

THE INFLUENCE OF PEER PRESSURE ON CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION WITH ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (eWOM) AS AN INTERVENING VARIABLE

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Abstract: *This study aims to examine the influence of peer pressure on conspicuous consumption, with electronic word of mouth (eWOM) serving as an intervening variable. In the digital age, consumer behavior is increasingly shaped not only by direct social interactions but also by virtual peer influence through social media platforms. Peer pressure, particularly among youth and digital-native consumers, often leads individuals to engage in conspicuous consumption to gain social approval. This research employs a quantitative approach using survey data collected from active social media users who frequently engage in product-related discussions online. The results show that peer pressure has a significant positive effect on conspicuous consumption, and this relationship is partially mediated by eWOM. The findings suggest that eWOM intensifies the impact of peer pressure by amplifying social comparison and visibility of consumption behaviors. This study contributes to the understanding of digital-era consumer behavior and offers insights for marketers aiming to build socially engaging brand strategies.*

Keywords: *peer pressure, conspicuous consumption, eWOM, consumer behavior, social media, digital marketing*

Introduction

The rapid development of social media and internet access has transformed the way consumers interact, obtain information, and make consumption choices. In the digital era, consumers are influenced not only by direct social interactions but also by opinions expressed online through reviews, comments, and recommendations shared by peers or social networks on digital platforms. This phenomenon makes conspicuous consumption or consumption aimed at displaying social status an increasingly relevant behavior to study in the contemporary context.

Peer pressure is one of the social factors that plays a significant role in shaping consumer behavior, especially among adolescents and young consumers. Individuals who wish to be accepted or aligned with their peer group tend to follow lifestyles or consumption choices perceived as “cool,” “attractive,” or “prestigious” within their social environment. For example, research on accounting students shows that peer pressure has a positive effect on consumptive behavior (Ningrum & Hamidi, 2025). However, in the digital era, where the consumption of information and opinions is increasingly conducted online, a question arises: is the effect of peer pressure on conspicuous consumption reinforced by digital opinions and recommendations (eWOM)? In other words, does eWOM function as a mediator between peer pressure and conspicuous consumption?

Moreover, eWOM has been proven to be an important factor in modern consumer behavior. Many consumers rely on online reviews, recommendations, and comments before deciding to purchase or display a product. Recent research (Gokerik, 2022) on consumer behavior in social

media shows that social media usage intensity and eWOM play a crucial role in driving the consumption of “conspicuous” goods (Thoumrunroje, 2014).

One example of a product in Indonesia chosen for social status rather than purely functional needs is the iPhone (Novalia, Madnasir, & Nurhayati, 2025). The study also emphasizes the need for a balance between consumptive desires and Islamic ethical values to prevent consumers from falling into excessive consumption behavior. Although peer pressure and eWOM can drive conspicuous consumption, Muslim consumers should still use Islamic ethics as a guiding principle, ensuring that purchasing decisions are not driven solely by desire, prestige, or social influence, but rather by the values of usefulness, simplicity, and social responsibility.

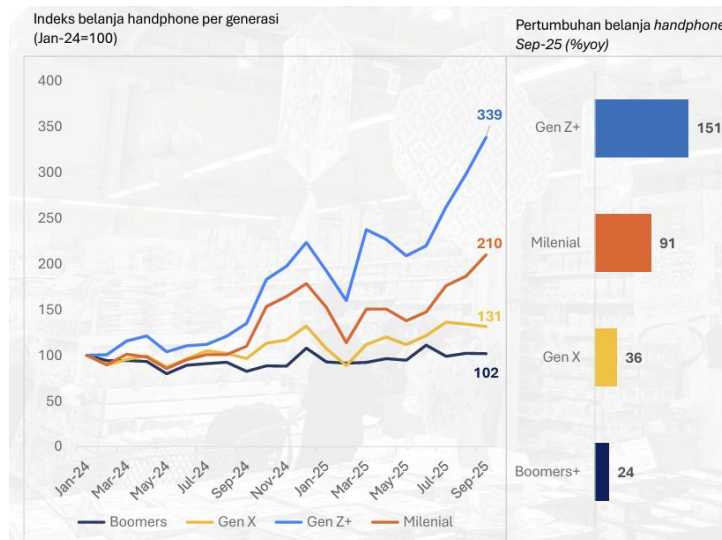


Figure 1. Smartphone Purchase Index by Generation
 Source : cnbcindonesia.com

According to information from CNBC Indonesia, the increase in iPhone sales indicates a **shift** in consumption patterns among the younger generation, where the proportion of spending on smartphones has risen, replacing categories such as hobbies and entertainment. This increase is also in line with the growth of digital activities, including online searches related to technology products. Against this background, this study focuses on gaining a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which peer pressure influences conspicuous consumption and the extent to which eWOM strengthens or mediates this influence.

Based on the background above, several research questions are addressed in this study:

1. Does peer pressure have a significant effect on conspicuous consumption? This question arises because, although peer pressure is often associated with consumptive behavior or social conformity in many studies (e.g., alcohol consumption, adolescent consumption behavior) (Ostarini & Mardianto, 2025), few studies have explicitly linked peer pressure to consumption for status or social image purposes (conspicuous consumption), especially in the digital era.
2. Does digital opinion and recommendation (eWOM) have a significant effect on conspicuous consumption? In the digital context, interactions occur not only face-to-face but also through social media, where users can observe, imitate, and compare the lifestyles of others. eWOM, in the form of comments, reviews, or recommendations from

peers or social networks, can strengthen the drive for conspicuous consumption by increasing visibility and social comparison pressure. Research on the relationship between eWOM and conspicuous/symbolic consumption supports this possibility (Arda, Lubis, Sulistiya, & Silalahi, 2024); (Gokerik, 2022).

3. Does peer pressure have a significant effect on eWOM? This question examines whether peer pressure significantly influences eWOM, as research (Ostarini & Mardianto, 2025) indicates that peer pressure significantly shapes individual behavior through social adjustment, which in the digital context is reflected in activities such as sharing and following information on social media.
4. Does peer pressure affect conspicuous consumption through eWOM? Although previous studies have examined eWOM in relation to purchasing decisions or consumer behavior for certain products (e.g., impulsive buying, purchase intention, loyalty) (Alvira, 2023), few studies have focused on eWOM as a mediator between social pressure and conspicuous consumption. Therefore, there is a need for theoretical and empirical evidence to examine the mediating role of eWOM in the context of status-driven consumption.

Literature Review

Conspicuous consumption was first introduced by (Veblen, 1899) as a type of consumption behavior undertaken not merely to fulfill functional needs, but to display social status and prestige in front of others. Another definition is provided by (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004), who state that conspicuous consumption is an individual’s tendency to purchase and use products with high symbolic value as a means to enhance self-image and gain social recognition. In consumer behavior research, indicators of conspicuous consumption generally include aspects such as the desire to display status, the use of goods to enhance self-image, and the purchase of products perceived as prestigious or luxurious (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004). These indicators are commonly used to measure the extent to which individuals engage in status-oriented consumption. Consumptive behavior can be defined as the tendency to purchase goods or services beyond basic needs, influenced by internal and external factors. One form of this behavior is conspicuous consumption, which involves consuming goods or services with the aim of demonstrating social status, identity, or prestige. Studies on university students indicate that both peer pressure and income are determinants of consumptive behavior (Ningrum & Hamidi, 2025).

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) is defined by (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004) as positive or negative statements made by actual or potential consumers about a product or company, which are available to many individuals and organizations via the internet. Meanwhile, (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008) define eWOM as a form of technology-based informal communication in which consumers share experiences, opinions, and recommendations through digital media such as social media, forums, and review platforms. To measure eWOM, (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004) developed indicators including the intensity of online information seeking, the frequency of providing reviews or recommendations, the tendency to trust reviews, and the influence of online opinions on consumption decisions. These indicators have become key references in digital marketing research. eWOM is a form of communication through digital media in which consumers share information, reviews, recommendations, and experiences about products or services. It affects consumer perceptions of products, brands, and purchasing decisions. In recent literature, eWOM has been linked to conspicuous and symbolic consumption, indicating that exposure to digital opinions and recommendations can encourage consumers to engage in consumption for the sake of status or image (Qattan & Al Khasawneh, 2020).

Peer pressure is defined by (Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986) as the influence exerted by a peer group that encourages an individual to conform to the group's norms, attitudes, or behaviors. Meanwhile, (Santrock, 2011) defines it as a social push in which individuals feel compelled to adjust to the group in order to gain acceptance or avoid rejection. Research on peer pressure often refers to indicators including direct pressure from peers, indirect pressure in the form of group norms, and the individual's desire for social acceptance (Brown, Clasen, & Eicher, 1986). These indicators are widely used in studies on adolescent behavior, social conformity, and consumptive behavior. Peer pressure can be understood as the encouragement from a peer group that motivates an individual to adjust their attitudes, behaviors, or lifestyle to align with the norms or expectations of the group. Numerous social and psychological studies have shown that peer pressure influences various aspects of behavior, such as consumption habits, smoking, alcohol use, and academic behavior (Pantu, Karmiyati, & Winarsunu, 2020). The intensity of social media usage and interactions via social media expands the scope of peer pressure in digital form (virtual peer influence) and strengthens the spread of eWOM (Andriany & Arda, 2019). Based on the theoretical review and literature above, the proposed conceptual framework assumes that peer pressure can directly drive conspicuous consumption, while simultaneously enhancing eWOM, which in turn also influences conspicuous consumption, positioning eWOM as an intervening or mediating variable.

Method

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design, aiming to explain the causal relationships between peer pressure as the independent variable, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as the intervening variable, and conspicuous consumption as the dependent variable. A quantitative approach aligns with (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), who state that quantitative research is used to objectively test relationships between variables through the analysis of numerical data. The use of explanatory research is also supported by (Sugiyono, 2017), who explains that explanatory research aims to identify cause-and-effect relationships among research variables.

The study was conducted using a survey method with an online questionnaire distributed to respondents meeting specific research criteria. According to (Cooper & Schindler, 2014), the survey method is suitable for efficiently obtaining a large amount of primary data. The population of this study consisted of all students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara (UMSU) who have Instagram accounts. Since the exact population size is unknown, the sample was determined using non-probability sampling with purposive sampling. (Sugiyono, 2017) states that purposive sampling is applied when respondents need to be selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives.

The sample size was calculated using Lemeshow's formula for an unknown population. This formula, proposed by (Lemeshow et al, 1990), is commonly used to estimate the minimum sample size in social and health research. With a 95% confidence level, a proportion of 0.5, and a 10% margin of error, the minimum sample size was determined to be 97 respondents. To improve representativeness, the researcher set the sample at 100 respondents. The sample criteria were specific, including active UMSU students, active Instagram users, those who had been influenced by comments or reviews from friends on social media when purchasing products, and those with experience consuming products to demonstrate status or enhance self-image. These criteria align with consumer behavior theory according to (Solomon, 2018), which states that social influence and symbolic motivation are important factors in purchasing decisions.

Data were collected through a Google Form-based questionnaire using a 1–5 Likert scale. The use of a Likert scale refers to (Cooper & Schindler, 2014) and (Sugiyono, 2017), who

mention that this scale is effective for measuring respondents’ attitudes and perceptions. Prior to analysis, the instrument was tested for validity using the Pearson Product Moment test and reliability using Cronbach’s Alpha, following (Ghozali, 2018), who states that an instrument is considered reliable if the alpha value is at least 0.70.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively to describe respondent characteristics and variable response trends. To analyze relationships among variables, path analysis was used with SPSS. According to (Kline, 2015), path analysis is an extension of linear regression used to test direct and indirect effects and assess the presence of mediating variables. The path analysis in this study consisted of two stages: the first regression tested the effect of peer pressure on eWOM, and the second regression tested the effect of peer pressure and eWOM on conspicuous consumption. Classical assumption tests, including normality, multicollinearity, and heteroskedasticity tests, were conducted to ensure the feasibility of the regression model, as explained by (Gujarati & Porter, 2009) in *Basic Econometrics*.

Hypothesis testing was carried out by examining t-values, significance (p-values), and the coefficient of determination (R²), following (Hair et al, 2014), who state that a hypothesis is accepted if the significance value is less than 0.05. Through this methodological framework, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how peer pressure and eWOM interact in influencing conspicuous consumption among UMSU students who are active Instagram users.

Result and Discussion

This study involved 100 respondents from Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara (UMSU) who met the following criteria: active UMSU students, active Instagram users, influenced by comments or reviews from friends on social media when purchasing products, and with experience consuming products to demonstrate status or enhance self-image. The product most frequently consumed for these purposes was mobile phones.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis Results

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	% High Respondents
Peer Pressure	4,2	0,65	70
eWOM	4,0	0,60	75
Conspicuous Consumption	4,1	0,68	65

Source: (SPSS Version 25, 2026)

Based on the survey results, for the Peer Pressure variable, 70% of respondents reported feeling influenced by their peers when purchasing mobile phones or other products. The highest indicator was “wanting to be accepted or recognized by friends”, with a mean of 4.2 (on a 1–5 scale), indicating that peer pressure strongly affects purchasing decisions. For the Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) variable, approximately 75% of respondents were often influenced by friends’ reviews, comments, or testimonials on Instagram before making a purchase. eWOM activities most frequently occurred with mobile phones, fashion items, and gadget accessories. On average, respondents stated that eWOM “helps them choose products that follow trends” (mean = 4.0, 1–5 scale). For the Conspicuous Consumption variable, 65% of respondents admitted buying mobile phones to showcase social status or enhance self-image. The highest

indicator of conspicuous consumption behavior was “purchasing the latest products to appear up-to-date” (mean = 4.1, 1–5 scale). The data indicate that peer pressure and eWOM reinforce each other. Respondents who experienced peer pressure were more likely to actively seek friends’ reviews or comments on Instagram before purchasing. The more eWOM they received, the higher their tendency to engage in conspicuous consumption, particularly in mobile phone purchases. This suggests that eWOM acts as a mediator that strengthens the influence of peer pressure on conspicuous consumption behavior.

The research analysis was conducted using path analysis, consisting of two submodels. Before testing the structural model, classical assumptions were examined to ensure that the data met the requirements for regression analysis. The normality test using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov method showed significance values of 0.072 for Submodel 1 and 0.065 for Submodel 2, indicating that both distributions were normal ($p > 0.05$). The multicollinearity test showed a Tolerance value of 0.884 and a VIF of 1.132 for all variables, indicating no signs of multicollinearity in the model ($VIF < 10$). In addition, the heteroskedasticity test using the Glejser method showed that all significance values were above 0.05, indicating no heteroskedasticity issues. These results suggest that both models meet the classical assumptions and are suitable for further analysis, in accordance with (Gujarati & Porter, 2009), who state that linear regression must satisfy basic assumptions to ensure valid results.

Table 2: Classical Assumption Test for Submodel 1 and Submodel 2

Test	Submodel 1	Submodel 2	Information
Normality (K–S Sig.)	0.072	0.065	Normal
Tolerance	0.884	0.821–0.857	No Multicollinearity
VIF	1.132	1.167–1.218	No Multicollinearity
Heteroscedasticity (Sig.)	0.218	0.244–0.311	No Heteroscedasticity

Source: (SPSS Version 25, 2026)

Submodel 1: Effect of Peer Pressure on eWOM

The regression results indicate that peer pressure has a positive and significant effect on eWOM. This finding reinforces the study by (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004), which emphasizes that social pressure and interpersonal relationships are key drivers of eWOM activity in digital media.

Table 3: Coefficients Submodel 1

Variable	B	Beta	t	Sig
Peer Pressure → eWOM	0,612	0,612	8,945	0,000

Source: (SPSS Version 25, 2026)

The regression results show that **B = 0.612**, indicating that for every one-unit increase in peer pressure, eWOM increases by 0.612 units. The **Beta value of 0.612** suggests that peer pressure has a positive and relatively strong contribution in influencing eWOM. Furthermore,

the **t-value of 8.945** and **Sig. = 0.000** indicate that the effect is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). In other words, peer pressure has a **significant positive effect** on eWOM, meaning that students who experience higher peer pressure are more likely to engage in online word of mouth activities such as posting comments, reviews, or recommendations on social media platforms like Instagram.

Table 4: Anova Submodel 1

Variable	F	Sig	R ²
Peer Pressure → eWOM	80,01	0,000	0,375

Source: (SPSS Version 25, 2026)

Based on the ANOVA results, the regression model shows an **F-value of 80.01**, indicating that the model is strong enough to explain the effect of peer pressure on eWOM. The **significance value (Sig.) of 0.000** is less than 0.05, which means the model is statistically significant, and the influence of peer pressure on eWOM is not due to chance. The **R² value of 0.375** indicates that 37.5% of the variation in eWOM can be explained by peer pressure, while the remaining 62.5% is influenced by other factors not included in the model. These results suggest that peer pressure has a **positive and significant effect** on eWOM, meaning that the greater the peer pressure experienced by students, the higher their tendency to engage in electronic word-of-mouth activities on social media.

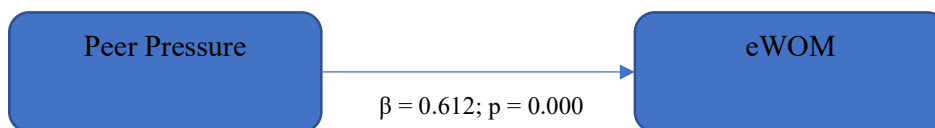


Figure 2. Submodel 1 Diagram (Path Diagram)

Source: (SPSS Version 25, 2026)

Submodel 2: The Effect of Peer Pressure and eWOM on Conspicuous Consumption

The regression results indicate that both peer pressure and eWOM have a significant effect on conspicuous consumption. This finding is consistent with (O’Cass & McEwen, 2004), who explain that conspicuous consumption arises from individuals’ social need to display status and becomes stronger when influenced by digital social opinions such as eWOM (Litvin et al., 2008); (Thoumrunroje, 2014).

Table 5: Coefficients Submodel 2

Variable	B	Beta	t	Sig
Peer Pressure → Conspicuous Consumption	0.331	0.331	4.282	0.000
eWOM → Conspicuous Consumption	0.447	0.447	6.215	0.000

Source: (SPSS Version 25, 2026)

Based on the regression results for Submodel 2, **peer pressure has a B value of 0.331 and a Beta of 0.331**, with a **t-value of 4.282** and **Sig. = 0.000**, indicating a positive and statistically

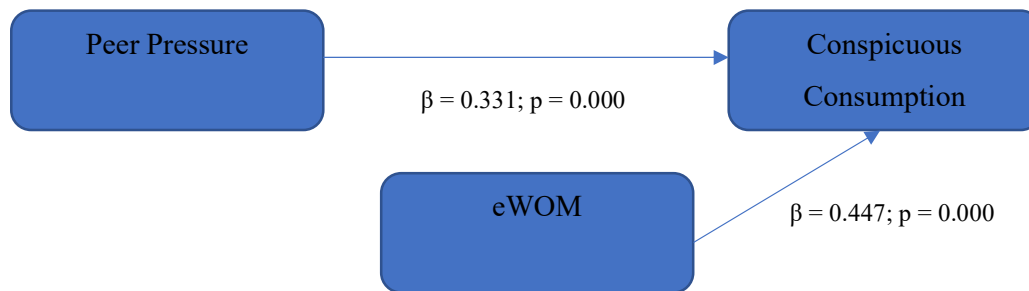
significant effect on conspicuous consumption. This means that an increase in peer pressure leads to a corresponding increase in conspicuous consumption among students. Similarly, eWOM shows a B value of 0.447 and a Beta of 0.447, with a t-value of 6.215 and Sig. = 0.000, demonstrating that eWOM also has a strong and significant positive influence on conspicuous consumption. Overall, these results suggest that both peer pressure and eWOM significantly drive students' tendency to engage in conspicuous consumption behaviors, such as purchasing products to enhance social status or self-image.

Table 6: Anova Submodel 2

Variable	F	Sig	R ²
Peer Pressure & eWOM → Conspicuous Consumption	67.92	0.000	0.586

Source: (SPSS Version 25, 2026)

Based on the ANOVA results for Submodel 2, the regression model shows an F-value of 67.92, indicating that the model is strong and suitable for explaining the effect of peer pressure and eWOM on conspicuous consumption. The significance value (Sig.) of 0.000 is less than 0.05, meaning that the model is statistically significant and the combined effect of peer pressure and eWOM on conspicuous consumption is not due to chance. The R² value of 0.586 indicates that 58.6% of the variation in conspicuous consumption can be explained by the two independent variables, while the remaining 41.4% is influenced by other factors outside the model. These results suggest that both peer pressure and eWOM play an important and significant role in driving students' conspicuous consumption behaviors.



Gambar 3. Submodel 2 Diagram (Path Diagram)

Source: (SPSS Version 25, 2026)

Direct Effect, Indirect Effect, and Total Effect

The effect was calculated using path coefficients (beta). Mediation was assessed using the Baron & Kenny approach, in accordance with the guidelines for path analysis outlined by (Kline,2015).

1. Direct Effect

- a. Peer Pressure → eWOM = 0.612
- b. Peer Pressure → Conspicuous Consumption = 0.331
- c. eWOM → Conspicuous Consumption = 0.447

2. Indirect Effect

Peer Pressure → eWOM → Conspicuous Consumption : $0.612 \times 0.447 = 0.273$

3. Total Effect

$0.331 + 0.273 = 0.604$

These results indicate that the mediation is partial, as the direct effect remains significant but decreases when the eWOM variable is included. This finding supports the theory that social media amplifies social pressure in the context of consumption (Solomon, 2018). Students who experience peer pressure are further motivated to purchase “conspicuous” products when exposed to reviews, recommendations, and encouragement from online friends through eWOM.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that peer pressure has a positive and significant effect on conspicuous consumption among Instagram-using students at UMSU. Furthermore, peer pressure also has a significant effect on eWOM, and eWOM partially mediates the effect of peer pressure on conspicuous consumption. In other words, peer pressure not only motivates students to purchase products to display status or enhance self-image, but its impact is strengthened through interactions and opinions shared online via social media. These findings confirm that, in a digital context, eWOM serves as an important mechanism that amplifies the influence of social pressure on symbolic consumption behavior.

For marketing practitioners, these results highlight the importance of leveraging eWOM strategies through social media to build product images that appeal to young consumers who are sensitive to peer pressure. Companies can encourage positive reviews, testimonials, or digital interactions that increase the social visibility of their products. For future research, it is recommended to expand the sample across multiple universities or cities and to consider additional variables such as personal motivation or other psychological factors that may influence the relationship between peer pressure, eWOM, and conspicuous consumption, in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of digital consumer behavior

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