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Consumers' online information adoption behavior: Motives and antecedents of electronic word of mouth communications

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ABSTRACT

Electronic word of mouth influences the consumer buying behavior through the online exchange of customer opinions and experiences about commodities using social networking sites. Reviews or comments posted on the Internet by consumers and experts are based on their personal experiences and the evaluation and expert analysis of a product. The current study explains an overview of key elements of eWOM communication antecedents, addresses eWOM motives to analyze food products purchasing factors associated with consumer engagement. We found certain factors of eWOM that should be considered in decision making according to the model for information adoption. It revealed that consumers' need for social interaction, economic incentives, and self-worth reinforcement are the primary drivers of eWOM involvement. However, argument quality was found to be more appealing then eWOM source credibility for food product purchasing. Practitioners should make their strategies to follow the credibility standards, trustworthy vehicles, perceived values, informative and digital channels for the enhancement of eWOM communications. eWOM communication is an emerging area, further research can be focused on the meta-analysis of relative factors, such as responses, moderators, and credibility to eWOM communication.

1. Introduction

Owing to the explosive growth of the Internet and e-commerce over the last few decades, the concept of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has received considerable attention for e-marketing. Before the advent of the Internet, word of mouth (WOM) was the most useful tool for marketing research and was known as the most influential source for the exchange of information. It was well established that WOM had more influence on consumer behavior than other marketing strategy or advertising campaign (Breazeale, 2009; Maxham III and Netemeyer, 2002). WOM plays a central role in marketing studies; however, traditional WOM interactions have limitations such as boundaries and are effective only for particular communities (Bhatnagar & Ghose, 2004). Therefore, with the introduction of cyber technologies, eWOM became paramount to interpersonal communications. When food marketers design

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies, they seek online information adoption behavior, so the current study solves this important issue for practice.

Many studies have been purposed the models of consumer decision-making process and these models consist of different stages to analyze how individuals search the information, alternatives evaluation, problem recognition, pre-purchasing assessment, choices, consumption and post-consumption to make a better decision. eWOM process starts when consumers recognize the need or desire in the actual state because problem recognition and advertising is the best source to help for customers to recognize their problems and fulfill the needs (Quester et al., 2007). After the problem recognition consumers look for the information from an internal or external source. At this stage, eWOM allows consumers to compare the alternatives about product or services after information seeking. Also at the final stage of purchase decision which includes product or services choice, brand choice, and retailer selection, eWOM reduces risk perception has a great impact on consumers' decision. eWOM continuous to effect consumer

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behavior because purchasing process continues in the post-purchase phase as expectations of the customers indicate the post purchasing which meets the satisfaction level (Comegys, Hannula, & Väisänen, 2006). This study needs to be done so e-marketers can better understand the most of motivational, risk and communication factors which impact computer-mediated information use by consumers at each stage of purchase decisions.

In a computer-mediated information system, online information adoption behavior is critical as consumers make decisions on argument quality of a product/service. Only if customers feel that information about a product fulfills their perceived demands and requirements, they evaluate each product or service according to their buying criteria (Pappas, 2016; Shen, Li, & DeMoss, 2012; Yoo, Kim, & Sanders, 2015). This shows that customers' perception of information quality available on the Internet is a necessary element for measuring their potential purchasing behavior. How individuals are motivated by eWOM, according to the information adoption model (IAM) derived from the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), depends on how individuals adopt electronic information (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). According to ELM, the central and peripheral routes affect individuals' attitudes and behavior and are known as argument quality and eWOM source credibility in IAM, respectively. Therefore, IAM is used to investigate the factors of electronic information adoption (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008). As pointed out by Racherla and Friske (2012) studies should assess the quality of online information and its effectiveness in convincing consumers. Moreover, they noted that individual needs to be better-understood information transformation between readers and seekers are not reliable. On the other hand, consumers often read eWOM before purchasing products or services. According to this perception, the current study focuses on why people prefer to read eWOM and explains the various dimensions of eWOM information contributing to its effectiveness. The current paper tries to address this gap in the literature with the following objectives:-

- To address eWOM motives to analyze food products purchasing factors associated with consumer engagement.
- To examine the factors involved in eWOM for the purchase of food products.
- To explain an overview of key elements of eWOM communication antecedents.

2. Literature review

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is an advertisement tool to share viewpoints with each other because of customer's awareness regarding products (Jung & Kim, 2012; Thorson & Rodgers, 2006; Vimaladevi & Dhanabhakaym, 2012). People read comments or reviews posted by different people about merits or demerits of products on web pages or websites, after gaining the information from eWOM forums, affect customer's buying behavior and help them to the selection of product (Bajpai & Pandey, 2012). We can say that nowadays, people are influenced by eWOM in positive and negative ways because customers prefer to reviews the views of other customer's opinions before decision making. Electronic word of mouth needs to be focused on proper providing platforms, focus on social sites and customer relations that can help for the companies.

Marketing experts have realized the importance of consumer-generated conversations stating that advertisers cannot duplicate in marketer-initiated advertising campaigns (Lohtia, Donthu, & Guillory, 2013; Nielsen, 2013). Prior studies suggested several complications and biased information in connection with the current status of Internet access and writing reviews (Hu, Zhang, &

Pavlou, 2009; Racherla & Friske, 2012). For instance, Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) stated that sellers provide incentives to writers to introduce promotional comments to influence consumers' evaluation of products. Moreover, different firms spent a considerable amount of money to manipulate adverse comments of customers. This is made more complicated as consumer-to-consumer interactions occur via computer-mediated channels or online-based information that does not support direct verbal communication and social communications (Fang et al., 2014). Subsequently, consumers have to face more ambiguous information while considering eWOM. These problems have been addressed by many independent popular press reports of many websites conveying customer reviews (Miller, 2009). eWOM communication studies concluded that purchase intention is the utmost outcome variable used by experimental research design for different characteristics such as quality, valence, and volume (see Table 1).

2.1. Consumers' attitude among online shopping

According to Van Raaij (1998), "Attitude is the individual predisposition to evaluate an object or an aspect of the world in a favorable or unfavorable manner". Tsang, Ho, and Liang (2004) described in a study that Attitude is a major element in E-business systems and marketing studies. Attitude is an outcome of what we say, feel and know De Mooij (2010) and Patat (2011) said that "Attitude is a lasting general evaluation of people (including oneself), objects, advertisements or issues". Michael (2011) specified that at the time of purchasing consumers attitude is not simple interaction between traders and consumers. Modern dealers know that consumer behavior is a continuing process, and the study of this whole process involved when consumer select, purchase, use products, services, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires". The study of consumer behavior holds "what and why people buy" and the consumer activities, for example, "why and how customers use the products and services". The basic marketing concept states a company exists on satisfying consumer needs better than its competitors, which means it provides the prior values to the people who will buy and use its products or services. At the same time, the customer's feedback of the products is a decisive test for a company to know about the product how much it has satisfied the customer's needs. The company should assimilate the knowledge of consumers into its marketing strategy. The information of customers helps the company to identify its position and capture the business opportunities in the market (Zhao, 2012). The consumer behavior is generally influenced by the consumer individualities. Cultural Perspectives have the comprehensive and deepest influence on the consumer shopping behavior. It contains three elements: culture, subculture, and social class. The online consumers can belong to the subculture and social class they show the interest in online shopping, and high-class people have more probability to purchase online because they have more online facilities such as own computer and they know better about internet usage. The consumer online shopping behavior is impacted by the social online status of an individual, such as reference group, family, and social prominences. The reference group of a person is directly or indirectly influenced his attitude and behavior. The family is regarded as the primary reference group of people and has certain influences on people's perception (Anders, Selma, & Claudio, 2007). Furthermore, friends also play an important role for individuals purchasing decision making. For the online consumers, the reference groups are virtual communities or discussion group from the internet, such as online forums, blogs, or magazines.

The consumers can read other people's feedbacks and comments of the products and services on the website, which actually