



From Negative eWOM to Brand Switching: The Role of Boycott Motivation and Variety Seeking

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Negative eWOM;
Boycott Motivation;
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This study aims to examine the effect of Negative Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) on Switching Intention, both directly and indirectly through Boycott Motivation and Variety Seeking as mediating variables. A quantitative research approach was employed using data collected from 200 Pizza Hut consumers who were active on social media. Data were obtained through an online questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4, including bootstrapping to assess mediation effects. The results show that Negative eWOM positively and significantly affects Boycott Motivation, Variety Seeking, and Switching Intention. Boycott Motivation also has a positive and significant effect on Switching Intention and significantly mediates the relationship between Negative eWOM and Switching Intention. In contrast, Variety Seeking does not significantly affect Switching Intention and does not mediate the relationship between Negative eWOM and Switching Intention. The findings imply that negative digital information can directly encourage switching intentions while also strengthening boycott motivation as the dominant psychological mechanism underlying brand switching. These findings highlight the importance of proactive digital reputation management, effective service recovery, and transparent communication to reduce boycott motivation and consumer switching.

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INTRODUCTION

Consumer switching in the food and beverage industry has become an important social issue because consumers increasingly make purchase decisions under the influence of information circulating through digital platforms. Negative electronic word of mouth can rapidly shape public perceptions, strengthen collective judgments, and alter consumers' willingness to continue supporting a brand (Rita et al., 2026; Sameeni et al., 2024). This issue matters

beyond individual purchasing because repeated online narratives can influence social norms, ethical consumption, and the survival of businesses that depend on consumer loyalty (Liu et al., 2024). Pizza Hut Indonesia provides a relevant context because declining consumer support can affect employees, suppliers, franchise operations, and broader economic activity. Understanding why consumers move away from a brand is therefore important for society and business sustainability. Evidence from the company's recent performance indicates pressure on sales and operations. Consequently, examining how negative eWOM shapes switching intention can explain and support retention strategies (Alshreef et al., 2023).

This study draws on consumer behavior and social influence perspectives to explain relationships among negative electronic word of mouth, boycott motivation, variety seeking, and switching intention. Negative eWOM represents externally generated information that can influence perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral responses toward a brand (Diyani et al., 2026). Boycott motivation reflects an ethical, social, or value-based willingness to reject a brand and discontinue consumption. Variety seeking represents an exploratory tendency to consider different products or brands because of boredom, curiosity, or a desire for change. Switching intention refers to the consumer's planned or desired movement from a current brand toward an alternative (Yao & Yao, 2023). These concepts can be integrated through a push-oriented behavioral perspective: negative information creates psychological pressure, boycott motivation expresses rejection based on values, variety seeking encourages exploration of alternatives, and switching intention represents the behavioral tendency (Ribeiro & Kalro, 2023). Therefore, the model examines value-driven and exploration-driven mechanisms.

The general problem underlying this research is the difficulty consumers face when making stable brand choices in an environment characterized by digital communication, ethical controversy, and abundant alternatives. In the Pizza Hut Indonesia context, negative online conversations associated with boycott narratives may reduce trust and weaken consumers' attachment to the brand. At the same time, consumers can easily identify substitute food and beverage brands through social media, delivery applications, promotions, and peer recommendations (Damayanti & Sumayyah, 2024). This combination creates two possible responses (Musyarofah et al., 2025). First, consumers may reject Pizza Hut because they perceive continued consumption as inconsistent with their values or social expectations. Second, they may explore competing brands because negative information reduces their motivation to remain with the existing choice (Putra & Suasana, 2026). These responses can occur simultaneously, making switching intention difficult to explain through a single psychological mechanism. Research is needed to explain how negative eWOM creates switching intentions.

Previous studies have demonstrated that negative eWOM can influence purchase decisions, brand perceptions, and behavioral intentions. Other research has examined boycott behavior as a response to ethical, political, social, or reputational controversies, while studies of variety seeking have emphasized consumers' desire for novelty and alternative experiences. Research on switching intention has likewise identified dissatisfaction, alternative attractiveness, perceived risk, and consumer characteristics as determinants. However, these literature streams have often developed separately (Xuan & Bowden, 2023). Studies focusing on negative eWOM frequently emphasize direct consequences, whereas boycott research concentrates on collective or value-based rejection, and variety-seeking research focuses on exploratory consumption. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how the same negative digital information can simultaneously activate a moral rejection pathway and an exploratory pathway (Dana et al., 2023). This limitation is important because consumers exposed to boycott-related eWOM may switch for different reasons, which direct-effect models cannot capture. Thus, an integrated explanation remains necessary.

The second limitation concerns contextual and explanatory integration. Existing research provides evidence that negative eWOM may increase unfavorable attitudes and switching tendencies, yet fewer studies examine boycott motivation and variety seeking as parallel mediators between negative eWOM and switching intention within the food and beverage industry. The distinction matters because boycott motivation reflects deliberate rejection grounded in perceived values, whereas variety seeking reflects a desire to experience alternatives (Qotrunnada & Auliya, 2026). Treating these mechanisms as equivalent may obscure differences in consumer decision processes. Furthermore, the Indonesian Pizza Hut context offers a setting in which digital communication, social pressure, ethical considerations, purchasing convenience, and intense competition intersect. Addressing this gap is important because managers need to understand whether consumers reject, seek alternatives, or experience both motivations (Wardhani et al., 2025). This study positions these mechanisms together within one integrated framework for explaining consumer switching behavior in digital environments (Pulungan & Widodo, 2023; Ramadanti et al., 2025).

The novelty of this study lies in simultaneously testing two distinct mediating pathways connecting negative eWOM with switching intention: boycott motivation as a value-driven pathway and variety seeking as an exploration-driven pathway. Rather than viewing switching as a simple consequence of dissatisfaction or negative information, the study explains how consumers translate digital exposure into different motivations before

developing an intention to change brands. The research also contributes a context-specific perspective by focusing on Pizza Hut consumers in Indonesia, where digital boycott narratives and competitive food and beverage markets create a relevant behavioral environment. This state of the art is important because firms facing negative online communication need more than general reputation-management strategies; they need to understand the psychological mechanism behind consumer departure. By distinguishing the two mediators, the study can provide clearer theoretical explanations and practical implications for designing communication, product, promotional, and customer-retention strategies during periods of reputational pressure.

The research problem addressed in this study is whether negative electronic word of mouth increases consumers' switching intention toward alternative food and beverage brands, and whether this relationship operates through boycott motivation and variety seeking. The proposed argument is that exposure to negative eWOM can strengthen consumers' motivation to reject Pizza Hut when information is relevant to their values and social judgments. Negative eWOM can also stimulate variety seeking by reducing consumers' desire to remain with the focal brand and encouraging exploration of competing alternatives. Both motivations are expected to increase switching intention, while negative eWOM may directly influence switching intention. Accordingly, boycott motivation and variety seeking are complementary mediators. Testing these relationships can clarify why consumers exposed to negative digital narratives move away from a familiar brand and whether value-based rejection or exploratory behavior provides the stronger explanatory pathway.

Based on the research problem, theoretical framework, and arguments developed above, the hypotheses are formulated as follows:

H1: Negative Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) has a positive effect on Boycott Motivation.

H2: Negative Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) has a positive effect on Variety Seeking.

H3: Boycott Motivation has a positive effect on Switching Intention.

H4: Variety Seeking has a positive effect on Switching Intention.

H5: Negative Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) has a positive effect on Switching Intention.

H6: Negative Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) has a positive effect on Switching Intention through Boycott Motivation.

H7: Negative Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) has a positive effect on Switching Intention through Variety Seeking.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative explanatory research design to examine the direct and indirect relationships among Negative Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Boycott Motivation, Variety Seeking, and Switching Intention (Damayanti & Sumayyah, 2024). The explanatory design was selected because the study aims to test the proposed causal relationships and examine the mediating roles of Boycott Motivation and Variety Seeking in the relationship between Negative eWOM and Switching Intention. The research was conducted among Pizza Hut consumers in Indonesia. Indonesia was selected as the research setting because Pizza Hut operates extensively in the country and has experienced substantial challenges related to changes in consumer behavior, negative online communication, and boycott-related discussions. The population consisted of consumers who had experience purchasing Pizza Hut products in Indonesia (Jaafar & Herna, 2024). A sample of 200 respondents was determined using purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were respondents aged at least 17 years, who had purchased Pizza Hut products at least three times during the previous six months, had been exposed to online boycott information or negative reviews concerning Pizza Hut, and had experience consuming alternative brands.

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire distributed to eligible respondents. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to measure respondents' perceptions and behavioral intentions. The questionnaire consisted of measurement items representing four research constructs: Negative eWOM, Boycott Motivation, Variety Seeking, and Switching Intention (Panjaitan & Indrawati, 2025). Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation. Only respondents who met all predetermined inclusion criteria were included in the analysis. The purposive sampling technique was considered appropriate because the study required respondents with specific experiences relevant to the research variables, particularly exposure to negative eWOM and boycott-related information as well as experience with alternative brands. The collected responses were subsequently screened to ensure completeness and consistency before proceeding to the statistical analysis (Kania & Salsabila, 2023).

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This analytical technique was selected because the proposed research model contains multiple constructs and includes both direct relationships and mediation effects. Data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, the measurement model was evaluated to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs through indicators such as indicator loadings, internal

consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Maru & Vijay, 2024). Second, the structural model was evaluated to examine the hypothesized relationships among Negative eWOM, Boycott Motivation, Variety Seeking, and Switching Intention. The analysis included the assessment of path coefficients, significance levels, coefficient of determination, and effect sizes where appropriate. Bootstrapping was also employed to test the significance of the indirect effects, thereby determining whether Boycott Motivation and Variety Seeking significantly mediate the relationship between Negative eWOM and Switching Intention. This procedure enabled the study to evaluate both direct and indirect effects within the proposed model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondents' Characteristics

The characteristics of the respondents were examined to provide an overview of the demographic composition of the 200 consumers participating in this study. The respondent profile was classified according to age, gender, employment status, domicile, average monthly income, and frequently used social media applications. These characteristics are important for describing the background of the respondents and providing contextual information regarding the sample used to examine Negative eWOM, Boycott Motivation, Variety Seeking, and Switching Intention. The distribution of respondents across each demographic category is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Item	f	%
Age	17–25 years	86	43.0
	26–35 years	89	44.5
	36–45 years	21	10.5
	More than 45 years	4	2.0
	Total	200	100
Gender	Male	68	34.0
	Female	132	66.0
	Total	200	100
Employment Status	Student	44	22.0
	Private-sector employee	64	32.0
	Civil servant	33	16.5
	Entrepreneur	18	9.0
	Homemaker	41	20.5
	Total	200	100
Domicile	Sumatra	31	15.5
	Java	82	41.0
	Lesser Sunda Islands (Bali, Nusa Tenggara,	19	9.5

	Maluku, and surrounding areas)		
	Kalimantan	49	24.5
	Sulawesi	18	9.0
	Papua	1	0.5
	Total	200	100
Average Monthly Income	Less than IDR 1,000,000	16	8.0
	IDR 1,000,000–2,500,000	31	15.5
	IDR 2,500,001–4,000,000	65	32.5
	Above IDR 4,000,000	88	44.0
	Total	200	100
Frequently Used Social Media Applications*	WhatsApp	200	100.0
	Instagram	184	92.0
	TikTok	200	100.0
	Facebook	69	34.5
	Twitter	98	49.0
	Telegram	16	8.0
	YouTube	200	100.0

Note: Social media application responses may exceed 100% because respondents could select more than one application.

Source: Processed by the researchers, 2026

Based on Table 1, the respondents were predominantly aged 26–35 years, accounting for 89 respondents (44.5%), followed by those aged 17–25 years with 86 respondents (43.0%). Respondents aged 36–45 years represented 10.5%, while those above 45 years accounted for only 2.0%. In terms of gender, females constituted the majority of the sample, with 132 respondents (66.0%), whereas males accounted for 68 respondents (34.0%). Regarding employment status, private-sector employees represented the largest group with 64 respondents (32.0%), followed by students (22.0%), homemakers (20.5%), civil servants (16.5%), and entrepreneurs (9.0%). Based on domicile, most respondents were from Java (41.0%), followed by Kalimantan (24.5%) and Sumatra (15.5%). In terms of monthly income, the largest group earned above IDR 4,000,000 (44.0%). For social media usage, WhatsApp, TikTok, and YouTube were each used by 100% of respondents, while Instagram was used by 92.0%. These characteristics indicate that the sample primarily consisted of young to middle-aged consumers who were highly exposed to digital communication platforms.

Measurement Model

Before testing the structural relationships among the constructs, the measurement model was evaluated to determine whether the indicators adequately represented their respective latent variables. The assessment focused on indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity. Indicator reliability was assessed through standardized outer loadings, while internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite

Reliability (CR). Convergent validity was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The results of the measurement model assessment are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Standardized Loading Factor, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	Items	Loading Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Negative eWOM	I frequently encounter many negative reviews about Pizza Hut on social media.	0.776	0.701	0.825	0.614
	I feel that negative reviews about Pizza Hut posted on social media are consistent with my own experiences.	0.676			
	My experience reading negative reviews about Pizza Hut influences my decision before purchasing.	0.884			
Boycott Motivation	I believe that deciding not to purchase Pizza Hut products is an appropriate response to the negative issues currently circulating.	0.853	0.803	0.884	0.717
	I feel the need to stop purchasing Pizza Hut products as an expression of dissatisfaction with the company.	0.849			
	I choose not to purchase Pizza Hut products anymore as a form of disagreement with the company.	0.838			
Variety Seeking	I feel bored if I continuously consume Pizza Hut products.	0.832	0.796	0.880	0.710
	I have a strong curiosity to try food products from restaurants other than Pizza Hut.	0.852			
	I do not hesitate to try eating at restaurants with brands different from Pizza Hut.	0.844			
Switching Intention	I hope to find another restaurant alternative that is better, so that I can switch from Pizza Hut.	0.860	0.779	0.871	0.693
	I have a strong desire to stop purchasing from Pizza Hut and switch to competing restaurants.	0.800			
	I plan to purchase food from restaurants other than Pizza Hut.	0.837			

Source: SEM-PLS 4.0

Table 2 shows that all indicators achieved acceptable standardized loading values, ranging from 0.676 to 0.884. Although one Negative eWOM indicator has a loading of 0.676, it remains acceptable within the context of the overall measurement model. The Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.701 to 0.803, indicating satisfactory internal consistency across all constructs. The Composite Reliability values range from 0.825 to 0.884, exceeding the commonly accepted minimum criterion. Furthermore, all AVE values range from 0.614 to 0.717, indicating that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. These results demonstrate that the constructs exhibit adequate indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent validity. Therefore, the measurement model is considered appropriate for subsequent structural model analysis.

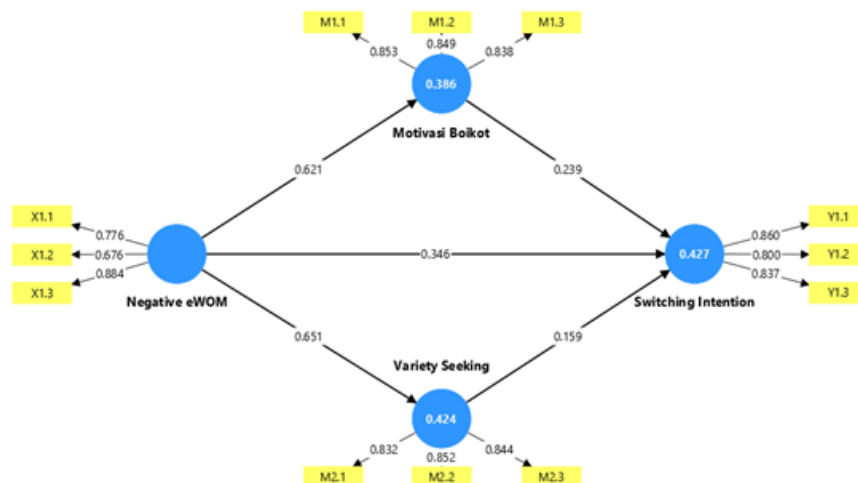


Figure 1. Algorithm Model Results

Figure 1 presents the PLS-SEM algorithm results for the overall research model. The model consists of four latent constructs: Negative eWOM, Boycott Motivation, Variety Seeking, and Switching Intention. Each construct is represented by three measurement indicators. The figure also illustrates the relationships among the constructs and the loading values associated with their respective indicators. The results provide an overview of the measurement and structural configuration before proceeding to the assessment of discriminant validity and the structural model.

Discriminant Validity

After establishing convergent validity and reliability, discriminant validity was assessed to determine whether each construct was empirically

distinct from the other constructs in the model. Discriminant validity was evaluated using two approaches: cross-loading analysis and the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The cross-loading results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity – Cross Loading

Indicator	Negative eWOM	Boycott Motivation	Variety Seeking	Switching Intention
NeWOM 1	0.776	0.370	0.481	0.363
NeWOM 2	0.676	0.311	0.354	0.249
NeWOM 3	0.884	0.670	0.631	0.664
MB 1	0.568	0.853	0.555	0.481
MB 2	0.532	0.849	0.588	0.487
MB 3	0.472	0.838	0.579	0.456
VS 1	0.509	0.581	0.832	0.470
VS 2	0.575	0.546	0.852	0.401
VS 3	0.561	0.584	0.844	0.505
SI 1	0.564	0.508	0.481	0.860
SI 2	0.441	0.437	0.463	0.800
SI 3	0.478	0.453	0.417	0.837

Source: SEM-PLS 4.0

As shown in Table 3, each indicator has its highest loading on the construct it is intended to measure. The Negative eWOM indicators have loadings ranging from 0.676 to 0.884 on their respective construct, while the Boycott Motivation indicators range from 0.838 to 0.853. The Variety Seeking indicators range from 0.832 to 0.852, and the Switching Intention indicators range from 0.800 to 0.860. In each case, the loading on the corresponding construct is higher than the cross-loadings on the other constructs. These findings indicate that the indicators demonstrate adequate discriminant validity and are capable of distinguishing their respective constructs from the other constructs included in the research model.

To further confirm discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was examined. This approach compares the square root of the AVE for each construct with its correlations with the other constructs. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity – Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	Negative eWOM	Boycott Motivation	Variety Seeking	Switching Intention
Negative eWOM	0.783			
Boycott Motivation	0.621	0.847		

Variety Seeking	0.651	0.677	0.843	
Switching Intention	0.598	0.561	0.546	0.833

Source: SEM-PLS 4.0

Table 4 shows that the square roots of the AVE values on the diagonal are 0.783 for Negative eWOM, 0.847 for Boycott Motivation, 0.843 for Variety Seeking, and 0.833 for Switching Intention. Each diagonal value is greater than the correlations between the respective construct and the other constructs. Therefore, the Fornell–Larcker criterion is satisfied. These results provide additional evidence that Negative eWOM, Boycott Motivation, Variety Seeking, and Switching Intention represent empirically distinguishable constructs. Accordingly, the measurement model demonstrates adequate discriminant validity and can proceed to structural model evaluation.

Structural Model (Inner Model): R-Square

Following the evaluation of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed to determine the explanatory capability of the endogenous constructs. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to identify the proportion of variance in each endogenous construct that can be explained by its predictor variables. The adjusted R^2 was also considered to account for the number of predictors included in the model. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. R-Square

Endogenous Variable	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Boycott Motivation	0.386	0.383
Variety Seeking	0.424	0.421
Switching Intention	0.427	0.419

Source: SEM-PLS 4.0

Based on Table 5, the R^2 value for Boycott Motivation is 0.386, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.383. This indicates that 38.6% of the variance in Boycott Motivation can be explained by its predictor variable, Negative eWOM, while the remaining 61.4% is explained by factors outside the model. Variety Seeking has an R^2 value of 0.424 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.421, indicating that 42.4% of its variance can be explained by Negative eWOM. Meanwhile, Switching Intention has the highest R^2 value of 0.427 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.419, indicating that 42.7% of the variance in Switching Intention can be explained by the predictor variables included in the structural model. The relatively close values between R^2 and adjusted R^2 indicate that the explanatory estimates remain consistent after adjustment for the number of predictors. Overall, the model provides meaningful explanatory capability for the endogenous constructs, particularly Switching Intention and Variety Seeking.

Hypothesis Testing

After evaluating the measurement and structural models, hypothesis testing was conducted to determine the significance and direction of the proposed relationships among the research constructs. The hypotheses were evaluated based on the path coefficient, sample mean, standard deviation, t-statistics, and p-values generated through the PLS-SEM bootstrapping procedure. A hypothesis was considered supported when the relationship was statistically significant at the 5% significance level and was consistent with the proposed direction. The direct and indirect effects for H1 through H7 are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T-Statistics	P-Values	Result
H1	Negative eWOM → Boycott Motivation	0.621	0.625	0.032	19.159	0.000	Accepted
H2	Negative eWOM → Variety Seeking	0.651	0.653	0.034	18.876	0.000	Accepted
H3	Boycott Motivation → Switching Intention	0.239	0.238	0.084	2.857	0.004	Accepted
H4	Variety Seeking → Switching Intention	0.159	0.159	0.086	1.836	0.066	Rejected
H5	Negative eWOM → Switching Intention	0.346	0.349	0.059	5.862	0.000	Accepted
H6	Negative eWOM → Boycott Motivation → Switching Intention	0.148	0.150	0.055	2.706	0.007	Accepted
H7	Negative eWOM → Variety Seeking → Switching Intention	0.103	0.104	0.058	1.789	0.074	Rejected

Source: SEM-PLS 4.0

Table 6 indicates that Negative eWOM has a positive and statistically significant effect on Boycott Motivation, as demonstrated by a path coefficient of 0.621, a t-statistic of 19.159, and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, H1 is accepted. Negative eWOM also has a positive and statistically significant effect on Variety Seeking, with a path coefficient of 0.651, a t-statistic of 18.876, and a p-value of 0.000. Thus, H2 is accepted. These findings indicate that greater exposure to negative eWOM is associated with stronger boycott motivation and greater tendencies to seek alternative brands.

Furthermore, Boycott Motivation has a positive and statistically significant effect on Switching Intention. The path coefficient is 0.239, with a t-statistic of 2.857 and a p-value of 0.004. Therefore, H3 is accepted. In contrast, Variety Seeking has a positive but statistically insignificant effect on Switching Intention, with a path coefficient of 0.159, a t-statistic of 1.836, and a p-value of 0.066. Because the p-value exceeds the 0.05 significance threshold, H4 is rejected. This result indicates that although consumers demonstrate a tendency to seek variety after being exposed to negative eWOM, such a tendency does not significantly translate into an intention to switch from Pizza Hut.

The results further demonstrate that Negative eWOM has a positive and statistically significant direct effect on Switching Intention. The path coefficient is 0.346, accompanied by a t-statistic of 5.862 and a p-value of 0.000. Accordingly, H5 is accepted. This finding indicates that Negative eWOM can directly increase consumers' intention to switch from Pizza Hut to competing restaurants, independent of the mediating mechanisms examined in this study.

The mediation results provide further insight into the mechanism underlying the relationship between Negative eWOM and Switching Intention. Negative eWOM has a positive and statistically significant indirect effect on Switching Intention through Boycott Motivation, with an indirect path coefficient of 0.148, a t-statistic of 2.706, and a p-value of 0.007. Therefore, H6 is accepted, demonstrating that Boycott Motivation significantly mediates the relationship between Negative eWOM and Switching Intention. In contrast, the indirect effect of Negative eWOM on Switching Intention through Variety Seeking is not statistically significant, with an indirect path coefficient of 0.103, a t-statistic of 1.789, and a p-value of 0.074. Thus, H7 is rejected.

Overall, the hypothesis testing results demonstrate that Negative eWOM plays an important role in explaining consumers' switching behavior. It significantly increases both Boycott Motivation and Variety Seeking, while also exerting a direct positive effect on Switching Intention. However, only Boycott Motivation significantly contributes to Switching Intention and functions as a significant mediator. Variety Seeking, despite being significantly influenced by

Negative eWOM, does not significantly affect Switching Intention and consequently does not provide a significant mediating pathway. These findings indicate that, within the proposed model, the value-based mechanism represented by Boycott Motivation provides a more important pathway for translating Negative eWOM into consumers' intention to switch than the exploratory mechanism represented by Variety Seeking.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Negative eWOM positively and significantly influences Boycott Motivation and Variety Seeking among Pizza Hut consumers in Indonesia. Negative reviews concerning service failures, food quality, and price discrepancies can increase perceived risk and uncertainty, encouraging consumers to adopt defensive responses toward the brand. When consumers perceive negative online information as credible and relevant, their concerns may develop into rejection-oriented attitudes and stronger boycott motivation (Efendi & Alfansi, 2025; Tan, 2023). At the same time, exposure to negative information can encourage consumers to explore alternative products and brands as a way of reducing uncertainty and seeking consumption experiences. These findings indicate that Negative eWOM activates two distinct consumer responses: rejection through boycott motivation and exploration through variety seeking. Therefore, negative digital communication should be understood not merely as an information source, but also as a stimulus capable of changing consumer attitudes and behavioral tendencies.

The significant effect of Boycott Motivation on Switching Intention indicates that consumers who develop stronger boycott motives are more likely to consider leaving Pizza Hut for competing brands (Fernanda et al., 2025; Tuominen et al., 2026). This finding suggests that dissatisfaction and negative perceptions can progress beyond attitudinal rejection into a behavioral intention to change brands. Boycott Motivation represents a stronger consumer response because it reflects a deliberate decision to reject a brand rather than evaluate alternatives. In contrast, Variety Seeking does not significantly influence Switching Intention. This result suggests that consumers may seek different experiences without necessarily intending to permanently abandon their existing brand. Variety seeking can therefore represent temporary exploration or novelty rather than a committed switching decision (Zhang & Wang, 2026). The difference between these findings demonstrates that not every motivation generated by negative information has the same behavioral consequence, particularly in fast-food consumption where consumers may alternate between brands according to situational preferences.

Negative eWOM also has a positive and significant effect on Switching Intention. This finding indicates that consumers exposed to unfavorable online information may develop intentions to choose competing brands even without first developing strong boycott motivation or variety-seeking tendencies. Negative information can encourage consumers to reassess purchasing decisions, increase doubts about the brand, and reduce future purchase confidence. Consequently, the influence of Negative eWOM extends beyond perceptions and attitudes to a direct behavioral intention. This result highlights the important role of digital information in consumer decision-making when online reviews are perceived as relevant to consumption experiences. The direct effect also indicates that switching intention may emerge through immediate evaluation of perceived risks and dissatisfaction (Chan et al., 2025). Therefore, companies cannot assume that consumers will always pass through a separate motivational process before considering alternatives, because negative digital information can become a direct trigger for switching decisions.

The mediation findings provide an explanation of the relationship between Negative eWOM and Switching Intention. Boycott Motivation significantly mediates this relationship, whereas Variety Seeking does not provide a significant mediating pathway (Sameeni et al., 2024). This result indicates that negative online information can influence switching more effectively when it generates an intention to reject the brand. Consumers who perceive negative information as credible may experience dissatisfaction and develop a deliberate motivation to boycott, which subsequently increases their intention to switch. In contrast, variety seeking appears insufficient to transform negative information into a significant switching intention. Consumers may explore other brands for novelty without making a firm decision to leave Pizza Hut. These findings suggest that Boycott Motivation functions as the dominant psychological mechanism connecting Negative eWOM with switching behavior, while Variety Seeking represents a less consequential pathway under negative brand-related information and reputational crises.

Theoretically, this study contributes by integrating Negative eWOM, Boycott Motivation, Variety Seeking, and Switching Intention within one explanatory framework. The findings show that Negative eWOM can stimulate both rejection-oriented and exploration-oriented responses, but these responses do not produce equivalent behavioral outcomes. Boycott Motivation significantly strengthens Switching Intention, whereas Variety Seeking does not. This distinction provides a more nuanced understanding of consumer behavior by demonstrating that the psychological pathway from negative information to switching depends on the type of motivation generated. The state of the art lies in comparing two mechanisms simultaneously rather than treating consumer

responses to negative information as a single process. The research contributes to consumer behavior literature by identifying boycott motivation as the more influential mechanism for explaining switching intention under negative digital conditions (Liu et al., 2024). This framework can support future studies examining other psychological mechanisms in similar contexts.

The practical implications indicate that Pizza Hut Indonesia should prioritize proactive online reputation management and rapid responses to negative consumer experiences. Management should monitor digital conversations, address complaints concerning service, food quality, and pricing, and communicate corrective actions transparently. These efforts are important because Negative eWOM directly increases Switching Intention and also strengthens Boycott Motivation, which contributes to switching. Although Variety Seeking does not significantly increase Switching Intention, its significant relationship with Negative eWOM suggests that consumers remain interested in alternative brands and experiences (Qotrunnada & Auliya, 2026). This tendency can be addressed through product innovation, service improvements, and customer engagement. The main contribution is identifying the dominant pathway through which negative information affects switching decisions. By emphasizing Boycott Motivation as the critical mediator, the study provides managers with a clearer basis for prioritizing reputation recovery, service improvement, and consumer retention strategies in Indonesia's competitive fast-food market and evolving digital marketplace.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Negative eWOM is an important determinant of consumer switching behavior among Pizza Hut consumers in Indonesia, both directly and indirectly through Boycott Motivation. The most important finding is that Boycott Motivation represents the dominant psychological mechanism linking Negative eWOM to Switching Intention, whereas Variety Seeking, despite being positively influenced by Negative eWOM, does not significantly contribute to switching intention or mediate the relationship. The key lesson from this finding is that consumers exposed to negative digital information are more likely to switch when negative perceptions develop into a stronger rejection-oriented motivation rather than merely a desire to seek alternative consumption experiences. Scientifically, this study contributes to consumer behavior and digital reputation management literature by simultaneously examining direct effects and two distinct motivational pathways, thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of how Negative eWOM influences switching behavior. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its quantitative cross-sectional design, purposive sampling, and focus on Pizza Hut consumers in

Indonesia, which may restrict the generalizability and ability to capture changes in consumer responses over time. Future research should employ mixed-method and longitudinal approaches and consider additional variables such as Source Credibility, Brand Image, and Brand Forgiveness to provide a deeper understanding of consumer responses to digital reputation crises.

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