THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN e-WOM AND CONSUMER ONLINE BUYING BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

The growth of active users on online interactive media platforms, such as electronic Word-of-Mouth, has had a significant impact on marketers as customers are more likely to trust unfiltered e-WOM from other consumers than marketer-influenced signals like branding. There is still a debate about the impact of e-WOM on consumer purchasing behaviour; this discrepancy could be attributed to various factors, including the context in which the studies were conducted, the methodological approaches used, and the time and spatial dimensions. Other factors contributing to the lack of consensus include the fact that online content is tailored to different occasions, social groups, and even different brands. The paper seeks to establish what e-WOM is and discuss its relationship with consumers' buying behaviour process during online buying. The study was quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional. The self-administered questionnaires were sent via email to 400 Durban University of Technology staff and students and only 288 questionnaires were received back. A review of the literature revealed a positive relationship between e-WOM and consumer buying behaviour. The empirical findings from the structural equation modelling, which demonstrated a positive, strong correlation between e-WOM and consumer buying behaviour, further support the literature. Marketers must design tactics to increase the likelihood of their businesses creating positive e-WOM in all e-WOM stages and capitalising on the power of any favourable reviews and testimonials received.

Keywords: Electric Word Of Mouth (e-WOM), Consumer Buying Behaviour, Online Buying, Online Interactive Media.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the popularity of digital marketing, the expansion of online presence among businesses, which remained largely unregulated, caused consumers to question the substance of online advertising due to a lack of trust, bad content, and invasion of personal privacy, among other concerns. Most of these firms provide a generic online advertising experience rather than a personalised one, resulting in low consumer engagement and retention. While advertisers use digital commercials to attract consumers' emotions towards businesses, the effects are frequently unsustainable and fruitless, leading to a lack of consumer trust in digital marketing. As a result, consumers nowadays rely on earned campaigns such as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) rather than commercials (Casas, Palaima, and Mironidze, 2019).

In reaction to the evolving landscape, businesses are implementing strategies to use the potential of various online media platforms to interact directly with consumers and influence their decision-making process. Online broadcast media (OBM) and online interactive media (OIM) are examples of these technologies (OIM). Microblogs, blogs, and social network services are all part of OIM (SNS). With OBM, the advertiser speaks and the consumers listen,

whereas in OIM, both the advertiser and the consumers speak, listen, and respond (Zhang and Tran, 2015). This has given rise to the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which is the subject of the current research.

Different studies have been conducted and they have contradictory results about the effects of e-WOM on online buying behaviour (Dou *et al*. 2012; Flanagin *et al*. 2014; He and Bond 2015; Reimer and Benkenstein 2016; Zainal *et al*. 2017). For example, He and Bond (2015) found that the volume of e-WOM communications affects buying behaviour, while Flanagin *et al*. (2014) found this relationship to be non-significant. The impact of e-WOM on consumer purchasing behaviour is still being debated; this disparity could be due to several factors, including the context in which the research was done, the methodological approaches used, and the time and spatial dimensions. Another element contributing to the lack of agreement is that internet information is targeted to different situations, social groupings, and even brands. The study aims to establish what e-WOM is and its relationship with consumer buying behaviour. The findings will add to the highly polarised debate over the impact of emerging technologies, such as e-WOM, on consumer behaviour by considering the dynamic environment in which consumers find themselves, as well as rapidly changing and updating technologies, globalisation, and other factors. Furthermore, when it comes to e-WOM, this research should help bridge the gap between limited expertise and unexpected consumer behaviour to increase positive consumer behaviour.

This paper is structured as follows: after the introduction, there is a literature review including theoretical and empirical research that offer light on the relationship between theory and practise. The third section provides context for the research and approach. The authors discussed views and implications following the study's analysis and findings. Finally, recommendations and conclusions are presented. The following section presents review of the literature.

LITERATURE

e-WOM as an influencing factor

The advent and extensive usage of the internet has resulted in the rise of a new type of word-of-mouth (WOM) notion known as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). E-WOM is defined as any positive or negative statement about a product or firm made by potential, actual, or past customers and made available to a large number of individuals and institutions over the internet (Cantallops and Salvi, 2018). This phenomenon has resulted in faster and broader information dissemination, as well as a stronger impact on marketers, which influences customers' decision-making processes, either positively or negatively (Singh, 2020; Huete-Alcocer, 2017).

When it comes to online purchase, e-WOM is regarded as one of the most powerful informal media among consumers and businesses. The purchasing behaviour of a product can be influenced by suggestions made by online users. Consumers can communicate their positive experiences through e-WOM, which boosts their trust in the business and their willingness to make a purchase. On the other hand, negative online word-of-mouth has the opposite effect

(Seifert and Kwon, 2015). Wu and Lin, (2016); Matute, Polo-Redondo, and Utrillas, (2016) emphasise the fact that previous customers' feedback and ideas now strongly influence consumers' online buying behaviours. Individuals can now utilise social media to interact with their friends and acquaintances about their ideas and opinions about various products and services (Lee and Youn, 2019). Due to decreased anonymity, there is a larger chance that the legitimacy and reliability of the information provided by e-WOM will improve, influencing the decision to buy online (Zhu and Zhang, 2020).

According to the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), subjective norms, such as social influence or advice from e-WOM, are effective means of influencing an individual's attitude and behaviour. Previous research (Ouellette, 2020; Zhao, Wang, Tang, and Zhang, 2020) has demonstrated that data from external sources (such as online consumer reviews) increases consumers' trust in their attitude towards an object, and this attitude can later direct the behaviour that consumers exhibit about the object.

Consumers typically use online interactive media not only before, during, and after the buying process (collecting information, analysing possibilities, and selecting the best option), but also after the purchase, when they share their own experience via social media (Oblak, Barcic, Klaric, Kuzman and Groselj, 2017).

According to research (Ouellette, 2020), current customers are quite digital in other aspects of their lives, and as a result, they automatically incorporate digital into their buying behaviour. According to the same survey, 80% of customers will never purchase without first reading a review on OIM. Another survey found that the vast majority of customers felt that online reviews are more trustworthy than brand websites (Zhao et al., 2020). Marketers should never underestimate the power of online influence marketing since negative content has higher long-term effects and is more persuasive than positive material (OIM). This is especially true when dissatisfied customers leave negative reviews online.

Consumers regard e-WOM communications as more trustworthy than traditional media since they provide product/service information to consumers (Ismagilova et al. 2017: 6). Utilising e-WOM communications during the purchasing process increases consumer trust in understanding products/services, lowers the risk of making poor purchasing decisions, and aids in attaining social approbation (Saleem and Ellahi, 2017).

Previous research (Filieri, Raguseo, and Vitari, 2018; Filieri, 2015; Floyd, Freling, Alhoqail, Cho, and Freling, 2014; Nam, Baker, Ahmad, and Goo, 2018; Wang, Cunningham, and Eastin, 2015; Yan, Wang, and Chau, 2015, 655) discovered that e-WOM is an important source of information that influences human behaviour significantly influencing the way consumers make purchasing decisions (Jeong and Koo, 2015; Lee, Keeling and Urbaczewski, 2017).

Further, it has been proven in past studies that e-WOM communications have a significant effect on consumer behaviour. Many research has been conducted to investigate the relationship between established e-WOMs and their impact on purchasing intentions (Fullerton, 2017; Ruiz-Mafe, Chatzipanagiotou and Curras-Perez, 2018; Tata, Prashar and Gupta, 2019; Bhandari and Rodgers, 2017; Netto, Carneiro, de Oliveira and Monteiro, 2016;

Saleem and Ellahi, 2017; Torlak, Ozkara, Tiltay, Cengiz and Dulger, 2014). According to these surveys, the majority of consumers claimed that online reviews have a substantial influence on their purchasing decisions. It is also critical to investigate the contextual factors that ultimately lead to online buying behaviour. As a result, this study incorporates contextual concerns such as generational segmentation and demography to provide insights into the impact of e-WOM on consumer online purchasing decisions.

Many empirical studies (Chen, Chen, and Chen, 2014; Erkan and Evans, 2016; Plotkina and Munzel, 2016) have discovered the impact of e-WOM on consumer intentions to purchase goods or services, such as car purchases (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012a), laptop purchases (Aerts, Smits, and Verlegh, 2017; Uribe, Buzeta, and Velásquez, 2016. Furthermore, Baber et al., (2016) discovered that information gained through the e-WOM platform is more important and valuable in decision-making processes than conversations with personal friends (WOM).

A study conducted by Joshi and Singh (2017) utilising regression analysis demonstrates that there is a high correlation between e-WOM and purchasing intention. Communication studies have also confirmed a positive relationship between e-WOM and purchase behaviour (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Kim et al., 2018). In the instance of online purchasing, research has found that social media exposure to subjective norms can influence purchase attitudes (de Lenne and Vandenbosch, 2017).

Since consumers increasingly trust the opinions of their peers, e-WOM in the form of online consumer feedback can have a large normative effect (Kim et al., 2017; Moran and Muzellec, 2014). According to the Theory of Reasoned Action and earlier research, positive e-WOM has a favourable impact on purchasing attitude and purchase intention, but negative e-WOM has the opposite effect (Lee et al., 2008; Park and Lee, 2009). Furthermore, research has shown that the online reviews that customers read before making a purchase influence 70% of their purchasing decisions (Joshi and Singh, 2017).

Nonetheless, other research has shown mixed results regarding the various aspects of e-WOM that influence purchasing behaviour (Dou, Walden, Lee and Lee, 2012; Flanagin, Metzger, Pure, Markov and Hartsell, 2014; He and Bond, 2015; Reimer and Benkenstein, 2016; Zainal et al., 2017). Sen (2008) and Sen and Lerman (2007) both observed that the influence of e-WOM is not as effective as the traditional face-to-face mouth (WOM) effect.

Different contexts, sample size, demographic characteristics, methodological techniques and study settings, as well as validity and reliability in the studies involved, could all explain differences in results. As a result, it is critical to perform another study to try to fill the vacuum left by earlier studies utilising the context of South African internet customers, with a focus on the role of demographic parameters as well as generation group.

Advertising practitioners have long recognised that consumers who spread their ideas have a significant role in influencing and expediting the circulation of information, which leads to consumers making excellent decisions (Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera and Zhang, 2013).

Generally, several authors agree that e-WOM is highly influential due to its credibility as a type of active processing in which consumers determine the reliability of the source and its independence from the interests of the marketers (Yoon and Taylor, 2015; De Pelsmacker, Dens, and Kolomiiets, 2018; Kim et al., 2018; Seo et al., 2018; Shin, Chae, and Ko, 2018). The hint suggests that customers are rejecting marketer-influenced signals such as branding and instead focusing on unfiltered e-WOM from other consumers. As a result, when marketers design digital media strategies, they must consider the consequences of e-WOM, both in terms of source credibility and message configuration, especially positive and negative attitudes expressed in dialogues posted on various SNS sites.

Shin et al., (2018), indicate that although e-WOM has been shown to have a favourable effect on consumer behaviour, consumers have been confounded by the enormous amount of information available on internet channels when it comes to acquiring reliable information. It was first stated that consumers require access to a wide range of information in order to make informed judgements (Isci and Kitaci, 2020).

This contradiction, however, has entirely transformed as evaluating exact details gets increasingly difficult. According to Lever, Mulvey, and Elliot (2017) consumers are perplexed, because of concerns about authenticity and reputation. Typically, the same product or service can have both bad and positive e-WOM, leaving consumers unsure of which reviewer to trust.

Although previous studies discovered the influence of e-WOM in social media, the mechanism between e-WOM and consumers' purchase decisions has yet to be clarified, owing to the interaction of various intrinsic and extrinsic factors when a consumer attempts to make an online purchase decision. As a result, it is hoped that the current study will establish this relationship and add to the ongoing debate.

The influence of e-WOM on consumer behaviour during COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak is an unusual occurrence that comes in handy during this period while the current study is underway. Consumers go online to learn more about products and companies during the COVID-19 pandemic (PwC, 2021). As their thirst for new content rose and their time spent on social media increased, they began to follow more social media influencers.

According to Karjala (2021), e-WOM has a considerable influence on consumer buying decisions, and the COVID-19 epidemic has underlined the relevance of social media as a source of information. Businesses must adapt to changes in consumer behaviour in order to sustain profitability and a competitive advantage in these unique conditions.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, Susanti et al. (2021), conducted a study to determine the influence of the e-WOM message on buying interest mediated by brand confidence in the Micro, Small, and Medium Businesses (MSME) group in the West Jakarta area. According to the study's findings during the COVID-19 pandemic, the influence of e-WOM on brand trust enhanced consumer purchasing interest in the MSME group.

While many malls and shops were closed at the outset of the lockdown and restaurants only offered takeaway during the pandemic, the function of e-WOM facilitated activities in fulfilling daily life, such as shopping. As a result, e-WOM is currently considered the most effective consumer influencer (Schijns and van Bruggen, 2018).

Since most consumers switched brands due to price, availability, online presence, and their first experience with that particular brand, they were more likely to consult e-WOM to validate their decisions and ensure value for money (Truong and Truong, 2022). Consumer purchasing power has been depleted, and they do not want to risk what little they have; hence, e-WOM becomes beneficial at this time. Since most purchases are made online, consumers consult e-WOM to avoid the risk that comes with online buying (Donthu and Gustafsson, 2020).

Consumers want to know if the seller delivers the exact things they ordered on time. Marketers must not undervalue the impact of e-WOM during this COVID-19 epidemic age because consumers are using it more frequently than ever before (Verma and Yadav, 2021). Based on the discussed literature, it is hypothesised that: There is a significant relationship between e-WOM and consumer buying behaviour.

Gaps in the literature

Literature has defined e-WOM and identified its relevance to consumer purchasing behaviour. According to a review of the literature, some studies, (Fullerton, 2017; Ruiz-Mafe, Chatzipanagiotou and Curras-Perez, 2018; Tata, Prashar and Gupta, 2019; Bhandari and Rodgers, 2017; Netto, Carneiro, de Oliveira and Monteiro, 2016; Saleem and Ellahi, 2017; Torlak, Ozkara, Tiltay, Cengiz and Dulger, 2014). show a strong relationship between e-WOM and consumer purchasing behaviour, while others show no such relationship. This study aims to fill a vacuum created by prior research on the paradoxes and current controversy surrounding the function of e-WOM in consumer purchasing behaviour.

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

The study was quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional. This method was chosen because it is best suited when dealing with a larger sample size. The self-administered questionnaires were sent via email to 400 Durban University of Technology staff and students and only 288 questionnaires were received back. Most of the questions posed were specifically related to the research objectives and were drawn from the studies of Voramontri and Klieb (2019: 22) and Osei and Abenyin (2016: 278).

Some questions were used as they are while some were modified to suit the study objectives. The latest version of SPSS was used to analyse the data. Structural equation modelling was used to investigate the causal relationships in this study. The overall model fit measures were used to assess the structural model's fit. The respondents' rights, values, and interests were respected. The findings of the study will be presented in the section that follows.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, participants were asked to understand the influence of e-WOM at various consumer buying behaviour stages, and the results are shown in Figure 1 below.
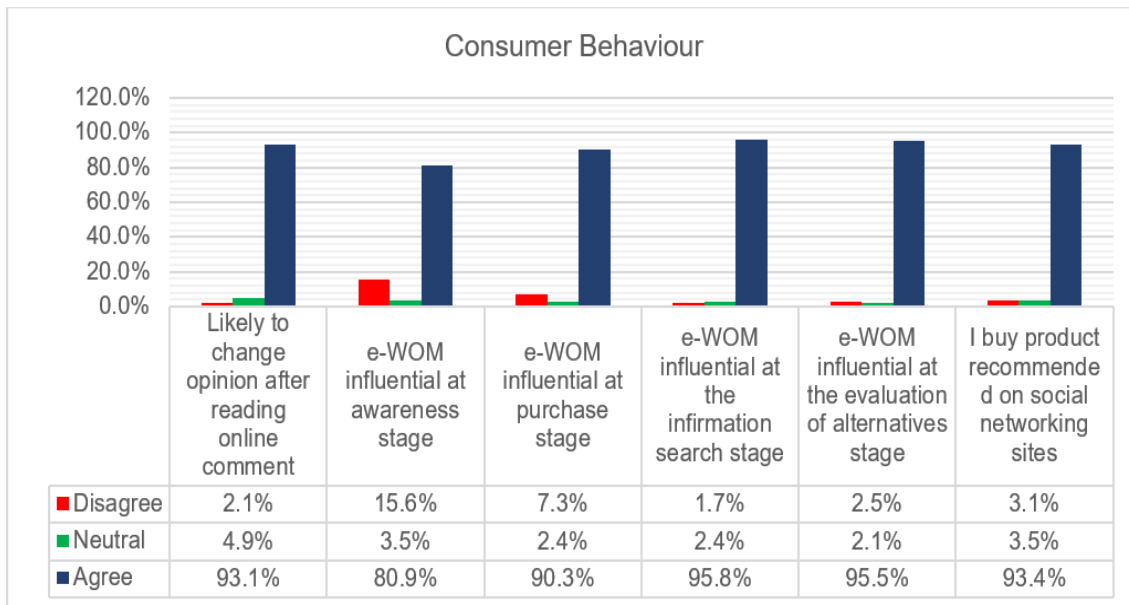

Consumer Behaviour

	Likely to change opinion after reading online comment	e-WOM influential at awareness stage	e-WOM influential at purchase stage	e-WOM influential at the infirmation search stage	e-WOM influential at the evaluation of alternatives stage	I buy product recommende d on social networking sites
Disagree	2.1%	15.6%	7.3%	1.7%	2.5%	3.1%
Neutral	4.9%	3.5%	2.4%	2.4%	2.1%	3.5%
Agree	93.1%	80.9%	90.3%	95.8%	95.5%	93.4%

Figure 1: Influence of e-WOM on consumer behaviour

The majority of the participants (80.9%) indicated that e-WOM is influential at the awareness stage of the consumer buying process. Further, most of the participants (95.8% and 95.5%) said that e-WOM is influential at the information search and evaluation of alternatives stages respectively. Also, 90.3% agreed that e-WOM is influential at the purchase stage. Overall, majority of the participants agreed that e-WOM influences their online buying at all stages of the buying process.

The findings align with the results of Oblak, Barcic, Klaric, Kuzman and Groselj (2017: 39), who found that usually, consumers use e-WOM during the purchasing process (collecting information, evaluating alternatives, and selecting the best alternative) and even post-purchase when they post their own experience on social media.

These results could also have been influenced by the time the study was conducted, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consumers are even buying fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) online, which was rarely done before COVID-19, even in the clothing and apparel sector, for example, in the South African online market (Bizcommunity 2021: 1). The need for e-commerce has arose because consumers feel safe doing their shopping online in the comfort of their own homes.

Structural Modelling Equation (SEM)

Figure 2 presents the structural modelling equation (SEM). The framework tested the relationship between e-WOM and consumer behaviour
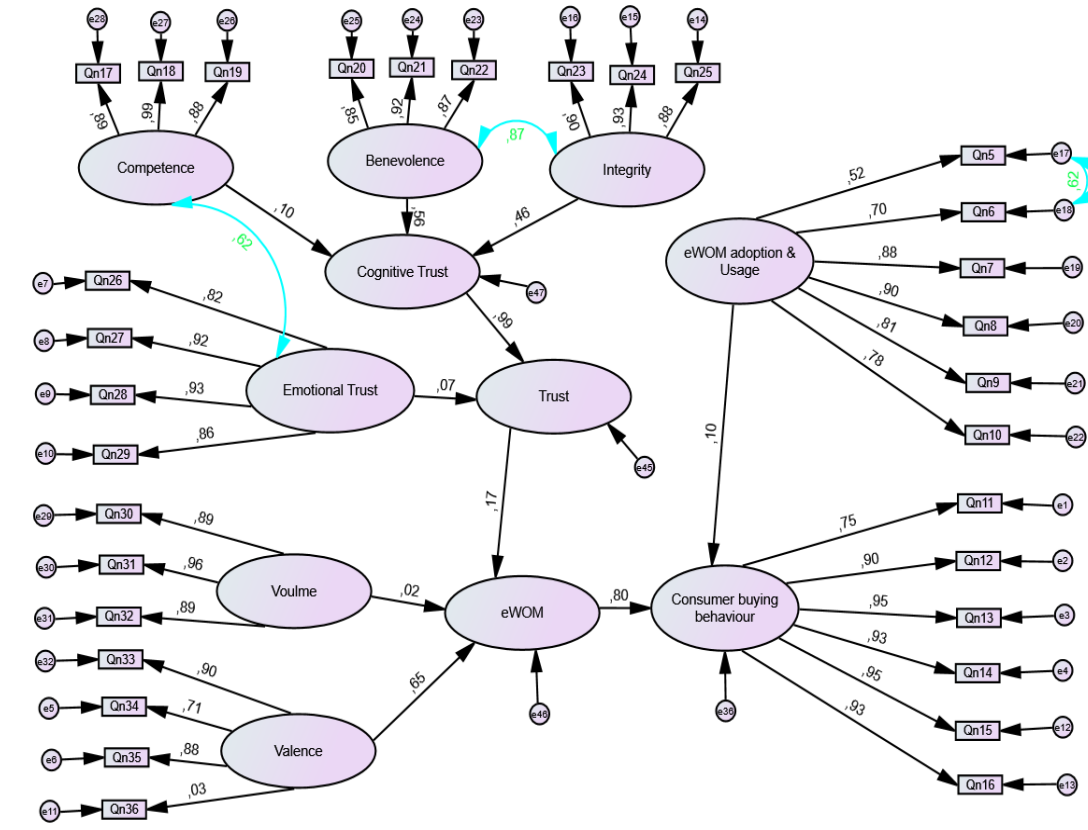

Figure 2: Structural Modelling Equation (SEM)

Using the framework, numerous e-WOM elements were investigated to see if they had an impact on e-WOM. Because it is outside the scope of the study, no further discussion of these e-WOM components will be provided. The impact of E-WOM on consumer behaviour was investigated. A correlation coefficient of 0.8 indicates a substantial positive association between e-WOM and consumer behaviour. As a result, the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between e-WOM and consumer purchasing behaviour is not rejected.

Prior research has also found a positive relationship between e-WOM and purchasing behaviour (Filieri, Raguseo and Vitari, 2018; Filieri, 2015; Floyd et al., 2014; Nam et al., 2018; Wang, Cunningham and Eastin, 2015; Yan, Wang and Chau, 2015; Erkan and Evans, 2016; Kim et al., 2018). Ismagilova et al., 2017) went on to say that e-WOM is recognised as a key source of information impacting consumer decision-making. According to Karjala's (2021) research, e-WOM has a significant impact on consumer purchasing decisions.

Oblak, Barcic, Klaric, Kuzman, and Groselj (2017) discovered that customers use e-WOM during the shopping process (gathering information, evaluating options, and selecting the best alternative) and even after the purchase when they publish their personal experience on social media. The timing of the study, during the COVID-19 pandemic, could have influenced the findings. Customers are even purchasing fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) online, which was uncommon before COVID-19, such as in the clothing and apparel industry in the South African internet market (Bizcommunity, 2021). E-commerce has become necessary because people feel safe shopping online from the comfort of their own homes.

Implications of the study

According to the literature, e-WOM is a dynamic, ongoing, two-way informal process that allows consumers to exchange marketing information utilising digital technologies via OIM platforms, and it plays an important role in influencing consumers' purchasing behaviour. It has been widely documented in the literature that e-WOM messages have a favourable relationship with consumer behaviour. Several studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between e-WOMs and their impact on purchasing intentions (e.g. Fullerton, 2017; Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2018; Tata et al.,2019; Bhandari and Rodgers, 2017; Netto et al., 2016; Saleem and Ellahi, 2017; Hirzianto et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2020; Oblak et al., 2017; Filieri et al., 2018; Nam et al., 2018; Yan; Kim et al., 2018). All the research found that e-WOM has a positive effect on consumer purchasing decisions.

A study conducted by Mihir Joshi and Vinod Kumar Singh (2017) utilising regression analysis demonstrates that there is a significant relationship between e-WOM and purchasing intention. Studies have also confirmed a positive relationship between e-WOM and purchase behaviour (Erkan and Evans, 2016; Kim et al., 2018). In the instance of online purchasing, research has found that social media exposure to subjective norms can influence purchase attitudes (de Lenne and Vandenbosch, 2017). Furthermore, research has shown that the internet reviews that buyers read before making a purchase have a significant positive relationship with their purchasing behaviour (Joshi and Singh, 2017). Previous research has revealed a positive relationship between e-WOM and purchasing behaviour. The empirical findings from the SEM, which demonstrated a positive, strong correlation between e-WOM and customer purchasing behaviour, is also supported by the literature.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in light of the findings: E-WOM has three stages and marketers must understand each stage and design tactics to increase the likelihood of their businesses creating positive e-WOM and capitalising on the power of any favourable reviews and testimonials received. Each stage will be detailed below, along with recommendations for each stage.

Creation Stage

The creation stage occurs when customers share their online experiences with a company's brand via e-WOM. Although this may appear to be a simple task, the business has a significant

role to play in developing this e-WOM. When customers purchase a product or service, marketers must plan for them to provide feedback on OIM.

This could be accomplished in any of the following ways:

- Send a follow-up email encouraging satisfied customers to rate the product or service they purchased.

- Once the transaction is completed, persuade customers to leave a testimonial or a Google review.

- Encourage customers to use a branded hashtag to share their product or experience on OIM.

The easy it is for customers to publish reviews or upload content on OIM, the more likely positive e-WOM will be generated.

Exposure Stage

Marketers must create strategies to publish reviews, ratings, and testimonies to their audience on OIM after they have received them. As a result, marketers must develop digital strategies that incorporate e-WOM. Possible tactics include:

- embedding consumer reviews or ratings on the company's website or e-Commerce store.

- Include a testimonial carousel on the company's webpage.

- Use user-generated material in all OIM channels.

The more visible this e-WOM is to the public, the greater its influence.

Evaluation Stage

The third stage is evaluation, in which potential customers use e-WOM to determine its credibility and relevance to their purchasing decisions. Consumers are searching for precise solutions at this point. People want to know if the product is dependable and if it is worthwhile to invest money on it. To thrive at this stage, marketers should give their audience the ability to easily filter through e-WOM. This includes;

- Allowing the audience to sort reviews or testimonies by star ratings (both positive and bad) and specified keywords.

- To narrow down the results that are most relevant to their potential purchase, reveal more about each reviewer (such as their age, geography, or clothing size).

- Visit trusted third-party websites that evaluate potential posters and clear out any untrustworthy sources to confirm the veracity of reviews.

It is also unavoidable for a business to receive bad e-WOM sentiment. When negative remarks are shared on social media, they have the potential to be seen by the entire globe. Negative word of mouth spreads quickly and has a huge impact on people's opinions of a business, yet nothing can be done to stop someone from writing something negative about a brand online. By correctly responding to negative feedback, a company's reputation can be reclaimed.

According to the study's findings, participants purchase products with more positive comments. Marketers must therefore guarantee that their OIM platforms have a more favourable valence. The following are some recommendations for dealing with valence on OIM.

a) Monitor OIM comments

The first step in resolving a problem and developing long-term partnerships is social listening. However, an unhappy customer will not always contact a company directly; hence, marketers must follow all mentions of their brand, branded hashtags, and branded URLs published on social media. Comment tracking guarantees that all unpleasant comments are addressed.

b) Timely response

Marketers must remember that speed is more crucial than ever when defining target response times. One constant is that prompt responses within an acceptable turnaround time are becoming the norm. A slow reaction to a sensitive issue, such as an emotionally charged complaint, can make a client feel ignored and fuel the flames of more displeasure. When a brand's response is seen to be excessively slow, bad opinion can soar and spread, in some cases propagating on social media before reaching other media sources.

c) Respond publicly

Before addressing an issue to a private communication, it is always necessary to respond publicly to a complaint on social media. One-on-one connection is no longer possible. A firm may respond directly to a social media comment directed at it, but the debate is still taking place in public. Responding publicly is crucial in order to depict the brand as open, responsive, and helpful. Only once the marketer has completed the first step should the conversation be moved into a private message in order to provide a more specific answer or to request sensitive information, such as an account number or identifying information, that is essential to fix the customer's problem. Negative social media feedback can also be used to turn angry customers into brand enthusiasts.

d) Sincerity and transparency

Brands may gain control of the situation by responding in a helpful and honest manner. Never respond negatively or defensively as a digital marketer. They must also avoid predetermined comments and engage their viewers. Marketers must ensure that the client feels heard in order to help ease a hostile atmosphere. Marketers should not be afraid to apologise for any annoyance or less-than-perfect experience.

Most clients recognise that personnel are human and, as such, make mistakes. Nevertheless, how the organisation manages its faults is where it may either improve or harm its reputation. If a firm's products or services have an issue, customers must be told that the company is aware of the problem and working on a solution. Nevertheless, unfavourable remarks can aid in the humanisation of a company's social media profile. Since a steady stream of 5-star ratings may be perceived as false by some users, it is prudent to communicate with consumers truly in order to de-escalate situations and develop goodwill.

e) Promote feedback sharing

Once the problem has been resolved, urge dissatisfied customers to change their negative comments to positive comments. Marketers should, however, encourage positive e-WOM communications without engaging in unethical or fraudulent activities. This is because unethical behaviour can lead to a loss of consumer trust and a negative reaction in the marketplace.

g) Enhance the quality of products and services

To avoid repeating complaints, marketers must use negative feedback to improve product and service quality. If the same concerns are expressed repeatedly, it indicates that the company is unwilling to improve, and hence prospective customers will be turned away.

g) Avoid deleting nasty remarks.

Reacting to social media posts, both positive and negative, can increase a brand's interaction with its customers; however, remarks that transcend the line into trolling territory, such as racist, homophobic, or otherwise aggressively derogatory remarks, should be avoided. A disclaimer outlining what violates the firm's online community guidelines, as well as the fact that the company reserves the right to remove any vulgar, discriminatory, or improper remarks, must be put in the 'About' section. Marketers must refrain from deleting comments. This is likely to evoke even more wrath, increasing both the number of comments and the intensity of hatred. If someone makes a nasty comment, it can be reported, and certain social media platforms, such as Facebook, allow the comment to be hidden from public view. This capability keeps the comment accessible to the original poster's friends as well as the user who created it, lowering the possibility of further controversy if a comment is deleted from public view.

CONCLUSION

The study aims to establish what e-WOM is and its relationship with consumer buying behaviour. The findings of the study indicate that there is a positive relationship between e-WOM and online consumer behaviour. Thus, the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between e-WOM and consumer purchasing behaviour is not rejected. It is very important that when customers purchase a product or service, marketers must plan for them to provide feedback on OIM. Marketers must create strategies to publish reviews, ratings, and testimonies to their audience on OIM after they have received them. By responding to negative feedback in time, a company's reputation can be reclaimed.

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