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Price Perception and E-WOM Effects on Brand Image and Purchase Intention in Air India

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Abstract: This research was conducted to find out the influence of Price and Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) through Brand Image as an intervening variable on Purchase Intention in Air India Airlines. The population in this study were respondents from various countries who had prior experience and familiarity with Air India. The study employed purposive sampling and adopted a quantitative design using SEM-PLS through SmartPLS. A total of 200 responses were collected via structured questionnaires. The results show that both Price and e-WOM significantly impact Brand Image. However, e-WOM does not significantly affect Purchase Intention, directly or indirectly, while Price and Brand Image have a significant direct influence on Purchase Intention. This study contributes to the literature on airline marketing by highlighting the mediating role of brand image in emerging markets, offering strategic insights for airlines seeking digital reputation recovery

Keywords: Price, Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), Brand Image, Purchase Intention, Air India, Airline Industry

INTRODUCTION

Air India operates as India's legacy full-service carrier and has long played a central role in the country's aviation industry. Following its recent privatization and organizational restructuring, the airline faces increasing competitive pressure from both low-cost and full-service carriers in a rapidly liberalized market (INJRD, 2023; Jayathilakan et al., 2024). These structural changes require the company not only to improve operational performance but also to strengthen its brand positioning and consumer trust. In such a competitive environment, understanding how consumers evaluate price fairness, form brand perceptions, and are

influenced by electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) becomes critical in shaping purchase intention. Therefore, examining these behavioral factors provides important insights into Air India's ability to sustain competitiveness and rebuild its market image.

Prior studies consistently highlight price perception and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) as important determinants of consumer decision-making, with brand image often functioning as a mediating mechanism that links these factors to purchase intention. Research across various contexts indicates that positive online reviews enhance consumer attitudes and buying intentions, while credible, high-quality, and high-volume e-WOM strengthens brand evaluations and purchasing behavior (Hassan et al., 2020; Welser, 2020). In the airline industry specifically, ticket pricing has been found to significantly influence passengers' attitudes and airline choice, particularly in price-sensitive markets, and a strong brand image has been shown to directly increase consumers' willingness to purchase tickets (Chen et al., 2024; Truong et al., 2020).

However, empirical findings remain inconsistent across settings. Some studies report that price or brand image may not independently determine purchase intention, but instead operate jointly with promotional or contextual factors (Rivera & Rachmawati, 2023). Other evidence suggests that e-WOM does not always exert a significant effect, depending on industry characteristics and consumer priorities (Astuti & Rahmawati, 2023). These mixed results indicate that the relationships among price perception, e-WOM, brand image, and purchase intention may vary across markets and sectors. Despite growing research in different countries, limited evidence addresses these mechanisms within the South Asian aviation context, particularly for legacy airlines undergoing post-privatization transformation, such as Air India.

Despite extensive research on price perception and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), findings regarding their effects on brand image and purchase intention remain inconsistent across industries and markets. Moreover, empirical evidence is still limited within the South Asian aviation context, particularly for legacy airlines undergoing post-privatization transformation such as Air India. This lack of context-specific understanding restricts insights into how pricing strategies and online consumer discourse shape passengers' brand evaluations and behavioral intentions. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effects of price perception and e-WOM on purchase intention, with brand image serving as a mediating variable, in order to provide empirical evidence for Air India's competitive positioning.

Price perception, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), brand image, and purchase intention represent key constructs in consumer decision-making. Rather than merely reflecting the monetary cost of a service, price perception captures consumers' evaluation of price fairness, affordability, and value received, which may directly influence both brand evaluations and behavioral intentions (Kotler & Armstrong, 2023; Lien et al., 2015). In competitive service industries such as airlines, ticket pricing serves not only as a financial consideration but also as a signal of service quality and positioning, thereby shaping how consumers perceive and assess the brand (Padmanaban & Sanjai, 2025).

Similarly, e-WOM functions as a powerful informational and persuasive mechanism in digital environments, where online reviews, comments, and shared experiences influence consumer attitudes and reduce perceived risk. Compared with firm-generated promotions, peer-generated information is often considered more credible, enabling e-WOM credibility, quantity, and quality to shape brand evaluations and purchasing decisions (Hassan et al., 2020; Kotler et al., 2021; Obaidullah et al., 2021). Through these mechanisms, consumers form brand image, defined as their cognitive and emotional associations with a brand, which subsequently guides their likelihood of purchase. A favorable brand image strengthens trust and preference, thereby increasing purchase intention as a psychological indicator of future buying behavior (Atito et al., 2023; Bilal et al., 2021; Das & Shome, 2024; Du & Tham, 2024).

There are four variables measured on this research, Price (X1), E-WOM (X2), Brand Image (Z), and Purchase Intention (Y). The hypothesis in this study are:

1. **H1:** Price Perception has influence on Brand Image.
2. **H2:** eWOM has influence on Brand Image.
3. **H3:** Price Perception has influence on Purchase Intention.
4. **H4:** eWOM has influence on Purchase Intention.
5. **H5:** Brand Image has influence on Purchase Intention.
6. **H6:** Price Perception has influence on Purchase Intention through Brand Image.
7. **H7:** eWOM has influence on Purchase Intention through Brand Image.

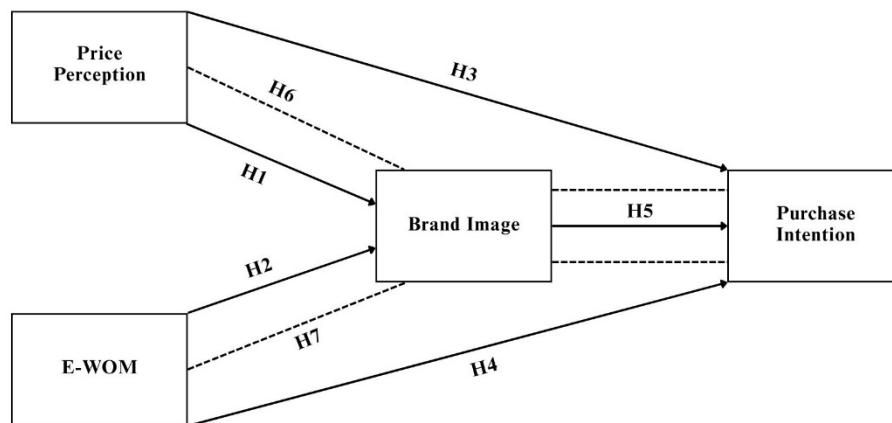


Figure 1. Research Model

This study offers several contributions to the literature. First, it provides empirical evidence from the South Asian aviation context, which remains underexplored compared to Western and East Asian markets. Second, it focuses on a legacy airline undergoing post-privatization transformation, offering insight into how structural and reputational changes influence consumer decision-making. Third, by employing an international respondent base, the study captures diverse cross-cultural perceptions toward Air India rather than relying on a single domestic market. Finally, the findings challenge dominant assumptions in prior research by demonstrating that brand image exerts a stronger influence on purchase intention than e-WOM, suggesting that reputation-based evaluations may outweigh online word-of-mouth effects in high-risk service industries such as aviation.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach to examine the relationships among key variables through survey data, following standard practices in quantitative research (Younus & Zaidan, 2022). The population comprises individuals who have prior experience with Air India, and a purposive sample of 200 respondents was selected according to specific research criteria to ensure relevant and meaningful responses (Hair et al., 2021; Rahman, 2023). Data were collected in August 2025 using an online survey administered via Google Forms with a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5) (Koo & Yang, 2025). Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized relationships between latent and observed variables, providing a robust method for evaluating model fit and examining direct and mediating effects (Miller et al., 2020). The measurement model’s reliability and validity were assessed using standard criteria, including Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Cronbach’s Alpha, and bootstrapping procedures, in line with established guidelines (Hair et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh, 2022). Discriminant validity was

ensured using standard procedures. This study uses a cross-sectional design and relies on self-reported survey data, which may limit causal inference and introduce response bias.

Tabel 1 Measurement of variables

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicator
Price	Price can be defined as the total value that consumers are willing to sacrifice in exchange for the benefits derived from acquiring or using a product or service (Kotler & Armstrong, 2023).	(Lien et al., 2015) 1. The price is inexpensive Responsiveness 2. The price is reasonable 3. The price is affordable 4. The price is appropriate (Arif, 2019) 1. Price competitiveness 2. Price suitability with product benefit.
Electronic Word of Mouth	Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) functions similarly to traditional word-of-mouth, with the distinction that communications occur digitally via the Internet. The pervasive accessibility of online platforms has made eWOM a highly influential channel for sharing information about a company's products and services, impacting consumer perceptions, business strategies, and public awareness (Hassan et al., 2020).	(Hassan et al., 2020) 1. Reviews are clear and understandable 2. Reviews are helpful 3. Reviews have sufficient supporting reasons 4. Reviews are high quality 5. Large number of reviews available 6. Quantity of reviews shows airline safety 7. Recommendations provide high-quality choices.
Brand Image	Brand image encompasses consumers' cognitive and emotional assessments, as well as the collective information, associations, and attitudes that they attribute to and communicate about a brand. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2023).	(Shafiee et al., 2014) 1. People think this aircraft is a decent option for flying. 2. This aeroplane behaves like one would expect from an aircraft. 3. Favourable opinions on this airplane's attributes.

		<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Superiority and advantage: the airplane's unique and distinctive standing in relation to rivals.5. The exhilarating and alluring aeroplane (the pleasure of flying).6. Interest in and favourable sentiments about aeroplanes.7. The aircraft is exquisite, opulent, and smooth.
Purchase Intention	Purchase intention can be understood as a consumer's deliberate consideration or plan to acquire a branded product. (Chen et al., 2024).	(Das & Shome, 2024) <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Intention to buy airline services2. Preference for this airline over others3. Willingness to recommend airline to others4. Belief airline fits travel needs5. Freedom of choice to fly with this airline

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to statistics acquired from distributing questionnaires to 200 respondents using a purposive sample method, The demographic profile reveals that the majority of respondents were young adults (86.5% aged 18–23), with most being students (80.5%) and well-educated, as 47.5% hold a Bachelor's degree. Gender distribution was relatively balanced (56% female, 44% male). In terms of nationality, the largest group of participants came from Indonesia, followed by respondents from India, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Slovakia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Kenya, Pakistan, Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, Brazil, Netherlands, Sri Lanka, United Kingdom, Germany, Ghana, Egypt, Canada, France, Namibia, Uganda, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, St Cathrine Jamaica, Turkey, Rwanda. This international distribution strengthens the relevance of the study by capturing diverse perspectives toward Air India across different cultural and geographic backgrounds. Regarding flight frequency, the majority were occasional travelers, flying 0–1 times per year (52%) or 2–3 times (35.5%), with only a small proportion traveling more frequently.

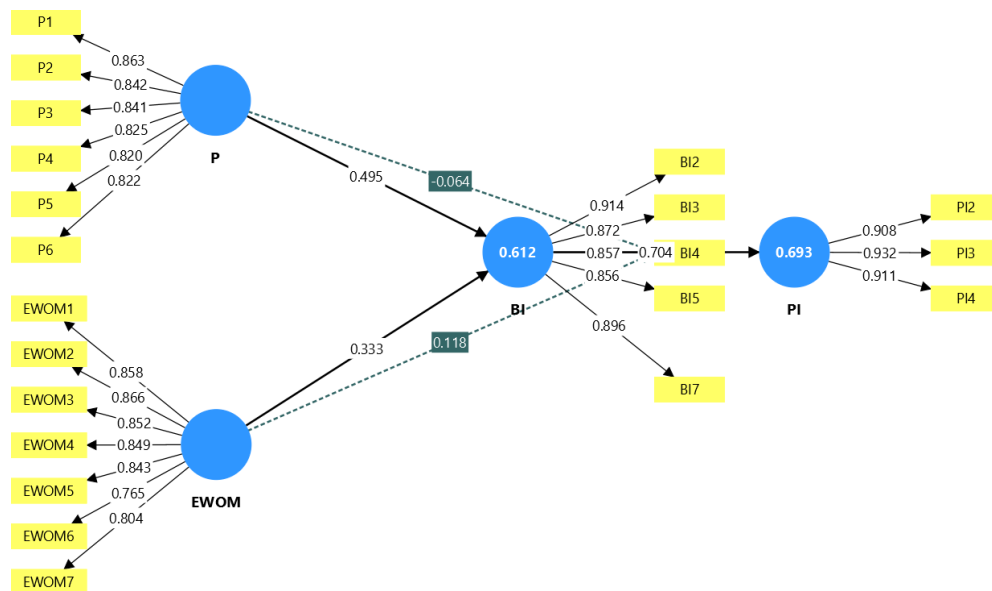


Figure 2. Loading Factor
Source: (SmartPLS 4 Output)

The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability. All indicators achieved outer loadings above 0.70, confirming convergent validity. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, while Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability values were above 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency across constructs. Discriminant validity assessed using the HTMT criterion also met the recommended threshold of below 0.90 (Hair et al., 2021). Overall, these findings confirm that the constructs demonstrate adequate reliability and are suitable for examining the structural relationships among variables in the subsequent analysis stage.

	Brand Image	E-Word of Mouth	Price	Purchase Intention	P x BI	EWOM x BI
Brand Image						
E-Word of Mouth	0.758					
Price	0.811	0.839				
Purchase Intention	0.897	0.659	0.745			
P x BI	0.146	0.346	0.271	0.118		
EWOM x BI	0.194	0.352	0.325	0.106	0.741	

Source: (SmartPLS 4 Output)

The structural model demonstrates substantial explanatory power. Brand Image explains 61.2% of its variance, while Purchase Intention accounts for 69.3%, indicating that the proposed variables meaningfully predict consumer behavior. Hypothesis testing using bootstrapping shows several significant direct effects, particularly the strong influence of Brand Image on Purchase Intention, as well as the effects of e-WOM and Price on Brand Image. Meanwhile, several direct and interaction paths are not statistically significant, suggesting that not all predictors contribute equally to purchase decisions.

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
BI -> PI	0.704	0.693	0.073	9.611	0.000
E-WOM -> BI	0.333	0.344	0.103	3.237	0.001
E-WOM -> PI	0.006	0.034	0.093	0.064	0.949
E-WOM x BI -> PI	0.118	0.144	0.084	1.399	0.162
P -> BI	0.495	0.486	0.103	4.832	0.000
P -> PI	0.171	0.159	0.087	1.966	0.049
P x BI -> PI	-0.064	-0.086	0.082	0.778	0.436

Source: (SmartPLS 4 Output)

Brand Image exerts the strongest positive influence on Purchase Intention, confirming its central role in shaping consumer decisions. Beyond statistical significance, this finding suggests that a favorable brand image reduces perceived risk, strengthens trust, and simplifies decision-making, factors that are particularly important in the airline industry where safety, reliability, and reputation are critical. When consumers perceive Air India positively, they are more confident in committing to purchase. This result supports prior studies emphasizing the strategic importance of brand perception in aviation contexts, including (Nastiti et al., 2021). This result is particularly important because many previous studies position e-WOM as a direct driver of purchase intention. In contrast, our findings indicate that for legacy airlines such as Air India, long-term brand reputation outweighs short-term online opinions, highlighting the contextual nature of consumer decision-making in high-risk service industries.

Electronic word-of-mouth significantly enhances Brand Image, indicating that online reviews and shared experiences contribute to shaping consumers' overall perceptions of the airline. This finding aligns with (Al Qaimari et al., 2021), who highlight the growing influence of digital communication on brand evaluations.

However, e-WOM does not directly influence Purchase Intention. This suggests that, within the airline context, online opinions may function primarily as supplementary information rather than decisive purchase triggers. Given the relatively high perceived risk associated with air travel, consumers appear to rely more heavily on established brand reputation and reliability than on individual online comments. Thus, the effect of e-WOM is more indirect, operating mainly through the formation of brand image. While this finding contrasts with (Tarkang et al., 2022), it is consistent with (Zahid & Ruswanti, 2024). This finding contributes theoretically by challenging the widely accepted assumption that e-WOM directly determines purchase intention, suggesting that its role may be primarily indirect and perception-building rather than transactional in the airline context.

The mediation and interaction effects involving Brand Image are largely insignificant. Brand Image does not significantly mediate the relationships between e-WOM or Price and Purchase Intention, indicating that these variables influence consumers primarily through direct perception-building rather than indirect mechanisms. This suggests that purchase decisions are driven more by immediate evaluations of brand credibility than by complex mediation processes. Although these results differ from (Hassan et al., 2020) and (Purba et al., 2021), they align with (Ramli et al., 2025), highlighting contextual differences across industries.

Price positively influences Brand Image and shows a modest direct effect on Purchase Intention. This indicates that consumers interpret reasonable pricing as a signal of value and credibility, thereby strengthening their evaluation of the airline. Consistent with (Purba et al., 2021), price contributes to purchase decisions, although its impact is weaker than that of brand image and is insufficient on its own to strongly drive intention.

Price plays both economic and psychological roles; consistent with the Perceived Value Theory (Zeithaml, 1988), fair pricing signals reliability and value-for-money, enhancing brand evaluation and purchase intention.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the central role of Brand Image and Price in shaping consumers' purchase intentions toward Air India. Brand Image emerges as the strongest predictor, indicating that trust, reliability, and positive brand perceptions are more decisive than other factors in airline selection. Price also directly influences both Brand Image and Purchase Intention, suggesting that perceptions of fairness and value-for-money remain critical in consumers' evaluations. In contrast, e-WOM primarily contributes indirectly by strengthening brand perceptions rather than directly driving purchasing decisions.

Theoretically, these findings emphasize the dominant role of brand-related evaluations over informational cues in high-risk service industries such as aviation. Practically, the results suggest that strengthening brand credibility and maintaining fair pricing strategies are more impactful than relying solely on online reviews. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its cross-sectional design and focus on a single airline, which may restrict generalizability.

Theoretical Contributions

Theoretically, this study extends consumer behavior and airline marketing literature by demonstrating that brand image plays a dominant mediating and direct role in purchase decisions, while e-WOM exerts only an indirect influence. This contrasts with prior findings that emphasize e-WOM as a primary determinant. By situating the analysis within a post-privatization legacy airline and an international customer base, the study provides context-specific insights that enrich existing models predominantly tested in low-cost or domestic airline settings.

Implications

For practice, Air India should prioritize consistent service quality, punctuality, and transparent pricing to reinforce customer trust and perceived value. Managing online engagement and customer reviews remains important, as e-WOM supports brand perception even if it does not directly influence purchase intention.

Research limitations

This study focuses exclusively on Air India and a limited set of variables, which may not capture all determinants of purchase intention. Future studies are encouraged to include additional factors such as service quality, promotions, or loyalty programs, and to apply comparative or longitudinal designs to enhance generalizability.

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