



Marketing Ethics and Negative e-WOM as Predictors of Switching Intention: The Mediating Role of Customer Trust in a Black Campaign Context

Dila Novita Sari*, Heriyadi, Helma Malini, Bintoro Bagus Purmono, Ahmadi

Universitas Tanjungpura, Indonesia

Email : dilanovittaa@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61987/jemr.v5i5.3119>

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Marketing Ethics;
Negative e-WOM;
Customer Trust;
Switching Intention

*Corresponding Author

The rapid growth of the beauty industry has intensified digital marketing competition, while unethical marketing practices may negatively influence consumer perceptions and brand relationships. Allegations of a Black Campaign involving White Inc have generated Negative electronic word of mouth (Negative e-WOM), potentially undermining Customer Trust and increasing Switching Intention. This study aims to examine the effects of Marketing Ethics and Negative e-WOM on Switching Intention, with Customer Trust as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach was employed using purposive sampling to collect data from 200 respondents who were familiar with the Black Campaign issue and exposed to related marketing information and Negative e-WOM. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. The results show that Marketing Ethics positively affects Customer Trust and negatively affects Switching Intention, whereas Negative e-WOM negatively affects Customer Trust and positively affects Switching Intention. Customer Trust also negatively affects Switching Intention and significantly mediates the relationships between Marketing Ethics, Negative e-WOM, and Switching Intention. These findings imply that ethical marketing practices and effective management of Negative e-WOM are important for maintaining consumer trust and reducing switching tendencies.

Article History:

Received: April 2026; Revised: May 2026; Accepted: June 2026

Please cite this article in APA style as:

Sari, D. N., Heriyadi, Malini, H., Purmono, B. B., & Ahmadi. (2026). Marketing Ethics and Negative e-WOM as Predictors of Switching Intention: The Mediating Role of Customer Trust in a Black Campaign Context. *Journal of Educational Management Research*, 5(5), 5969-5988.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has made marketing communication faster, more interactive, and influential in shaping consumer judgments. Social media enables brands to communicate widely, while consumers can simultaneously share experiences, evaluations, and criticism through electronic word of mouth. This development matters socially because marketing messages can affect purchasing

decisions, corporate responsibility perceptions, and consumer trust. Ethical marketing becomes important because consumers increasingly encounter commercial information in environments where misleading, manipulative, or harmful communication can spread rapidly. Tan and Salo (2023) emphasize ethical marketing as an important foundation for responsible digital exchange, while Uslay (2025) highlights the need for a broader understanding of marketing ethics. Negative e-WOM can also shape consumer responses and intentions (Alnoor et al., 2024; Matiukaite et al., 2024). Therefore, understanding how ethical perceptions and negative online information influence trust and switching is important for consumers and responsible digital marketing.

This study applies the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theory to explain how stimuli are translated into consumer behavioral intentions. Within this framework, Marketing Ethics and Negative e-WOM function as external stimuli that provide signals about a brand. Customer Trust represents the internal state through which consumers interpret those signals, whereas Switching Intention represents the behavioral response. Sivasothy et al. (2024) identify S-O-R as applicable for explaining relationships between environmental stimuli and consumer responses, while Zhang et al. (2022) demonstrate its usefulness in explaining consumer behavioral reactions. The framework is also compatible with evidence that ethical behavior can strengthen trust and loyalty (Mansouri et al., 2022) and negative e-WOM can influence consumer intentions (Guan et al., 2025). Thus, S-O-R provides a theoretical basis for testing the proposed direct and mediated relationships for the proposed consumer behavior model and mediation structure and testing mediation directly.

The general problem arises when digital marketing practices create uncertainty about whether brand communication reflects fair competition, responsible persuasion, or potentially harmful competitive attacks. Consumers exposed to controversial promotional messages may encounter conflicting information from brands, making it difficult to evaluate the credibility of information they receive. Such conditions can weaken trust and encourage consumers to reconsider their relationships with brands. Previous evidence indicates that ethical seller behavior is associated with trust, satisfaction, and loyalty (Mansouri et al., 2022), whereas negative electronic word of mouth can generate unfavorable consumer responses (Sengupta et al., 2024; Hancock et al., 2023). Switching intention is particularly important because consumers may respond to perceived ethical problems or negative information by considering alternative brands. Consequently, the central societal problem is how consumers form trust and switching intentions when ethical concerns and negative online communication occur simultaneously in digital markets.

Existing studies have examined relationships between ethical behavior, trust, electronic word of mouth, and consumer behavioral outcomes, but these streams remain partly separated. Mansouri et al. (2022) show that sellers' ethical behavior influences trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, while Tan and Salo (2023) position ethical marketing as an important element of responsible digital exchange. Research on e-WOM similarly demonstrates its influence on intentions and decisions (Alnoor et al., 2024; Roy et al., 2025). However, much of this literature examines trust, loyalty, purchase intention, or e-WOM outcomes independently rather than explaining switching intention through an integrated mechanism. Studies of switching intention have considered diverse contexts, including e-commerce and digital services (Iranmanesh et al., 2022; Ng et al., 2024), but the role of ethical marketing and negative e-WOM as simultaneous antecedents remains less developed. This fragmentation creates a gap in explaining switching behavior.

The literature further indicates that trust can connect external information and behavioral responses, yet its mediating role requires stronger integration across ethical marketing and negative e-WOM perspectives. Aldulaimi et al. (2025) show that perceived ethicality and e-WOM are associated with loyalty through trust, providing evidence that trust can transmit effects of ethical perceptions and online communication. Sudaryanto et al. (2025) likewise demonstrate the mediating importance of trust in the relationship between e-WOM and purchase decisions. Meanwhile, Mushagalusa et al. (2022) directly connect price fairness, trust, and switching intentions, suggesting that trust is relevant to consumers' willingness to remain or change providers. Nevertheless, previous studies rarely combine Marketing Ethics and Negative e-WOM as contrasting stimuli and examine Customer Trust as the mechanism leading specifically to Switching Intention. Addressing this gap is important to explain consumer responses to controversial digital marketing communication in digital consumer markets today.

The state of the art of this study lies in integrating ethical marketing perceptions and negative online communication within one decision model. The research examines a controversial beauty marketing context where consumers may simultaneously evaluate the ethicality of brand communication and encounter negative electronic word of mouth. Customer Trust is positioned as the psychological mechanism that connects these signals with Switching Intention. This configuration moves beyond isolated effects by explaining how different digital marketing stimuli may generate opposite behavioral pathways. Contemporary consumers make brand judgments within social media environments, where corporate messages and reactions circulate simultaneously. By focusing on these relationships in Indonesia, the study develops a contextual

explanation of switching behavior that connects ethical evaluation, online information, trust, and behavioral intention. This perspective helps explain responses to controversial marketing practices beyond product evaluations and managerial interpretation for this context and responsible practice today.

This study addresses the research problem of how Marketing Ethics and Negative e-WOM influence Switching Intention and whether Customer Trust explains these relationships. The proposed argument is that ethical marketing perceptions should strengthen trust and reduce consumers' willingness to switch, whereas negative e-WOM should weaken trust and increase switching intention. Customer Trust is therefore expected to operate as a mechanism through which external stimuli become behavioral responses. The study contributes theoretically by extending S-O-R to an integrated model of ethical marketing, negative digital communication, trust, and switching. Empirically, it tests these relationships among consumers exposed to the White Inc. Black Campaign issue. Practically, the findings are expected to clarify how responsible marketing communication and effective management of negative online information can help brands maintain trust and reduce switching tendencies. The study offers evidence for ethical digital marketing practices in digital markets.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical arguments and previous empirical findings presented in the Introduction, the conceptual framework of this study is developed as follows.

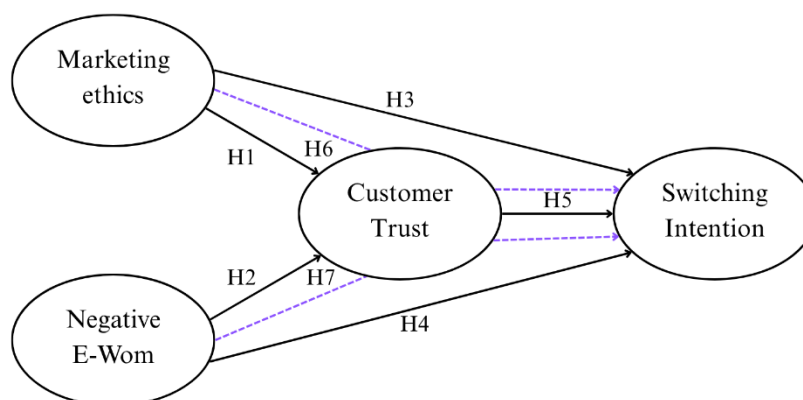


Figure 1. Research Framework

Research Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework and the theoretical relationships among the variables, the hypotheses proposed in this study are as follows:

H1: *Marketing Ethics* has a positive effect on *Customer Trust*.

- H2:** *Negative e-WOM* has a negative effect on *Customer Trust*.
H3: *Marketing Ethics* has a negative effect on *Switching Intention*.
H4: *Negative e-WOM* has a positive effect on *Switching Intention*.
H5: *Customer Trust* has a negative effect on *Switching Intention*.
H6: *Customer Trust* mediates the effect of *Marketing Ethics* on *Switching Intention*.
H7: *Customer Trust* mediates the effect of *Negative e-WOM* on *Switching Intention*.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach using a causal associative survey design to examine the relationships among Marketing Ethics, Negative e-WOM, Customer Trust, and Switching Intention. The design was selected because the study aimed to empirically examine hypothesized relationships among measurable constructs and assess Customer Trust as a mediating mechanism. A quantitative survey design is appropriate for testing relationships among latent constructs using standardized measurement and statistical modeling (Lim & Koay, 2024; Miller & Lengler, 2025). The study was conducted in Indonesia because it focuses on Indonesian consumers who were aware of the White Inc. Black Campaign issue and related online information. This context provides a relevant setting for examining how perceptions of marketing ethics and negative digital communication are associated with consumer trust and switching intentions in the bodycare market.

The population comprised bodycare consumers in Indonesia who were aware of the White Inc. Black Campaign issue and had reconsidered their purchasing decisions after the issue emerged. Respondents were selected using non-probability purposive sampling based on four criteria: they were aware of the issue, had encountered White Inc. promotional content perceived as disparaging competitors and/or related negative online reviews, had been or were currently White Inc. consumers, and resided in Indonesia. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure that respondents possessed characteristics directly relevant to the research objectives. The minimum sample size was determined based on the number of measurement indicators, with 16 indicators requiring a minimum of 160 respondents according to the ten-times rule commonly applied in PLS-SEM. The study targeted 200 respondents to provide adequate observations for model estimation and hypothesis testing. Consideration of sample size and sampling technique is essential for ensuring that quantitative studies have sufficient empirical support for the intended statistical analysis (Ahmed, 2024; White, 2023).

Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms and social media channels. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used to measure respondents'

perceptions. The measurement instrument was developed by adapting established indicators from relevant theoretical and empirical sources. Marketing Ethics indicators were adapted from Nandavita et al. (2025). The measurement items were designed to capture respondents' perceptions of marketing ethics, negative electronic word of mouth, customer trust, and switching intention. These measures were selected to represent consumers' perceptions of ethical marketing practices, exposure to negative online information, trust toward White Inc., and intentions to switch brands. Careful instrument development and evaluation are important in survey-based research because the quality of measurement directly affects the validity of subsequent statistical inferences (Hill et al., 2022; Reed et al., 2024).

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. PLS-SEM was selected because the study involves multiple latent constructs and aims to examine both direct and indirect relationships within a predictive structural model. The measurement model was first assessed through convergent validity using outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with recommended values of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively. The structural model was subsequently evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2) to assess the explanatory power of the endogenous constructs. PLS-SEM is particularly useful for estimating complex models involving multiple constructs and mediation relationships (Guenther et al., 2023; Hair & Alamer, 2022; Legate et al., 2024; Sarstedt & Liu, 2024).

Hypotheses were tested using bootstrapping to estimate the significance of the direct and indirect effects. The analysis examined the direct effects of Marketing Ethics and Negative e-WOM on Customer Trust and Switching Intention, as well as the effect of Customer Trust on Switching Intention. Mediation was assessed by examining the indirect effects of Marketing Ethics and Negative e-WOM on Switching Intention through Customer Trust. Contemporary methodological literature recommends evaluating mediation through the estimated indirect effect and its uncertainty rather than relying solely on the significance of individual component paths (Qin, 2024; Sarstedt & Moisesescu, 2024; Schuler et al., 2025). Accordingly, the mediation hypotheses were evaluated based on the bootstrapped indirect effects, while statistical significance was determined using the corresponding confidence intervals and p-values. This procedure enabled the study to examine both the direct relationships and the mediating mechanism underlying consumers' switching intentions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondent Characteristics

The respondent profile was examined based on gender, age, educational attainment, domicile, occupation, and screening responses. A total of 200 respondents were included in the analysis. The screening questions indicated that all respondents reported knowing about the Black Campaign issue involving White Inc., having encountered promotional content from White Inc. containing elements of the Black Campaign, having been exposed to negative electronic word-of-mouth (Negative e-WOM) concerning White Inc., and being consumers of White Inc. These screening results indicate that all respondents met the basic criteria established for inclusion in the study.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Category	Item	f	%
Gender	Male	8	4.0%
	Female	192	96.0%
	Total	200	100.0%
Age	17–25 years	91	45.5%
	26–35 years	83	41.5%
	36–45 years	20	10.0%
	46–55 years	6	3.0%
	Total	200	100.0%
Educational Attainment	Junior High School/equivalent	2	1.0%
	Senior High School/Vocational School/equivalent	88	44.0%
	Diploma (D1/D2/D3/D4)	32	16.0%
	Bachelor's degree (S1)	70	35.0%
	Postgraduate degree (S2/S3)	8	4.0%
	Total	200	100.0%
Domicile	Kalimantan	72	36.0%
	Java	66	33.0%
	Sulawesi	22	11.0%
	Sumatra	28	14.0%
	Other	12	6.0%
	Total	200	100.0%
Occupation	Student/University student	76	38.0%
	Private-sector employee	45	22.5%
	Civil servant	17	8.5%
	Entrepreneur	38	19.0%
	Influencer	10	5.0%
	Educator	14	7.2%

Total		200	100.0%
Screening Question	Aware of the Black Campaign issue involving White Inc.	200	100%
	Had seen White Inc. promotional content containing Black Campaign elements	200	100%
	Had been exposed to Negative e-WOM concerning White Inc.	200	100%
	Consumer of White Inc.	200	100%

Source: Researcher's analysis, 2026.

Table 1 shows that the sample was predominantly female, with 192 respondents (96.0%), while male respondents accounted for 8 respondents (4.0%). In terms of age, respondents aged 17–25 years constituted the largest group (45.5%), followed by those aged 26–35 years (41.5%), whereas respondents aged 36–45 years and 46–55 years accounted for 10.0% and 3.0%, respectively. Regarding educational attainment, the largest groups were respondents with senior high school or vocational school education (44.0%) and bachelor's degrees (35.0%). The distribution by domicile shows that respondents were primarily from Kalimantan (36.0%) and Java (33.0%), followed by Sumatra (14.0%), Sulawesi (11.0%), and other regions (6.0%).

With respect to occupation, students accounted for the largest proportion of respondents (38.0%), followed by private-sector employees (22.5%) and entrepreneurs (19.0%). Civil servants represented 8.5% of the sample, while influencers and educators accounted for 5.0% and 7.2%, respectively. The reported occupation percentages should be retained as presented in the original dataset, although the displayed educator percentage produces a minor arithmetic discrepancy when summed with the other categories. The screening results further show that all 200 respondents (100%) answered affirmatively to each screening criterion, confirming that the analyzed sample satisfied the stated respondent requirements.

Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated using convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability. Convergent validity was assessed using standardized outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). The results of these assessments are presented in Table 4.2.

Convergent Validity and Reliability

Table 2. Convergent Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variable	Items	Loading Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	Mean
Marketing Ethics	ME1 (RC)	0.776	0.853	0.895	0.630	2.36
	ME2 (RC)	0.790				
	ME3 (RC)	0.802				
	ME4 (RC)	0.788				
	ME5 (RC)	0.813				
Negative e-WOM	NEWOM1	0.868	0.753	0.857	0.666	3.67
	NEWOM2	0.757				
	NEWOM3	0.821				
Customer Trust	CT1 (RC)	0.810	0.864	0.902	0.647	2.31
	CT2 (RC)	0.815				
	CT3 (RC)	0.781				
	CT4 (RC)	0.776				
	CT5 (RC)	0.839				
Switching Intention	SI1	0.861	0.840	0.903	0.757	3.68
	SI2	0.867				
	SI3	0.883				

Source: SEM-PLS 4.0.

Note: RC = Reverse Code.

Table 4.2 indicates that the standardized loading factors ranged from 0.776 to 0.813 for Marketing Ethics, from 0.757 to 0.868 for Negative e-WOM, from 0.776 to 0.839 for Customer Trust, and from 0.861 to 0.883 for Switching Intention. All reported indicator loadings exceeded 0.70, indicating that the indicators had substantial loadings on their respective constructs. The AVE values were 0.630 for Marketing Ethics, 0.666 for Negative e-WOM, 0.647 for Customer Trust, and 0.757 for Switching Intention. Thus, based on the reported loading factors and AVE values, all four constructs met the commonly applied criteria for convergent validity.

The reliability results also indicate acceptable internal consistency across the constructs. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.753 to 0.864, while Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.857 to 0.903. These values were above the conventional 0.70 threshold for internal consistency. Accordingly, the measurement indicators demonstrated satisfactory reliability for subsequent structural model analysis.

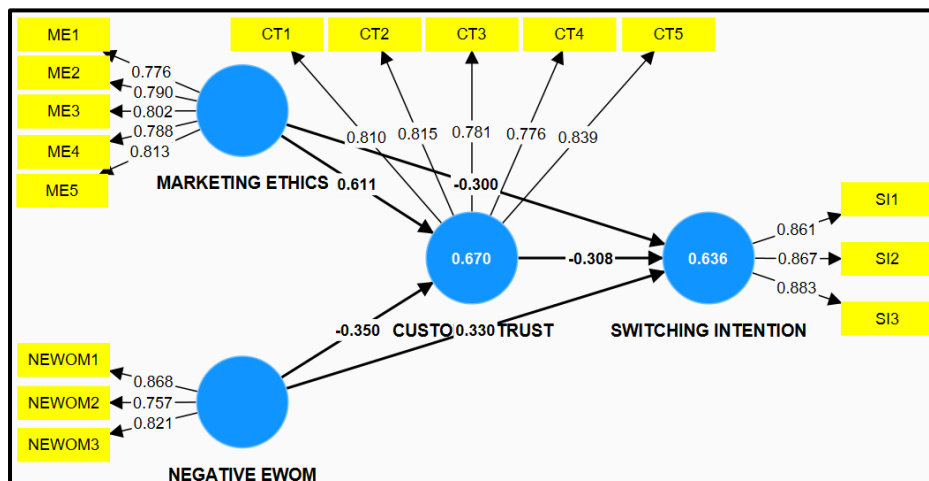


Figure 2. Algorithm Model Result

Source: SEM-PLS 4.0.

Figure 2 presents the PLS algorithm model for the constructs and indicators included in the study. The model contains Marketing Ethics and Negative e-WOM as exogenous constructs, Customer Trust as an intervening construct, and Switching Intention as the endogenous outcome construct. The indicator loadings shown in the model correspond to the values reported in Table 2. The model therefore provides the measurement-model configuration used for the subsequent structural analysis.

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using cross-loadings and the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The cross-loading assessment examines whether each indicator loads more strongly on its assigned construct than on the other constructs. The Fornell–Larcker assessment compares the square root of AVE for each construct with the correlations between constructs. The results of both assessments are presented in Tables 4.3 and 4.4.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity – Cross Loadings

Indicator	CT	ME	NEWOM	SI
CT1	0.810	0.630	-0.453	-0.619
CT2	0.815	0.585	-0.470	-0.589
CT3	0.781	0.628	-0.452	-0.592
CT4	0.766	0.588	-0.467	-0.560
CT5	0.839	0.599	-0.566	-0.583
ME1	0.575	0.776	-0.317	-0.487
ME2	0.583	0.790	-0.298	-0.502
ME3	0.549	0.802	-0.347	-0.524
ME4	0.621	0.788	-0.318	-0.561
ME5	0.654	0.813	-0.339	-0.565

NEWOM1	-0.582	-0.404	0.868	0.573
NEWOM2	-0.361	-0.212	0.757	0.374
NEWOM3	-0.488	-0.347	0.821	0.576
SI1	-0.626	-0.571	0.581	0.861
SI2	-0.653	-0.621	0.549	0.867
SI3	-0.631	-0.545	0.532	0.883

Source: SEM-PLS 4.0.

As shown in Table 3, each indicator has its highest loading on the construct to which it belongs. The loading values for Customer Trust range from 0.766 to 0.839, while those for Marketing Ethics range from 0.776 to 0.813. Negative e-WOM indicators have loadings ranging from 0.757 to 0.868, whereas Switching Intention indicators range from 0.861 to 0.883. The observed pattern indicates that the indicators exhibit greater associations with their respective constructs than with the alternative constructs, supporting discriminant validity based on the cross-loading criterion.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity – Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	Customer Trust	Marketing Ethics	Negative e-WOM	Switching Intention
Customer Trust	0.805			
Marketing Ethics	0.754	0.794		
Negative e-WOM	-0.599	-0.408	0.816	
Switching Intention	-0.732	-0.667	0.637	0.870

Source: SEM-PLS 4.0.

The Fornell–Larcker results in Table 4 show that the square root of AVE for each construct is greater than its correlations with the other constructs. The diagonal values are 0.805 for Customer Trust, 0.794 for Marketing Ethics, 0.816 for Negative e-WOM, and 0.870 for Switching Intention. Each diagonal value exceeds the corresponding inter-construct correlations in the same row and column. These results provide evidence that the constructs demonstrate adequate discriminant validity according to the Fornell–Larcker criterion.

Reliability

The reliability assessment further confirms the internal consistency of the measurement model. Marketing Ethics obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.853 and a Composite Reliability of 0.895, while Negative e-WOM obtained values of 0.753 and 0.857, respectively. Customer Trust recorded Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability values of 0.864 and 0.902, respectively, whereas Switching Intention recorded values of 0.840 and 0.903. Since all reported reliability

coefficients exceed 0.70, the constructs demonstrate acceptable internal consistency for the structural model analysis.

Structural Model

The structural model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2) and hypothesis testing. R^2 indicates the proportion of variance in an endogenous construct that is explained by its predictors in the structural model. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the path coefficient, standard deviation, T-statistic, and p-value obtained from the PLS-SEM procedure. The results are presented in Tables 4.5 and 4.6.

R-Square

Table 5. R-Square

Construct	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Customer Trust	0.670	0.667
Switching Intention	0.636	0.630

Source: SEM-PLS 4.0.

Table 5 shows that the R^2 value for Customer Trust is 0.670, indicating that 67.0% of the variance in Customer Trust is accounted for by the predictor constructs included in the model. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.667 indicates that 66.7% of the variance remains explained after adjustment for the number of predictors. For Switching Intention, the R^2 value is 0.636, indicating that 63.6% of its variance is explained by the predictors specified in the structural model. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.630 indicates that 63.0% of the variance in Switching Intention is explained after adjustment, while the remaining variance is attributable to factors outside the model and unexplained error.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T-statistics	P-values	Result
H1	Marketing Ethics → Customer Trust	0.611	0.610	0.051	11.885	<0.001	Accepted
H2	Negative e-WOM → Customer Trust	-0.350	-0.352	0.058	5.999	<0.001	Accepted
H3	Marketing Ethics →	-0.300	-0.301	0.089	3.359	0.001	Accepted

	Switching Intention						
H4	Negative e- WOM → Switching Intention	0.330	0.329	0.075	4.413	<0.001	Accepted
H5	Customer Trust → Switching Intention	-0.308	-0.309	0.101	3.058	0.002	Accepted
H6	Marketing Ethics → Customer Trust → Switching Intention	-0.188	-0.188	0.063	2.982	0.003	Accepted
H7	Negative e- WOM → Customer Trust → Switching Intention	0.108	0.109	0.041	2.638	0.008	Accepted

Source: SEM-PLS 4.0.

Table 6 indicates that Marketing Ethics has a positive and statistically significant association with Customer Trust, with a path coefficient of 0.611, $T = 11.885$, and $p < 0.001$. Negative e-WOM has a negative and statistically significant association with Customer Trust, with a coefficient of -0.350, $T = 5.999$, and $p < 0.001$. Marketing Ethics also has a negative and statistically significant association with Switching Intention, with a coefficient of -0.300, $T = 3.359$, and $p = 0.001$. Negative e-WOM shows a positive and statistically significant association with Switching Intention, with a coefficient of 0.330, $T = 4.413$, and $p < 0.001$.

Customer Trust is negatively and significantly associated with Switching Intention, with a path coefficient of -0.308, $T = 3.058$, and $p = 0.002$. The indirect effect of Marketing Ethics on Switching Intention through Customer Trust is also statistically significant, with an indirect coefficient of -0.188, $T = 2.982$, and $p = 0.003$. Similarly, the indirect effect of Negative e-WOM on Switching Intention through Customer Trust is positive and statistically significant, with an indirect coefficient of 0.108, $T = 2.638$, and $p = 0.008$. Thus, all seven tested structural relationships reported statistically significant effects at the 5% significance level, with the directions of the effects corresponding to their respective path coefficients.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that *Marketing Ethics* and *Negative e-WOM* significantly influence *Customer Trust* and *Switching Intention*, while *Customer Trust* significantly mediates the relationships between these two antecedents and *Switching Intention*. First, *Marketing Ethics* has a positive and significant effect on *Customer Trust* ($\beta = 0.611$; $p = 0.000$). This finding indicates that consumers who perceive White Inc.'s marketing practices as ethical tend to develop stronger trust in the brand. This result is consistent with the ethical marketing literature, which emphasizes that integrity, transparency, and responsible communication contribute to positive consumer evaluations and relational outcomes. Tan and Salo (2023) argue that ethical marketing provides an important foundation for trust in digitally mediated markets, while Mansouri et al. (2022) demonstrate that sellers' ethical behaviour is associated with customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. Similarly, Chong and Patwa (2023) emphasize the importance of integrity in marketing communication. Thus, the present finding reinforces existing evidence by demonstrating that perceived marketing ethics is not merely an ethical attribute but also an important relational mechanism through which consumer trust is developed.

In contrast, *Negative e-WOM* has a negative and significant effect on *Customer Trust* ($\beta = -0.350$; $p = 0.000$). This result confirms that negative online information surrounding a brand can undermine consumers' confidence in that brand. The finding corresponds with prior research showing that e-WOM plays an important role in shaping consumer perceptions and behavioural responses. Alnoor et al. (2024) demonstrate that both positive and negative e-WOM can influence consumers' intentions, while Matiukaite et al. (2024) identify e-WOM characteristics as important determinants of consumer purchase intentions. Sudaryanto et al. (2025) further show that customer trust can function as an important mechanism in the relationship between e-WOM and purchase decisions. However, the present finding extends this literature by focusing specifically on *Negative e-WOM* as a trust-damaging stimulus rather than treating e-WOM as a general information construct. This distinction is important because negative information may create uncertainty, increase perceived risk, and weaken consumers' confidence in the brand.

The direct relationship with *Switching Intention* further clarifies the behavioural consequences of the two antecedents. *Marketing Ethics* has a negative and significant effect on *Switching Intention* ($\beta = -0.300$; $p = 0.001$), indicating that stronger perceptions of ethical marketing are associated with lower intentions to switch brands. This result is compatible with Mansouri et al. (2022), who found that ethical seller behaviour contributes to trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. It also complements research on marketing ethics suggesting that ethical marketing

practices can create more sustainable relationships between firms and consumers (Tan & Salo, 2023; Uslay, 2025). The finding therefore supports the argument that ethical conduct can reduce consumers' motivation to seek alternatives. Importantly, however, the present study identifies *Switching Intention* as a specific behavioural outcome of perceived marketing ethics. This provides a more direct explanation of how ethical perceptions may influence consumers' willingness to remain with a brand rather than only affecting attitudinal outcomes such as trust or satisfaction.

Conversely, *Negative e-WOM* has a positive and significant effect on *Switching Intention* ($\beta = 0.330$; $p = 0.000$). This indicates that greater exposure to negative electronic word-of-mouth is associated with stronger intentions to move away from White Inc. The result is consistent with research demonstrating that negative e-WOM can generate unfavourable consumer responses and influence behavioural intentions. Guan et al. (2025) show that negative e-WOM can emerge from negative evaluations of service attributes, while Sengupta et al. (2024) demonstrate that negative e-WOM can influence consumer evaluations following service-related experiences. Hancock et al. (2023) also highlight the dynamics through which negative e-WOM can spread within online communities. Nevertheless, the present study contributes a different behavioural perspective by connecting negative e-WOM directly to *Switching Intention*. Rather than considering negative e-WOM only as an outcome of dissatisfaction or service failure, the findings position it as an antecedent capable of motivating consumers to consider leaving a brand.

The negative and significant effect of *Customer Trust* on *Switching Intention* ($\beta = -0.308$; $p = 0.002$) provides further evidence that trust functions as an important relational mechanism in retaining consumers. Consumers with stronger trust in White Inc. demonstrate lower intentions to switch, whereas weaker trust is associated with greater willingness to consider alternative brands. This finding is consistent with Chen et al. (2022), who demonstrate the importance of customer trust for engagement and loyalty, and with Mushagalusa et al. (2022), who show that trust and switching intentions are closely connected in service relationships. The finding also corresponds with Lyu and Ratasuk (2024), who identify trust as an important determinant of consumer relationships in e-commerce. The contribution of the present study lies in placing *Customer Trust* between ethical and negative informational stimuli and switching behaviour. Thus, trust is not treated merely as a desirable relational outcome but as a psychological mechanism that can explain why consumers either remain with or consider leaving a brand.

The mediation results provide the central contribution of the study. *Customer Trust* significantly mediates the relationship between *Marketing Ethics* and *Switching Intention* ($\beta = -0.188$; $p < 0.003$), while also mediating the

relationship between *Negative e-WOM* and *Switching Intention* ($\beta = 0.108$; $p = 0.008$). These findings indicate two opposing pathways: ethical marketing strengthens trust, which is subsequently associated with lower switching intention, whereas negative e-WOM undermines trust, which is subsequently associated with higher switching intention. This mechanism is consistent with research linking ethicality, e-WOM, trust, and customer loyalty or behavioural intention (Aldulaimi et al., 2025; Sudaryanto et al., 2025). However, the novelty of the present study is the integration of these relationships into a single explanatory model of switching intention. Existing studies in the stored literature tend to examine ethical behaviour, e-WOM, trust, loyalty, or switching in separate relationships. By combining *Marketing Ethics* and *Negative e-WOM* as contrasting antecedents and *Customer Trust* as a mediating mechanism, this study provides a more integrated explanation of how positive ethical signals and negative digital information may produce opposite switching responses.

Overall, the findings support the *Stimulus–Organism–Response* (S-O-R) perspective by demonstrating that external marketing and informational stimuli can shape behavioural responses through consumers' internal psychological evaluations. In this model, *Marketing Ethics* and *Negative e-WOM* represent the stimuli, *Customer Trust* represents the organismic state, and *Switching Intention* represents the behavioural response. This interpretation is consistent with research emphasizing the applicability of S-O-R in explaining consumer responses to environmental and digital stimuli (Sivasothey et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022). The principal theoretical contribution is therefore the extension of the S-O-R mechanism into a context where ethical marketing and negative online communication operate as competing stimuli that influence switching through trust. Practically, the findings indicate that maintaining ethical marketing practices and managing negative e-WOM are interconnected rather than separate managerial concerns. The study's novelty lies in showing that consumer switching in the examined context is not explained solely by direct reactions to ethical perceptions or negative online information, but also by the intervening role of trust in translating these stimuli into behavioural intentions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that consumer responses to controversial digital marketing are shaped not only by direct evaluations of marketing practices and negative online information but also by the trust formed through these experiences. Based on data from 200 White Inc consumers exposed to the Black Campaign issue, *Marketing Ethics* significantly increases *Customer Trust* and reduces *Switching Intention*, whereas *Negative e-WOM* significantly decreases *Customer Trust* and increases *Switching Intention*. *Customer Trust* also

significantly reduces Switching Intention and mediates the effects of both Marketing Ethics and Negative e-WOM on consumers' switching intentions. The main implication of these findings is that ethical marketing and effective management of negative e-WOM are essential for maintaining consumer trust and reducing switching tendencies in digital markets. The study's theoretical contribution lies in extending the S-O-R framework by integrating ethical marketing and negative e-WOM as contrasting stimuli, Customer Trust as the organismic mechanism, and Switching Intention as the behavioral response within a single model. However, the study is limited by its purposive sample of 200 respondents and its focus on consumers familiar with a specific brand-related controversy, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should examine other brands, industries, consumer segments, and digital controversies, and consider longitudinal or comparative designs to provide broader evidence on how ethical marketing, negative e-WOM, and trust shape switching behavior over time.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. K. (2024). How to Choose a Sampling Technique and Determine Sample Size for Research: A Simplified Guide for Researchers. *Oral Oncology Reports*, 12, 100662. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oor.2024.100662>
- Aldulaimi, S., Soni, S., Kampooale, I., Krishnan, G., Ab Yajid, M. S., Khatibi, A., ... & Khurana, M. (2025). Customer Perceived Ethicality and Electronic Word of Mouth Approach to Customer Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Customer Trust. *International Journal of Ethics and Systems*, 41(1), 258–278. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOES-03-2024-0088>
- Alnoor, A., Tiberius, V., Atiyah, A. G., Khaw, K. W., Yin, T. S., Chew, X., & Abbas, S. (2024). How Positive and Negative Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) Affects Customers' Intention to Use Social Commerce? A Dual-Stage Multi-Group SEM and ANN Analysis. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 40(3), 808–837. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2022.2125610>
- Chen, Y., Prentice, C., Weaven, S., & Hisao, A. (2022). The Influence of Customer Trust and Artificial Intelligence on Customer Engagement and Loyalty – The Case of the Home-Sharing Industry. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 912339. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.912339>
- Chong, W. K., & Patwa, N. (2023). The Value of Integrity: Empowering SMEs with Ethical Marketing Communication. *Sustainability*, 15(15), 11673. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151511673>

- Guan, X., Zhang, L., Liu, X., & Liu, Q. (2025). An Eye for an Eye: Exploring How Human-Robot Service Attributes Affect Customers' Negative Electronic Word-of-Mouth. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 127, 104104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2025.104104>
- Guenther, P., Guenther, M., Ringle, C. M., Zaefarian, G., & Cartwright, S. (2023). Improving PLS-SEM Use for Business Marketing Research. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 111, 127–142. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2023.03.010>
- Hair, J., & Alamer, A. (2022). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in Second Language and Education Research: Guidelines Using an Applied Example. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*, 1(3), 100027. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rmal.2022.100027>
- Hancock, T., Breazeale, M., Adams, F. G., & Hardman, H. (2023). Fueling and Cooling Firestorms: How Online Community Members Enable and Disable Online Negative e-WOM. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 32(2), 286–304. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-12-2021-3756>
- Hill, J., Ogle, K., Gottlieb, M., Santen, S. A., & Artino, A. R., Jr. (2022). Educator's Blueprint: A How-To Guide for Collecting Validity Evidence in Survey-Based Research. *AEM Education and Training*, 6(6), e10835. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aet2.10835>
- Iranmanesh, M., Min, C. L., Senali, M. G., Nikbin, D., & Foroughi, B. (2022). Determinants of Switching Intention from Web-Based Stores to Retail Apps: Habit as a Moderator. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 66, 102957. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.102957>
- Legate, A. E., Ringle, C. M., & Hair, J. F., Jr. (2024). PLS-SEM: A Method Demonstration in the R Statistical Environment. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 35(4), 501–529. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21517>
- Lim, W. M., & Koay, K. Y. (2024). So You Want to Publish in a Premier Journal? An Illustrative Guide on How to Develop and Write a Quantitative Research Paper for Premier Journals. *Global Business and Organizational Excellence*, 43(3), 5–19. <https://doi.org/10.1002/joe.22252>
- Lyu, J., & Ratasuk, A. (2024). Determinants of Customer Trust in Rural E-Commerce in Zhengzhou, China: A Case Study of Taobao Villages. *วารสารปัญญาภิวัฒน์*, 16(2), 105–124.
- Mansouri, H., Sadeghi Boroujerdi, S., & Md Husin, M. (2022). The Influence of Sellers' Ethical Behaviour on Customer's Loyalty, Satisfaction and Trust. *Spanish Journal of Marketing-ESIC*, 26(2), 267–283. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SJME-09-2021-0176>

- Matiukaite, K., Sciukauskas, I., & Usas, A. (2024). The Impact of e-WOM Aspects on Consumer Purchase Intentions. *Polish Journal of Management Studies*, 30(2), 162–180. <https://doi.org/10.17512/pjms.2024.30.2.10>
- Miller, S., & Lengler, J. (2025). Strengthening Quantitative Research in International Business: Best Practices for Methods and Results Sections. *Critical Perspectives on International Business*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CPOIB-01-2025-0018>
- Mushagalusa, C. N., Balemba Kanyurhi, E., Bugandwa Mungu Akonkwa, D., & Murhula Cubaka, P. (2022). Measuring Price Fairness and Its Impact on Consumers' Trust and Switching Intentions in Microfinance Institutions. *Journal of Financial Services Marketing*, 27(2), 111–135. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41264-021-00102-3>
- Nandavita, A. Y., Fadla, D. A., Lizariani, D., & Hasyima, M. (2025). Etika dalam Pemasaran: Upaya Mewujudkan Keadilan dan Perlindungan Konsumen di Era Digital. *Jurnal Ekonomi dan Manajemen*, 2(1b), 2360–2369. <https://doi.org/10.62710/e5hqb690>
- Ng, M., Law, M., & Lin, K. F. K. (2024). Determinants of Smartphone Brand Switching Intention of Consumers in Hong Kong. *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, 12(2), 275–289. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41270-022-00198-z>
- Qin, X. (2024). An Introduction to Causal Mediation Analysis. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 25(3), 703–717. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-024-09962-5>
- Reed, J. E., Johnson, J. K., Zanni, R., Messier, R., Asfour, F., & Godfrey, M. M. (2024). Quality of Locally Designed Surveys in a Quality Improvement Collaborative: Review of Survey Validity and Identification of Common Errors. *BMJ Open Quality*, 13(1), e002387. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjoq-2023-002387>
- Roy, K., Paul, U. K., Tiwari, S., & Mookherjee, A. (2025). Impact of Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) on Purchasing Decisions: An Empirical Study. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, 32(10), 3901–3936. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BIJ-08-2024-0642>
- Sarstedt, M., & Liu, Y. (2024). Advanced Marketing Analytics Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, 12(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41270-023-00279-7>
- Sarstedt, M., & Moisescu, O. I. (2024). Quantifying Uncertainty in PLS-SEM-Based Mediation Analyses. *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, 12(1), 87–96. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41270-023-00231-9>
- Schuler, M. S., Coffman, D. L., Stuart, E. A., Nguyen, T. Q., Vegetabile, B., & McCaffrey, D. F. (2025). Practical Challenges in Mediation Analysis: A Guide for Applied Researchers. *Health Services and Outcomes Research Methodology*, 25(1), 57–84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10742-024-00327-4>

- Sengupta, A. S., Stafford, M. R., & Fox, A. K. (2024). Misery Loves Company: Evaluation of Negative e-WOM Effects at the Post-Service Recovery Stage. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, 34(4), 493–518. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-03-2023-0093>
- Sivasothy, J. A., Yeo, S. F., & Tan, C. L. (2024). Assessing the Applicability and Reliability of the SOR Theory in the Healthcare Sector: A Comprehensive Review of Recent Research. *PaperASIA*, 40(1b), 1–12. [https://doi.org/10.59953/paperasia.v40i1\(b\).55](https://doi.org/10.59953/paperasia.v40i1(b).55)
- Sudaryanto, S., Hanim, A., Rosediana Dewi, I., Kartikasari, A. D., & Rusdiyanto, R. (2025). The Mediating Effect of Customer Trust of E-WOM and Online Customer Reviews Impacting Purchase Decision of Household Electronic Products at a Marketplace: Evidence from Indonesia. *Cogent Business & Management*, 12(1), 2503093. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2503093>
- Tan, T. M., & Salo, J. (2023). Ethical Marketing in the Blockchain-Based Sharing Economy: Theoretical Integration and Guiding Insights. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 183(4), 1113–1140. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-05015-8>
- Uslay, C. (2025). Toward a More General Theory of Marketing Ethics. *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, 27(1), 126–161. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRME-03-2024-0083>
- White, M. (2023). Sample Size in Quantitative Instrument-Based Studies Published in Scopus up to 2022: An Artificial Intelligence Aided Systematic Review. *Acta Psychologica*, 241, 104095. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2023.104095>
- Zhang, J., Jiang, N., Turner, J. J., & Pahlevan-Sharif, S. (2022). The Impact of Scarcity on Consumers' Impulse Buying Based on the SOR Theory. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 792419. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.792419>