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Investigating the role of rational and emotional content towards consumer engagement and EWOM intention: Uses and gratification perspectives

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of rational and emotional content in social media on consumer engagement and EWOM intention. The population of this research is e-commerce social media users with a total sample size of 394 respondents using the purposive sampling technique. The Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) is used to test the research hypothesis. The results of the study revealed the role of rational and emotional content in influencing consumer engagement but did not affect EWOM intention. Consumer engagement affects EWOM intentions. The study's findings support consumer engagement which is proven to mediate the relationship between rational and emotional content and EWOM intention. Social media marketing practitioners use rational and emotional content types on their brand pages in order to gain engagement and EWOM from social media users.

Keywords: Customer engagement, E-Commerce, Emotional content, EWOM, Rational content, Social media.

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1. Introduction

Consumer engagement has attracted the attention of many organization due to its role in enhancing a company's competitive advantage [1]. Marketing practitioners and academicians have an interest in studying consumer engagement for various reasons. Practitioners are interested in consumer engagement because of its role in ensuring the success of digital

marketing, whereas academics value in-depth knowledge about the driving factors of consumer engagement because of its role in the decision-making phase [2]. Different levels of marketing activity lead to increased consumer engagement. Consumer participation in social media is an important step along with the advancement of digitalization and social media's role as the main channel in digital marketing. Unfortunately, research on engagement has not received as much attention as other scientific fields [3].

Businesses are increasingly using social media to communicate with customers and display product-related content [4] which acts as a main predictor for building engagement on social media [5, 6]. Creating engaging social media content has also become a daily activity in order to attract, retain, increase sales and enrich customer brand relationships [7, 8]. However, managing brand content on social media remains a significant challenge for many marketers [9]. Similarly, only a few empirical studies on content and consumer engagement on social media have been conducted [10-12].

Brands use content posted on their social media pages to communicate with their target audience about their products. According to earlier studies, both rational and emotional content categories which provide information on products or services or convey messages intended to stimulate readers' emotions influence how social media users behave [13, 14]. Although studies on the advertising content of communications with rational and emotional appeals have been conducted in the past [15], they have not been widely applied to studies on the content of social media [16].

Consumer comments on brand posts have the potential to be shared by other users of the social media ecosystem known as Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) [17]. EWOM has drawn the attention of academics since the advent of the internet in the early 1990s. It has become the most popular marketing aspect for firms [16], enhancing brand positioning and promoting sales [18] due to its direct influence on customer purchasing behaviour [18]. In addition to benefiting the company, it also benefits other consumers through reviews and comments written on social media as external references in their purchasing decisions [19]. Brand content on social media is intended as an integral part of marketing communications that has a persuasion function to influence consumer behavior. However, only a few previous studies have examined the impact of this rational and emotional content on EWOM [20, 21]. Finding empirical evidence of the relationship between these two categories of content in social media marketing research is much more difficult.

EWOM and social media content are crucial components of social media marketing to increase engagement [22, 23]. Research in this field is still limited and challenging to comprehend despite researchers' increased attention to content marketing and engagement [24, 25]. This study aims to fill the empirical gap by re-examining the impact of content types on engagement and engagement on EWOM and testing for the first time the role of engagement in mediating the relationship between content and EWOM on the social media Facebook page of the e-commerce industry. The results of this study will contribute to provide the latest insights on the study of consumer engagement on social media which is influenced by content strategies, i.e., rational and emotional content and how they influence the formation of EWOM among social media users.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1. Uses and Gratification Theory

The uses and gratification (U&G) theory is used as a foundation for explaining the relationship between the media and its audience. The main assumption of U&G states that a person takes certain benefits provided by a media with different levels of variation based on one's purpose for choosing and consuming media [26]. This theory explains a person's motivation for consuming various types of content that has an impact on changes in audience behavior used to develop content as a marketing campaign tool and is known as content marketing [27]. In its development, U&G theory has been used to explain the relationship between types of content on social media and engagement behavior [10, 28], EWOM [29, 30], trust and value [31].

Companies get a benefit from a social media content strategy because they can manage their own social media content [11]. Creating value between consumers and companies and between consumers and other consumers is the strength of social media marketing because consumers participate in the development of brand products indirectly helping brand promotions through EWOM [32, 33]. Social media has been recognized as part of daily user and marketing activities [34]. Researchers have an interest in researching how users consume social media content and how their behavior changes after viewing brand content. It's worth knowing whether the brands have succeeded in achieving their goal with social media content marketing to create favorable consumer behavior to fill the empirical and research gap.

2.2. Social Media Content (Rational and Emotional Content)

The U&G theory posits that audiences have certain motivations for using social media depending on the audience with some seeking entertainment and others seeking information. In social media, content acts as an important factor in attracting consumer attention to brands and plays a role in forming engagement [35, 36]. Social media content plays an important role in the effectiveness of digital marketing. The choice of the concept of content marketing in social media marketing in this study is due to the fact that content marketing has an important impact for online customer engagement purposes, developing and distributing information and disseminating highly relevant information that can transmit value to consumers [37].

Content on social media pages functions as marketing advertisements that influence behavior [38]. On social media, the distribution of content based on its origins is divided into two groups: User Generated Content (UGC) and Firm Generated Content (FGC). UGC is content created by social media users [39] while FGC is content created by brands [40]. The types of FGC content posted by the brand on their social media pages are known to be divided into rational and emotional content types [41]. Rational content is a type of post that contains information, facts and details with a rational

delivery while emotional content relies on an emotional approach and the psychological needs of consumers [41]. Typically, rational messages include recognised factual facts together with relevant details for the intended audience [42]. On social media, rational and emotional content influence many aspects of consumers such as brand loyalty [43], purchase intention [44] and consumer risk perceptions of brands [45].

2.3. Consumer Engagement in Social Media

Engagement can be viewed from various perspectives starting from relational constructs (brand loyalty, relationship marketing, orientation marketing and concentric marketing), Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and social networks [46]. Engagement shows the level of positive consumer valence in the form of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activities while interacting with brands or other consumers [47]. Research on engagement on social media continues to show progress from both company and consumer interests [48]. Engagement has become an important component of brand relationships and promotional efforts [49] but knowing what factors can influence customer engagement behavior is still very limited [50]. Previous research has shown that certain types of media and content offer gratuities (prizes) for their users [51]. Consumers are encouraged to behave positively towards the brand after using and consuming social media material. The consumption of goods and services (passive behavior), contributing and receiving (active behaviour) and producing (active behaviour) are all examples of customers' positive behaviors in the study of customer engagement behaviour [10]. In the context of this study, customer engagement is viewed as the satisfaction experienced by consumers after using social media and consuming its content. On Facebook, consumers' satisfaction with social media use is shown through comments, sharing material, and like posts [52]. This research will contribute to provide the results of an empirical study of the implementation of U&G theory in the context of online media.

2.4. Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) Intention

EWOM enables companies to improve their marketing strategies and encourages online purchasing decisions [53]. EWOM contains all online informal conversations (positive or negative) between customers and sellers about certain goods or services [54]. It has an impact on brand attitude and purchase intention [55] becomes a reference for successful viral marketing and builds interpersonal relationships [56]. It can be influenced by various content appeals and customer engagement [57]. According to a prior study, Firm Generated Content (FGC) had an effect on EWOM [39]. Brand engagement and EWOM have become important factors in the development of competitive advantages for companies [58]. However, there are still limitations to understand the role of engagement and EWOM on social media [39].

2.5. Hypothesis Development

2.5.1. Relationship between Rational, Emotional Content and Customer Engagement

The relationship between content and customer engagement has been studied in previous research. Ashley and Tuten [59] found a positive relationship between emotional content and engagement among Facebook users in the USA. Coursaris, et al. [38] proved that informational posts (similar to rational content concepts) and transformational appeals (similar to emotional content concepts) have an impact on the formation of involvement and engagement. Similarly, Soares, et al. [60] found evidence that emotional content has a positive effect on engagement behavior (likes, shares and comments) in Brazil. However, the research conducted by Shahbaznezhad, et al. [28] contradicts this. Shahbaznezhad, et al. [28] examined the effect of rational and emotional content on the active and passive engagement behavior of consumers in the airline industry. The influence of emotional and rational content is still contradictory to each other which become the basis for proposing a research hypothesis.

H₁: Rational content has a significant positive effect on customer engagement.

H₂: Emotional content has a significant positive effect on customer engagement.

2.5.2. Relationship between Rational, Emotional Content and EWOM Intention

The relationship between content and EWOM has been studied by Kim, et al. [61] who found evidence that content has a significant effect on EWOM intention. Ahmadi, et al. [21] focus on the effects of celebrity social media posts which include both emotional and logical types of posts on WOM and EWOM. Ahmadi's research results are strengthened by findings from Wang, et al. [62] who found that emotional announcement types encourage the formation of positive EWOM consumers. However, Simoes' findings [63] found no significant relationship between content characteristics and EWOM. Contradictory findings are still found regarding the role of content types in influencing EWOM which is the basis for conducting this research. Based on the previous findings, researchers are interested in re-examining the role of emotional and rational content in EWOM. So, the hypotheses proposed are:

H₃: Rational content has a positive and significant effect on EWOM intention.

H₄: Emotional content has a positive and significant effect on EWOM intention.

2.5.3. Relationship between Consumer Engagement and EWOM

The relationship between engagement and EWOM is explained by several previous research results. Chu, et al. [64] found that engagement has a partial effect on the formation of EWOM among WeChat users in China. Wang and Kubickova [65] found a relationship between multiple users who have positive engagement daily and the emergence of EWOM. Kanje, et al. [57] also presented evidence of the connection between EWOM and engagement and stated that consumers who engage both affectively and behaviorally have a greater influence on the formation of EWOM. Based on previous findings, the hypothesis developed in this study is:

H₅: Customer engagement has a positive and significant effect on EWOM intention.

2.6. Mediating Role of Consumer Engagement

The concepts of engagement and EWOM in marketing studies play a role in mediating or moderating the relationship that occurs between dependent and independent variables. As for the mediating effect, research conducted by Phan, et al. [58] has proven that there is a mediating effect of the engagement variable on the relationship between personalization, connection and EWOM. Demir and Yıldız [66] also confirm the role of customer engagement in mediating the relationship between social media marketing and EWOM. The results of these two studies have been able to confirm the role of engagement as a variable that mediates the relationship between independent factors in social media and the dependent factor of consumer behavior. However, the authors have not found how engagement plays a role in mediating the relationship between content types (rational and emotional) as an independent variable and EWOM as a dependent factor, which we consider a research novelty and has not been found in previous studies. Based on this justification, the hypotheses proposed are:

H₆: Customer engagement mediates the relationship between rational content and EWOM intention.

H₇: Customer engagement mediates the relationship between emotional content and EWOM intention.

The research model is described as follows based on the study and development of the hypotheses:

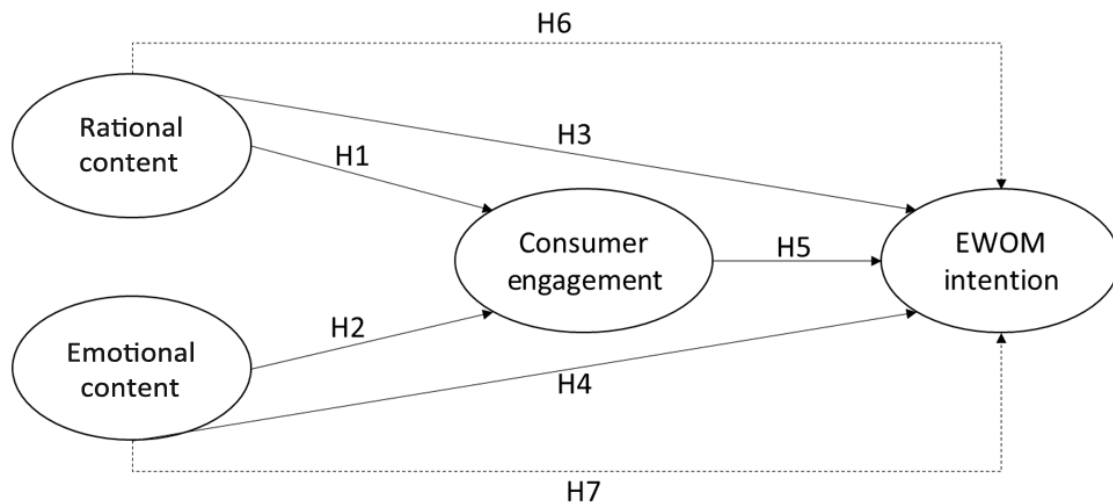


Figure 1.

Research framework.

Note: Straight line (—) = direct relationship.
Dashed line (----) = indirect relationship.

Figure 1 illustrates the research model that describes the pattern of relationships between dependent, mediating and independent variables. Rational and emotional content as independent variables. Engagement as the mediating variable and EWOM as the dependent variable.

3. Materials and Methods

This study aims to determine the effect of social media content types on the formation of engagement and EWOM among Tokopedia e-commerce users in Indonesia. Screening questions are used to filter and select the sample for this study. Purposive non-probability sampling was used to select the intended respondents such as those who are Facebook users and have seen or commented on one of Tokopedia's Facebook posts in the last three months. Furthermore, data was collected by distributing questionnaires to respondents with a total of 394 samples collected.

The researcher adopted item statements from previous studies to measure each variable. Rational and emotional content adopt research from Kim and Johnson [67], each with three statement items. Consumer engagement was adopted from Demir and Yıldız [66] research with six statement items. This study used a Likert scale with a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). For the characteristics of the respondents, the items asked included the respondent's gender, age, income and occupation. Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used for data analysis. This study focuses on predicting the main research construct by explaining and exploring the relationship between dependent and independent constructs along with evaluating the quality of the data based on the characteristics of the measurement model.

4. Results

4.1. Profile Respondent

The results of the descriptive analysis for this research consisted of 394 respondents based on gender showing that the percentage of respondents was 52.1% women and 47.9% men. Based on age characteristics, the dominance of respondents aged around 18–23 years was 194 people (49.2%). The occupation of the respondents was dominated by students with as

many as 187 respondents or 47.46%. The characteristics of respondents based on monthly income are dominated by respondents with an Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) of 2,000,000–4,000,000 (52.03%).

4.2. PLS-SEM Analysis

Partial Least Square requires two stages of testing to test the model. The first stage is to test the suitability of the measurement model. The second stage is to evaluate the structural model.

4.2.1. The Outer Model

Outer model testing is carried out to examine the relationship between indicators used in each latent variable. Construct reliability, discriminant validity and convergent validity are used to test the outer model. Each questionnaire item is said to be valid using convergent validity if it meets the outer loading value > 0.7 and the Average Variance Expected (AVE) value is more than 0.5 [68]. Table 1 shows the outer loading value and the AVE which show the results of the convergent validity test. For a cross-loading value greater than 0.7 in discriminant validity, the loading value of each item against the construct must be greater than the cross-loading value to meet the good testing criteria. We use the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loading to examine and evaluate discriminant validity. Furthermore, reliability is measured using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. This indicator measurement is said to be a good indicator if it has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of at least 0.7.

Table 1.

Convergent validity.

Construct	Item code	Factor loading	AVE
Rational content	RC1	0.829	0.702
	RC2	0.838	
	RC3	0.847	
Emotional content	EM1	0.753	0.689
	EM2	0.849	
	EM3	0.883	
Consumer engagement	CE1	0.784	0.663
	CE2	0.776	
	CE3	0.821	
	CE4	0.830	
	CE5	0.847	
	CE6	0.823	
EWOM intention	EI1	0.859	0.675
	EI2	0.804	
	EI3	0.801	

Table 2 shows that the relationship between the latent variable and the AVE square root value is greater than that of the other latent variables. The score for the cross-loading correlation for each statement item used in this study is greater when compared to other latent variables, so it can be concluded that each research item has discriminant validity.

Table 2.

Fornell Larcker criterion.

Construct	Consumer engagement	EWOM intention	Emotional content	Rational content
Consumer engagement	0.814			
EWOM intention	0.783	0.822		
Emotional content	0.792	0.619	0.830	
Rational content	0.639	0.515	0.723	0.838

Based on the findings in Table 3, the composite reliability and Cronbach alpha values are greater than 0.7 which means that the construct used in this study is reliable. Based on Table 4, the R² value of EWOM is 61.4% and the R² value of consumer engagement is 63.6% which can be classified as substantial. The R² value of this study indicates that 63.6% of consumer engagement can be explained by rational and emotional content. While the EWOM intention that is formed can be explained by 61.4% consumer engagement.

Table 3.

Reliability test.

Construct	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha	Decision
Consumer engagement	0.922	0.898	Reliable
EWOM intention	0.862	0.763	Reliable
Emotional content	0.869	0.774	Reliable
Rational content	0.876	0.789	Reliable

Table 4.
R-square (R2) result.

Construct	R-square (R2)	Adjusted R-square	Decision
Consumer engagement	0.637	0.635	Substantial
EWOM intention	0.614	0.611	Substantial

4.2.2 The Inner Model

The inner model is used to compare the latent variables with other variables. Common values used to evaluate structural models are predictive relevance (Q^2) and goodness of fit (GoF). This study uses predictive relevance (Q^2) with reference to $Q^2 > 0.05$. The predictive relevance of this study is obtained when the value of Q^2 is greater than 0 which indicates that the model has good relevance (Table 5). Our model has a large GoF based on the Goodness of Fit (GoF) obtained from the blind-folding process in the Smart-PLS 3.3.0 software (Table 6).

Table 5.
Predictive relevance (Q^2).

Construct	Predictive relevance (Q^2)	Result
Consumer engagement	0.417	Relevance
EWOM intention	0.398	Relevance

Table 6.
Goodness of fit.

Construct	GoF	Description
Customer engagement	0.649	Large
EWOM intention	0.643	Large

Table 5 shows the Q^2 results of the consumer engagement variable of 41.7% and the EWOM intention of 40%. The value of $Q^2 > 0$ indicates that the model has predictive relevance. Furthermore, the GoF value of this study is known to be 0.649 for customer engagement and 0.643 for EWOM intention (Table 6) which are included in the high criteria. The test results for the hypotheses proposed in this study are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7.
Summary of hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis	Path	Path. coeff.	T-stat	T-table	P-value	Decision
H1	RC → CE	0.138	2.727	1.645	0.006	Accepted
H2	EC → CE	0.692	16.587	1.645	0.000	Accepted
H3	CE → EI	0.782	17.172	1.645	0.000	Accepted
H4	RC → EI	0.033	0.789	1.645	0.430	Rejected
H5	EC → EI	-0.024	0.425	1.645	0.671	Rejected
H6	RC → CE → EI	0.542	15.437	1.645	0.000	Accepted
H7	EC → CE → EI	0.108	2.772	1.645	0.007	Accepted

This study used a significance level of 5% with the one-tailed test. Based on the results of data processing summarized in Table 7, it can be shown that the path analyzed for correlation has a t-statistic value > 1.645 and a p-value < 0.05 . With this result, it can be concluded that the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H6, and H7 are accepted while the hypotheses H4 and H5 are rejected.

5. Discussion

Based on the results of the correlation analysis, it was found that rational content has a positive and significant effect on consumer engagement, with a path coefficient value of 0.138, a t-stat = 2.727 and a p-value = 0.006 which means that H1 is accepted. The results of this study are in accordance with the findings of Dolan, et al. [10] who examined the role of rational messages in influencing the active and passive engagement behavior of social media users in Australia. Lopez [69] also found that rational messages play a more important role in forming consumer brand engagement among Twitter users. Rational content contains content about descriptions of features, values and benefits of brands and products that is posted and shared by marketers on social media pages to influence how consumers engage with social media brands. Companies that have the goal of maximizing customer engagement through their social media pages can consider creating rational-type content to create user engagement. The results of these findings are different from the results of research conducted by Khurana and Knight [70] which found a negative effect between rationality and engagement. According to the findings of Khurana and Knight [70], the higher the rational appeals shared by a brand on a social media page, the lower the level of engagement obtained. However, it is interesting to further study the role of rational content and consumer engagement with other methods to gain different insights from these contradictory findings.

The results of this study found that emotional content has a positive and significant effect on consumer engagement with a path coefficient of 0.692, a t-stat of 16.587 and a p-value of 0.000, so H2 is accepted. The results of this study are in accordance with the results of research conducted by Rietveld, et al. [6]; Soares, et al. [60] and Ashley and Tuten [59].

The results of this study provide empirical evidence of the role of emotional content in fostering engagement with e-commerce social media users. Schreiner and Riedl [71] state that emotional content has the potential to attract attention and generate consumer engagement. We found that consumer engagement among Tokopedia users is formed by content that contains positive emotions, creates a pleasant atmosphere and builds a comfortable feeling among users. The better the type of emotional content on social media, the more positive customer engagement will be formed. With this finding, Tokopedia management can ensure that they create useful posts and foster positive feelings on their social media for a better social media marketing strategy in the future. Content marketing activists can also consider creating content that contains rational and emotional messages in their social media posts. However, according to findings by Moser, et al. [72], emotional content affects consumer engagement in a negative direction which means that the better the emotional content, the smaller the consumer engagement. Moser, et al. [72] conducted their research on Twitter users using the content analysis method. These different findings are interesting for further research to obtain results that can be compared with the findings of other studies.

The results of this study prove the role of customer engagement in influencing EWOM intention with a path coefficient of 0.782, a t-stat of 17.172, and a p-value of 0.000, so H3 is accepted. These results are consistent with the results of research conducted by Kanje, et al. [57]; Phan, et al. [58] and Demir and Yıldız [66] who also found evidence that EWOM intention influences consumer engagement. The higher the level of engagement that consumers feel on a brand's social media page, the higher their interest in creating EWOM. Brand owners can maximize their efforts to create consumer engagement on social media to have an impact on creating EWOM.

The results of this study prove that rational and emotional content have no effect on the formation of EWOM interest among Tokopedia social media users, with a path coefficient of 0.033, a t-stat of 0.789 and a p-value of 0.430 for rational content and EWOM and a path coefficient of -0.024, a t-stat of 0.425 and a p-value of 0.671 for emotional content and EWOM. Thus, H4 and H5 are rejected. These results contradict the findings of Ahmadi, et al. [21] and Kim, et al. [61] which state that posts containing rational and emotional messages can encourage the formation of EWOM among users. According to Ahmadi, et al. [21], emotional content is more influential in forming EWOM than rational content. In contrast, the results of this study did not find a direct effect between rational and emotional content types and the formation of EWOM among social media users. This finding is a new one for academics and content marketers to consider other types of content besides content that has informational features about products and content that can foster positive feelings to create EWOM among e-commerce social media users. Kwok, et al. [73] argue that brand marketing messages are more capable of generating stronger EWOM intentions. However, our results don't support this argument.

Customer engagement plays a role in mediating the relationship between rational content and EWOM intention with a path coefficient value of 0.542, a t-stat of 15.437, and a p-value of 0.000. Customer engagement also mediated the relationship between emotional content and EWOM intention with a path coefficient of 0.108, a t-stat of 2.772, and a p-value of 0.007. Similarly, H6 and H7 are accepted. The results of this study are in accordance with the findings of previous studies which prove the role of consumer engagement in mediating the relationship between Social Media Marketing (SMM) and EWOM intention [66]. According to research findings, EWOM is not directly influenced by rational and emotional content posted on social media. It should be noted that the formation of EWOM will not occur without first forming consumer engagement caused by rational and emotional content on e-commerce social media pages in Indonesia. These results contribute to insight into the role of customer engagement in mediating the relationship between social media content and the creation of EWOM intentions in the online ecosystem. The results of this study are expected to help Tokopedia show what types of content can foster engagement on social media which in turn has an impact on the creation of EWOM by social media users.

6. Conclusion

This study aims to examine the role of rational and emotional content in shaping customer engagement and EWOM intention. The results showed that rational and emotional content have a positive and significant effect on the formation of customer engagement. Customer engagement plays a role as a mediating variable in the relationship between rational and emotional content and EWOM intention. The research results prove that there is no direct effect between rational and emotional content on EWOM intention because the mediation test shows the opposite result, the use of content that contains rational messages and content that is able to evoke emotions in social media users is still relevant to be carried out by Tokopedia management because of its impact on the formation of customer engagement and EWOM intention. Indirectly, the role of rational and emotional content on social media pages also plays a role in the formation of EWOM intentions, so Tokopedia management needs to maintain to create rational and emotional content in the future.

The results provide an important contribution to current research results which are still limited in providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between rational and emotional content in social media and the process of forming customer engagement and EWOM intention. There are certain limitations to this study. First, although this research shows the relationship between content type (rational and emotional) and customer engagement and EWOM intention, other studies have succeeded in examining the role of content type on purchase intention. Future researchers should research the role of social media content type in EWOM and purchase intention. Second, this study uses a sample of respondents who use e-commerce social media in Indonesia. Based on this fact, we suggest further research to examine the variable content type and EWOM intention in different industries. For example, the banking industry or the leisure industry which commonly use social media as their marketing strategy. Third, this research has explained the role of consumer engagement in mediating the relationship between types of social media content and EWOM intention. However, the

results of other studies have also found the role of brand equity in mediating the relationship between types of content and EWOM. Thus, the researcher encourages future research to consider using brand equity in the next research.

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