

Chapter 15

E–WOM: The New Consumer Megaphone – Underlying Reasons and Related Factors

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ABSTRACT

Together with the internet, social networking sites provide the consumers and the companies with a new marketing channel. In these online platforms, people make groups and come together for specific purposes. This new vivid and productive environment attracts the consumers seeking for product information and the companies trying to be in close contact with the customers. So the traditional WOM (word of mouth) has gained a new momentum and transformed into a new form in this online environment, called e-WOM (electronic word of mouth). Setting out from this recent fact, the chapter aims to give a general review of word of mouth communication starting with the traditional word of mouth and then elaborating e-WOM. It tries to tell about what e-WOM is and how it functions in online environments. As well as the definitions and the explanations of e-WOM, the chapter also aims to give the underlying reasons and the related factors during the process of e-WOM communication, thus putting a general framework for the companies and brands about this new marketing communication.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, consumers face an excessive amount of message from the brands and companies and they are fed up with all this mess. So the consumers are seeking ways to save time during their purchase process. At that point word of mouth, WOM, is regarded as the ultimate and effective solution for the consumers. Thanks to the internet, millions of people from different parts of the world are engaged in the conversations about the brands and companies. These informal conversations between consumers allow them to get the right product information from the right people such as the experienced customers, opinion leaders and market mavens.

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The growth of internet as a large scale information database allows people to participate in online communications for an exchange of information beyond time and space (Bechina & Husta, 2011:82). Especially because of its potential to remove the time and space limitations, this extraordinary communication opportunity has had a profound impact on many scientific communication-based fields. Like many other fields, marketing has also been affected deeply from both the content and the strategic importance of these new communication platforms.

Together with the internet, social networking sites are coming to the fore more and more. The social networking sites, getting rid of the apathy of technology, create a similar effect in online environments just as the traditional face-to-face communications do in real environments. Internet users and consumers are increasingly participating in and adopting social networking sites because these sites allow consumers to be engaged in personal connections in a cooperation-based structure, thus leading to common and widespread social networks (Akar, 2010:108). These platforms provide the consumers and the companies with a new marketing channel. In these online platforms, people make groups and come together for specific purposes. This vivid and efficient environment also attracts the consumers seeking for product information and the companies trying to be in close contact with the customers. So the traditional WOM has gained a new form in this online environment, called e-WOM.

Social media is regarded as the most popular media of communication today, so people use social media platforms widely in our century. Especially because of the lack of time people suffer in modern world, social media functions as a bridge to connect people to each other. Millions of people use social media to be in contact with their peers and acquaintances and also to share about their lives and opinions as well as collecting information about others. These social media users, at the same time a consumer each, attract companies and brands. So, many brands and companies are in an effort to be able to use social media effectively to develop an understanding of these new platforms in order to answer the needs of consumers (He et al.,2013).

This chapter has been prepared to give a general review of traditional WOM and its online counterpart, e-WOM. The chapter also aims at the underlying reasons, the potential impact, the measurement and the basic factors affecting word of mouth in online environments.

WOM AND E-WOM

In our increasingly competitive environment, though it is possible to reach each individual through electronic communication devices, the significance WOM, known as word of mouth, has remained the same over the years and it has gained a new importance together with the introduction of internet and Web 2.0 technology. Today businesses need to know and benefit from the potential of word of mouth communications and prepare strategical plans in accordance with this new version of word of mouth communication.

The concept WOM is a far older concept than the marketing itself. From the beginning of civilization on, people have taken advice from other people as regards many different things in their daily lives. Even, it is known that early people took advice from each other about foods and commodities informally (Arora, 2007:52).

In the early 1950s, B.E Asch mentioned ‘crowd psychology’ in his work, and then in 1957 Jr.Brooks and C.Roberts published an article in the *Journal of Marketing*. This article is regarded as the first study emphasizing the significance of WOM in the introduction of new products (Kanning, 2008:62).

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