An Empirical Analysis of Receiver's Psychological Characteristics in eWOM Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Customer engagement in e-commerce (CEE) is paramount to success, and CEE can be achieved by engaging customers in eWOM. However, every customer perceives the eWOM message from their perspective. There is a limited number of studies conducted on receiver characteristics of eWOM, and hence, the purpose of this research is to analyse the different personal characteristics of the receivers of eWOM and their influence on eWOM communication's effectiveness. The quantitative research is carried out with the help of existing scales items from relevant literature. The final analysis included 503 responses. Further, EFA, CFA, and structural equation modelling techniques are used to determine the empirical relationships among variables. Five major characteristics of receivers were identified to understand their relationship with purchase intention, attitude change, and brand image. The paper found a significant relationship between the hypothesized variables. This study will contribute to the likelihood of profiling receivers and significantly improve the impact of eWOM on e-engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

The continually evolving web has changed the way human-computer interaction used to be (Ismagilova et al., 2019). The pervasiveness of technology has provided unprecedented choices on how we educate ourselves, buy and sell products, entertain and express ourselves, communicate with friends and family, spend our time on things and become informed about the world around us (Lalmas, 2014). In addition, the continuous connectivity of the Internet through smartphones allows a plethora of applications to choose from effortlessly, like multiple e-commerce sites, e-tailing sites, social networking sites, web search engines and email tools (Doorn et al., 2010). Therefore, the online platforms are a new venue of customer engagement and interaction for new-age businesses and customers.

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Customer engagement in e-commerce (CEE) is paramount to success and must be a constant priority for businesses (Bilro, 2019). The traditional indicators of customer engagement are not sufficient anymore as businesses innovate to understand where they can find the customer today or in the post-pandemic era. As per statistics, customer engagement provides a better customer experience, leading 86% of customers to spend more and create a better brand differentiation (SmartInsights, 2018). The best way to activate e-engagement is to enable feedback and reviews from customers that engages the site visitors. The other statistics by Vernit, a leading customer engagement firm, reveals that engaged customers spread positive reviews offline & online about businesses and participates in loyalty schemes more (buildfire, 2019). So, it is evident that electronic word of mouth in the form of online reviews helps in better engagement of customers in e-commerce (Bilro, 2019).

Additionally, consumers turn to eWOM on the Internet website to solve their consumption problems to help them in search and exchange information (Eirinaki et al., 2012; Roozen & Raedts, 2018). As the online review is gaining acceptance (Statista, 2016), firms frequently face the dare necessity to study all the important perspectives posted by customers about their enterprises to create a holistic interpretation. Indeed, consumer information created through multiple platforms about product& service (Ayeh et al., 2013; Šerić and Praničević, 2018) referred to as electronic word of mouth (eWOM). The eWOM is critical since the product has a significant impact on consumer's behaviour, brand awareness, and consumer attitudes, which ultimately leads to product sales (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Lopez and Sicilia, 2014). The eWOM communication changed the power dynamics from marketers to active customers, thereby increasingly contributing to buying decisions (Chu & Choi, 2011; Cheung & Thadani 2012; Rani & Shivaprasad, 2018). Researchers have examined the impact of eWOM on consumer behaviours in a number of sectors like food services (Arndt, 1967), the entertainment sector (Brown & Richingen, 1987), banking activities (Keaveney, 1995), clothing (Richins, 1983), travel and financial services sectors (Litvin, 2006), Education & training (Lehmann, 2015) and electronic products (Shivaprasad & Rani, 2020).

The recent years have been very worthwhile for eWOM communication literature as many studies have been published on this topic using systematic and scientific methods of research ((Ismagilova et al., 2019). Researchers have presented lots of evidence on source credibility, message credibility, platform of eWOM communication and Receiver's characteristics; however, the number of studies related to eWOM source and eWOM message has been dominant in the literature of eWOM. Most of the existing literature has taken eWOM Receiver's demographic information to understand its effect on eWOM communication rather than other significant personal characteristics (Babić Rosario, 2016; Ismagilova et al., 2019; Varma, 2021). However, one's assessment of eWOM may differ from one individual to another based on their psychological characteristics. As a result, consumers may interpret the same message in different ways based on their psychological characteristics. However, research is scarce on this topic, and therefore the present study will attempt to know the relation of the Receiver's characteristics in eWOM effectiveness. Many Receiver's psychological characteristics have been ignored in empirical studies, which prevent a deeper understanding of receiver's of eWOM. Hence, this research study aims to understand the Receiver's psychological characteristics in eWOM communication, which can be responsible for better e-engagement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The revolutionary impact of the Internet on communication, particularly the development of e-commerce, has inspired academicians and practising professionals worldwide, with its potential for customer engagement and building customer relations (Brodie et al., 2011; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007; Harmeling et al. 2017; Kumar, 2018). The Internet has revolutionized how people and organizations communicate with each other through the introduction of new digital communication channels. New platforms were introduced with the evolution of Web 2.0, allowing business firms to link with customers, building networks or communities with one other by enabling bi-direction

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