommendations from other users are often considered more credible than company advertisements (Sukoyo et al., 2019). The factor of customer satisfaction is very important and interesting because it offers several benefits, such as consolidating business-buyer relationships, creating customer loyalty, and forming word-of-mouth references that generate profits for the company (Tjiptono, 2002: 24). Satisfied customers tend to continue using the service, reducing churn rates and increasing the company's long-term revenue (Granita, 2017; Wijaya, 2024).

Satisfied customers are also more likely to recommend services through eWOM. Online reviews and recommendations (eWOM) are highly influential because they can reach a wide audience and are considered more credible than traditional advertising. Positive Emotional Experience (PEE) can strengthen the relationship between customer satisfaction and eWOM (Fitri & Madiawati, 2021). Satisfied customers who have positive experiences tend to share their experiences more often through social media, which can enhance reputation and attract new customers. PEE can increase loyalty and the

intention to recommend a service (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018). Understanding how PEE moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and eWOM is very important, especially in the context of telecommunications networks in Indonesia, which face intense competition and high consumer expectations.

Customer satisfaction alone is not a sufficient engine for advocacy (Lam et al., 2025). Today's always-on internet means service failures and frictions can trigger outsized emotional reactions relative to positive uptake. Contemporary evidence shows that emotional content and valence in online reviews materially shape attention, judgments, and downstream behavior (Kohout et al., 2023). This notion implies that a human-centered layer, manifested in PEE for this study context, should condition how satisfaction translates into eWOM (Nieves-Pavón et al., 2024). Positioning PEE as a contingency therefore may present understandings into mixed satisfaction–eWOM findings and aligns with mounting results that stronger positive emotional experiences are associated with greater eWOM intention and loyalty.

In telecommunications recent research, word of mouth (WOM) is still too often modeled as a single, online-only outcome, even though electronic and face-to-face channels trigger different cues, social contexts, and managerial levers (Kusawat & Teerakapibal, 2024). The literature tilts heavily toward eWOM and rarely analyzes offline WOM, reinforcing an eWOM-first bias and leaving open the practical question of how face-to-face WOM (fWOM) could be created (Ngo et al., 2024). Recent syntheses confirm the field's continued emphasis on eWOM mechanisms, presenting its significant impact in influencing customer's behaviors even without considering fWOM at all (Ramdan et al., 2025; Liu, 2024). However, on the other hand, recent work also shows offline WOM's distinct effectiveness in shaping outcomes (Chawdhary & Weber, 2025). Therefore, a design that models eWOM and fWOM simultaneously and compares their relative antecedents would therefore narrow both theoretical gap and managerial value.

Furthermore, emprical findings in recent literature have shown inconsistent research results regarding the relationship between satisfaction, service quality, and eWOM. For example, Oraedu et al. (2021) and Gabbianelli et al. (2022) found a significant relationship between satisfaction and eWOM, while Serra-Cantallops et al. (2020) found no significant relationship. Similarly, Gabbianelli et al. (2022) supported the influence of service quality on eWOM, but Oraedu et al. (2021) and Serra-Cantallops et al. (2020) did not find any support. This inconsistency highlights the need for further research, particularly considering moderating factors such as Positive Emotional Experience (PEE). Based on this background and the existing research gap, this study aims to examine the moderating effect of Positive Emotional Experience (PEE) in the relationship between customer satisfaction and eWOM among telecommunications network users in Indonesia.

Literature review

In the context of the competitive telecommunications industry, the relationship between service providers and customers is shaped by various dimensions of interaction quality and value perception. One of the main foundations in building this relationship is service communication, which is the extent to which the parties involved in the service exchange share information openly, honestly, and substantively (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). Effective communication not only clarifies expectations but also serves as a tool for resolving problems and informing customers about service changes (Oraedu et al., 2021). This dimension is closely related to service quality, which is broadly understood as customers' overall assessment of the services received from a particular provider (Zeithaml, 1988). In a highly competitive telecommunications market, improving service quality is a critical factor for business sustainability (Kondasani & Panda, 2015). These two elements—service communication and service

quality—are seen as the main antecedents in shaping relationship value, which is the value created jointly between customers and providers through resource-based co-creation, commitment, and interrelated interactions (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This relationship value does not arise from transactions alone, but from meaningful usage experiences (value-in-use).

Through quality and valuable interactions, customers form two key responses: trust and satisfaction. Customer trust is based on experiences in various interactions and transactions that show that performance expectations and satisfaction are met (Costabile et al., 2002). Trust also reflects the belief that the provider will act in accordance with agreed promises and commitments (Barnes, 2004). On the other hand, satisfaction refers to an affective response to the fulfillment of consumer expectations, namely the assessment that the features of a product or service provide a pleasant level of satisfaction in the consumption process (Oliver, 1997; Cronin et al., 2000). These two constructs—trust and satisfaction—become a bridge to post-consumption behavior, particularly in the form of word-of-mouth (WOM).

WOM in the modern context is divided into two forms: face-to-face WOM (fWOM) and electronic WOM (eWOM). fWOM is informal face-to-face communication between non-commercial individuals about brands, products, or services (Harrison-Walker, 2001), while eWOM includes positive or negative statements shared online by customers—past, present, or prospective—and accessible to a wide audience (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Both play an important role in shaping brand reputation and influencing other consumers' decisions. However, in the digital age, eWOM has a much greater reach, speed of dissemination, and durability than fWOM.

Furthermore, customers' emotional experiences during the consumption process also strengthen or weaken the relationship between satisfaction and eWOM. Positive Emotional Experience (PEE) is defined as the overall experience customers have from product search, purchase, use, to after-sales service (Kennedy et al., 2015). Research shows that services that generate positive emotional experiences (PEE) tend to trigger stronger eWOM and have an impact on loyalty (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2020). Therefore, PEE is positioned as a moderating variable that strengthens the relationship between customer satisfaction and eWOM. Based on this theoretical framework, eight hypotheses were formulated (see Figure 1).
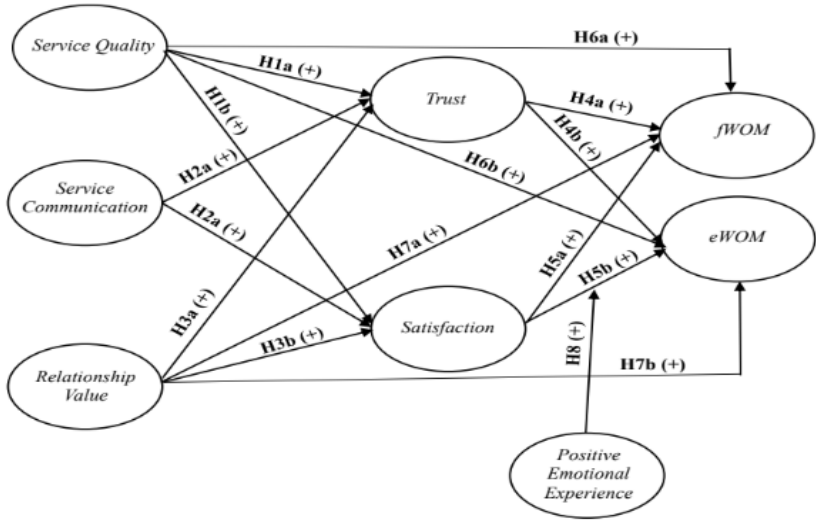

Figure 1. Research Model

H1: Service quality has a positive effect on (a) trust and (b) satisfaction among telecommunications network users.

H2: Service communication positively affects (a) trust and (b) satisfaction among telecommunications network users.

H3: Relationship value positively affects (a) trust and (b) satisfaction among telecommunications network users.

H4: Trust positively affects (a) fWOM and (b) eWOM among telecommunications network users.

H5: Satisfaction has a positive effect on (a) fWOM and (b) eWOM among telecommunications network users.

H6: Service quality has a positive effect on (a) fWOM and (b) eWOM among telecommunications network users.

H7: Relationship value has a positive effect on (a) fWOM and (b) eWOM among telecommunications network users.

H8: The moderating effect of PEE has a positive influence on Customer Satisfaction and positive eWOM among telecommunications network users in Indonesia.

Research methodology

This study falls under the category of basic research and uses causal research methods to analyze the cause-and-effect relationship between variables (Sugiyono, 2012). This study is quantitative in nature. The independent variables include Service Communication, Service Quality, and Relationship Value. The dependent variables are Trust, Satisfaction, fWOM, and eWOM. The moderating variable is Positive Emotional Experience (PEE). The research population consists of telecommunications network users in Indonesia who meet certain criteria, including having used the network in the last 6 months, being 17 years of age or older, residing in Indonesia, having at least a high school/vocational school/equivalent education, and having visited a telecommunications network service office in the last year. The sampling techniques used were non-probability and snowball sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Hair et al. (1998) and Ferdinand (2002), an appropriate sample size is 100–200 and should not exceed 400. Therefore, this study used a sample of 286 respondents. Data were collected using an online questionnaire via Google Forms. The measurement scale used was a 7-point Likert scale (Jogiyanto, 2014) with (1) meaning strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. Data were processed using Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS version 4 software.

Findings

Results

In the SEM analysis using SmartPLS, there were two measurement models, namely the indicator/measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model). The outer model was assessed using validity and reliability, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. Meanwhile, the inner model was used to test the relationship between the exogenous variable constructs (independent variables) and endogenous variables (dependent variables) that had been hypothesized.

Table 1. Validity Test Results

Indicators		Outer Loading (> 0.5)	Cross Loading (> 0.5)	AVE (> 0.5)
Service Communication	SC1	0.824	0.824	0.574
	SC2	0.689	0.689	
	SC3	0.772	0.772	
	SC4	0.815	0.815	
Service Quality	SQ1	0.812	0.812	0.604
	SQ2	0.690	0.690	
	SQ3	0.742	0.742	
	SQ4	0.760	0.760	
	SQ5	0.742	0.742	
Relationship Value	RV1	0.817	0.817	0.581
	RV2	0.774	0.774	
	RV3	0.756	0.756	
	RV4	0.729	0.729	
	RV5	0.731	0.731	
Satisfaction	CS1	0.843	0.843	0.711
	CS2	0.851	0.851	
	CS3	0.836	0.836	
Trust	TR1	0.836	0.836	0.678
	TR2	0.775	0.775	
	TR3	0.856	0.856	
fWOM	FW1	0.853	0.853	0.752
	FW2	0.853	0.853	
	FW3	0.894	0.894	
eWOM	EW1	0.920	0.920	0.833
	EW2	0.912	0.912	
	EW3	0.906	0.906	
Positive Emotional Experience	PEE1	0.768	0.768	0.574
	PEE2	0.718	0.718	
	PEE3	0.736	0.736	
	PEE4	0.726	0.726	
	PEE5	0.774	0.774	
	PEE6	0.767	0.767	

Indicators	Outer Loading (> 0.5)	Cross Loading (> 0.5)	AVE (> 0.5)
PEE7	0.808	0.808	

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Composite Reliability (rho a) (> 0.5)	Composite Reliability (rho c) (> 0.5)	Cronbach's Alpha (> 0.6)
Service Quality (X1)	0.814	0.814	0.806
Service Communication (X2)	0.789	0.789	0.780
Relationship Value (X3)	0.581	0.581	0.819
Satisfaction (Y1)	0.797	0.797	0.797
Trust (Y2)	0.765	0.765	0.761
fWOM (Y3)	0.838	0.838	0.835
eWOM (Y4)	0.903	0.903	0.900
Positive Emotional Experience (Z)	0.878	0.878	0.876

Evaluation of the Outer Model using 286 respondents showed that all indicators met the cut-off value, confirming that the research instrument met the assumptions of validity and reliability. Next, the inner model was measured to test the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Table 3. R-Square Test Results

Variable	R Square	Adjusted R-Square
Satisfaction	0.620	0.548
Trust	0.549	0.615
fWOM	0.495	0.538
eWOM	0.352	0.338
Positive Emotional Experience	0.550	0.487

Table 3 shows that the R-Square value is 0.620 for the Customer Satisfaction construct and 0.509 for the Trust construct, which means that Service Communication, Service Quality, and Relationship Value can explain Customer Satisfaction and Customer Trust by 62.0% and 50.9%. R-square values are also found in fWOM and eWOM, which are influenced by Service Communication, Service Quality, Relationship Value, Trust, and Satisfaction, namely 49.5% and 35.2%. In the Positive Emotional Experience construct, which is moderated between Customer Satisfaction and eWOM, the value is 55%. Thus, the research model has fairly good predictive ability, especially for Customer Satisfaction and Trust, while for eWOM, the explanatory ability is relatively lower.

Table 4. Hypothesis Test Results

	Indicators	Original Sample	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	p-value	Result
H1a	Service Quality → Trust	0.250	0.101	2.474	0.013*	Significant
H1b	Service Quality → Satisfaction	0.205	0.059	3.492	0.000**	Significant
H2a	Service Communication → Trust	0.162	0.084	1.935	0.053*	Not Significant
H2b	Service Communication → Satisfaction	0.151	0.060	2.513	0.012**	Significant
H3a	Relationship Value → Trust	0.422	0.097	4.336	0.000**	Significant
H3b	Relationship Value → Satisfaction	0.520	0.067	7.780	0.000**	Significant
H4a	Trust → FWOM	0.133	0.096	1.385	0.166ns	Not Significant
H4b	Trust → EWOM	-0.068	0.081	0.838	0.402ns	Not Significant
H5a	Satisfaction → FWOM	0.284	0.073	3.916	0.000**	Significant
H5b	Satisfaction → EWOM	0.174	0.087	1.989	0.047*	Significant
H6a	Service Quality → FWOM	-0.046	0.111	0.416	0.678ns	Not Significant
H6b	Service Quality → EWOM	-0.021	0.208	0.101	0.920ns	Not Significant
H7a	Relationship Value → FWOM	0.392	0.096	4.099	0.000**	Significant
H7b	Relationship Value → EWOM	0.131	0.126	1.038	0.299ns	Not Significant
H8	Positive Emotional Experience x Satisfaction → EWOM	0.037	0.025	1.511	0.131ns	Not Significant

Notes: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ns Not significant at 0.05 level of significance

The results show that service quality significantly predicts both trust (p = 0.000) and satisfaction (p = 0.013), with positive coefficients in each case, while service communication does not reach significance for trust (p = 0.053) but does for satisfaction (p = 0.012), also positively. Relational value emerges as a consistent upstream driver, positively and significantly influencing trust and satisfaction (both p = 0.000). Downstream, trust itself does not translate into either fWOM (p = 0.166; coefficient negative) or eWOM (p = 0.402; coefficient positive), whereas satisfaction does, showing positive, significant effects on both fWOM (p = 0.000) and eWOM (p = 0.047). Direct paths from service quality to fWOM and eWOM are not significant (p = 0.678 and p = 0.920; both negative), suggesting their influence is routed primarily through trust and satisfaction rather than directly to advocacy behaviors. Relational value directly boosts fWOM (p = 0.000; positive) but not eWOM (p = 0.299; positive, non-significant), indicating an offline

skew in its advocacy impact. Finally, the moderating effect of PEE on the satisfaction → eWOM link is positive but non-significant (p = 0.131), implying that, in this sample, emotional experience does not materially change how satisfaction converts into electronic recommendations.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide empirical contributions to the understanding of the relationship between service quality, service communication, relationship value, trust, satisfaction, and word-of-mouth (WOM) behavior in the Indonesian telecommunications sector. The following discussion compares the research results with the findings of Oraedu et al. (2021), Gabbianelli et al. (2022), and Serra-Cantallops et al. (2020) to identify contextual consistency and differences.

First, service quality significantly affects trust and customer satisfaction, so H1a and H1b are accepted. H1a is consistent with the findings of Oraedu et al. (2021), while H1b is in line with the research of (Oraedu et al., 2021; Serra et al., 2020; and Gabbianelli et al., 2022). These studies found that service quality is a strong antecedent in building perceptions of trust and satisfaction in the technology-based service sector. In Indonesia, initiatives such as artificial intelligence-based virtual assistants (e.g., Veronika from Telkomsel) reflect service providers' efforts to improve interaction quality and responsiveness, which directly affect customer experience.

Second, service communication has a significant effect on satisfaction but not on trust, so H2a is rejected and H2b is accepted. This finding differs from Oraedu et al. (2021), who reported a significant effect of service communication on trust. This difference can be explained by disparities in telecommunications infrastructure in Indonesia, especially in rural areas, where limited access reduces the effectiveness of communication even though information is conveyed transparently (Kamilla et al., 2021). In this context, we can conclude that service communication is adequate to meet service expectations, and therefore satisfaction, but not sufficient to build long-term trust.

Third, relationship value shows a significant influence on trust and satisfaction, so H3a and H3b are accepted. These findings are in line with Oraedu et al. (2021). Vargo and Lusch (2004) explain the logic of service dominance, whereby relationship value built through personalization, commitment, and resource integration drives the creation of shared value. Programs such as iManage CRM (Indosat) were created to build emotional closeness with users and to facilitate customers in experiencing the services provided.

Fourth, trust does not significantly affect fWOM or eWOM, so H4a and H4b are rejected. This finding contradicts the findings of Oraedu et al. (2021), who state that trust is a driver of WOM. However, in the context of Indonesia, the high incidence of digital fraud at 32.5% according to the APJII (2024) survey causes consumers to be more cautious in recommending services, even though they trust the provider. This shows that trust and WOM can operate as separate constructs in a risky digital environment.

Fifth, satisfaction has a significant effect on fWOM and eWOM, thus H5a and H5b are accepted. This finding is consistent with Oraedu et al. (2021) and Gabbianelli et al. (2022), who state that satisfaction is the main driver of recommendation behavior, both offline and online. Positive user reviews on social media platforms (e.g., regarding network stability while gaming) illustrate how service experiences that meet or exceed expectations encourage voluntary information dissemination.

Sixth, service quality did not significantly affect fWOM or eWOM, so H6a and H6b were rejected. This indicates that users not only assess service quality based on experience but also on the fulfillment of performance expectations and customer satisfaction, depending on the product. Service quality is not only about customer service, but can also be in the form of fast internet service that meets consumer needs. This finding contradicts Gabbianelli et al. (2022), who emphasize the mediating role of satisfaction

in the relationship between service quality and post-consumption behavior, but is in line with the findings of Oraedu et al. (2021), who state that there is no significant relationship between service quality and fWOM and eWOM.

Seventh, relationship value has a significant effect on fWOM but not on eWOM, so H7a is accepted but H7b is rejected. This difference reflects could be attributed to the cultural preferences. In the Indonesian context, personal (face-to-face) recommendations are considered more authentic and secure than public recommendations in digital spaces, which are vulnerable to negative responses or criticism (Nidhal et al., 2024). These findings are in line with the research conducted by Oraedu et al. (2021).

Finally, the moderating effect of Positive Emotional Experience (PEE) has an insignificant influence on the relationship between satisfaction and eWOM, so H8 is rejected. This finding contradicts Serra-Cantallops et al. (2020), who reported PEE as a significant enhancer of eWOM. In telecom, with recent developments, mobile/data access functions as a largely utilitarian, always-on background service in which "working as expected" satisfies a practical job rather than evoking strong delight; accordingly, continuance and downstream responses tend to be explained mainly by perceived usefulness and service quality–driven satisfaction, leaving little incremental variance for positive-emotion amplification to add on top of satisfaction (Situmorang et al., 2025).

Conclusions

Based on the research findings, Service Quality and Relationship Value are proven to be the main foundations in building trust and user satisfaction in telecommunications networks in Indonesia, with satisfaction being a direct driver of word-of-mouth behavior, both directly (fWOM) and electronically (eWOM). Although Service Communication has a positive effect on satisfaction, its impact on trust is not significant, indicating its limitations in creating long-term bonds, especially in the context of uneven infrastructure. Interestingly, trust itself does not have a direct impact on WOM, indicating that consumers remain cautious in recommending services amid the high risk of digital fraud.

Service Quality does not directly influence WOM, but its role remains central through the mediation of satisfaction, while Relationship Value has a stronger influence on positive fWOM and negative eWOM, reflecting the social and emotional dimensions of customer interactions. Additionally, Positive Emotional Experience (PEE) does not strengthen the relationship between satisfaction and eWOM, so companies should not only rely on emotional aspects but also focus on meeting service expectations from both technical and non-technical perspectives.

Therefore, it is recommended that service providers improve overall service quality, convey convincing information about product advantages over competitors, continue to innovate with the latest technology, and always maintain valuable relationships to maintain customer trust and integrity. For further research, a broader scope is needed in terms of location and respondent profile diversity so that the results are more representative and generalizable, as well as exploring the latest trends in telecommunications network user behavior, given the ever-evolving dynamics of the telecommunications market.

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