

INFLUENCE OF WORD OF MOUTH COMMUNICATION ON CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISION

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ABSTRACT

To make consumers aware about a product or service, corporate executives are searching new ways as the market is highly competitive. They adopt different methods to achieve this goal. Word of mouth is one of the methods which help the consumers in their decision making. Therefore, the research was conducted to check the effect of word of mouth (WOM) communication on brand image and impact of brand image on consumer purchase decision of smart phone. The study focuses on Smartphone brands mainly. Sample of 552 was collected from Haryana (India) using questionnaire method. The data thus generated was analyzed with the help of PLS-SEM. The findings reveal that offline WOM, online WOM, E-WOM quality and information consumption significantly influence the brand image whereas the brand image also influence the consumer purchase decision of smart phone. The impact of prior purchase satisfaction and expertise of sender was found not significant.

Keywords: Word of Mouth Communication, WOM, E-WOM Quality, Brand Image, Purchase Decision, Smart Phone.

INTRODUCTION

People used to share their views personally few years back when there was no technology available. Earlier, recommendations were the main reason of advertisement for a business but now the technology has changed many things. Today people are using technology to interact with their friends, family and other people through social media and sharing their experiences there [1].

Nail (2005) explored that loyalty and trust creates word of mouth and the impact of later on buying behavior of consumer. Information created by consumer is highly credible than information created by seller. It is because information credibility is positively related to trustworthiness (Wilson and Sherrell, 1993). Chevalier and Mayzlin (2003) found that book sales are significantly affected by online book reviews. Also it was stated that positive book reviews helps in

increasing the sale and impact of positive reviews is less than the negative reviews (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). Either it is positive WOM or negative WOM, helps in increasing performance in respect to box office revenue (Liu, 2006). Rather than the print advertisements, word of mouth places an impact on consumers for switching brand (Money et al., 1998). Trusov et al. (2009) and Bickart & Schindler (2001) explored that user comments, reviews, suggestions and advertisements affect the perception of a consumer in a distinct way. Consumers found WOM is most informational and reliable. Brand image of the companies is significantly important for the success, stock price, future profit, decisions related to acquisition, companies' alliance, competitive advantage in the market (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). About the services, brand and products, people participate in sharing their views with others for some reasons like; spreading knowledge, recognition need in the society, wish to do something good for others and sharing their experiences with others [2].

WOM is a powerful source for customers and marketers. With increasing usage of internet, WOM is used to share knowledge and promotion [3]. WOM helps in reducing expenses and save time. Experts share their views and ideas using WOM and it provides true reviews about a product (Silverman, 2011). For sharing the views about a product, a company does not pay to consumers and it is less costly tool for advertisement. Companies spend more money in promotion through T.V, print etc. but they don't need to pay for reference [4]. Traditionally word of mouth was the main source of publicity. It was a powerful and important component for a long time. But with change in time and arrival of digital media, business has changed. In this digital era, digital media and mobiles are the medium for word of mouth acceleration (Subramanian, 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purchase Intention/Decision

WOM helps the consumers to purchase long-term and everyday goods. It was seen that friends and family members influence the purchase decision of the consumers (Aslam et al., 2011). Comments and reviews are helpful in purchase decision of the consumer and it also makes them more confident (Lin et al., 2013). WOM helps in increasing the organization sale, so the firm should focus on

WOM communication to encourage the sales (Godes and Mayzlin, 2009). After identifying influencing factors for purchase intention of the consumer, marketing strategies can be developed for business growth and to attract consumers (Cretu and Brodie, 2007).

Research threw a light on positive relationship of E-WOM communication with purchase intention and brand image (Torlak et al., 2014). Consumers' intention for travelers booking directly influenced by perceived value, brand image, trust and perceived price with mediating effects, whereas leisure travelers consider time, cost and convenience when they book online hotel (Lien et al., 2015). The conscious plan of the consumer is intention to purchase that creates an attempt to buy a product (Spears and Singh, 2004) and intention to purchase is one of the key factor for the success of online advertisement (Moe and Fader, 2004). Many research mentioned that an attitude of the consumer for a brand/product place an impact on purchase intention (Limbu et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2012; Leonidou et al., 2010; Dennis et al., 2009).

Quality of a product and service can be gained by E-WOM messages by the consumer (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006) and these kinds of messages minimize the uncertainty and risk related to a product or service. E-WOM messages influence the purchase decision of the consumers related to product (Chatterjee, 2001) and effective reviews also play a positive effect on purchase intention of the consumer (Chatterjee, 2001; Chen and Xie, 2004).

Online and Offline WOM

To share the information about a service or product, WOM communication is the very important channel and it is necessary to see the technical savvy impact on word of mouth consumption (Kumar et al., 2010). With passage of time, WOM communication is changing. Due to change in technology or change in communication techniques, E-WOM communication is getting popular and it place positive and notable impact on purchase intention of the consumers' brand attitude and image of brand (Elseidi and El-Baz, 2016). The way of communication with each other has changed due to technology, and through this technology consumers can share advice online related to consumption (Bechwati and Xia, 2008; Brown et al., 2007; Godes and Mayzlin, 2004). Also it can be seen that bad experience about a

product or place can arise difficulties for a firm as it spread negative WOM (Aslam et al., 2011).

Before purchasing anything today consumer search for the information about the product and use the sources like; reviews of the customer, sites, blogs and forum. Consumers choose E-WOM most of the time to get the information (Zhu & Zhang, 2010) and through internet E-WOM is spreading widely (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012). Some studies show that to get reliable information, consumers prefer WOM communication and their decisions are affected by suggestions and comments of the consumers (Trusov et al., 2009). Sharing views online on internet is a good opportunity to share their consumption experiences with other consumers and sharing their advice related to brand, products on social networking and review sites of consumer (Brown et al., 2007; Godes and Mayzlin, 2004; Xia and Bechwati, 2008). From the above background following hypothesizes are framed:

H₁: There is significant relationship between Online Word of Mouth communication and Brand Image.

H₂: There is significant relationship between Offline Word of Mouth communication and Brand Image.

E-WOM Quality

Information about the quality of product or service can be gained by E-WOM messages (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006) and these messages are helpful in minimizing uncertainty and risk related to service or product (Chatterjee, 2001). E-WOM quality means comment's convincing strength drive in message which is informational (Bhattacharjee, 2006), which shows that E-WOM quantity and E-WOM quality have positive impact on consumers' intention to purchase (Lin et al., 2013). It is very important to assess the potential purchase decision through perception of the consumer about quality information. Quality of information perceived by the consumers helps in determining their buying decision (Cheung, 2008). Based on E-WOM quality reviews, following hypothesis has been setup:

H₃: There is significant relationship between E-quality and Brand Image.

Information Consumption and Prior Purchase Satisfaction

Researcher found that information from colleagues, co-workers and friends are related to tech savvy level. Information creation and consumption form social media and friends are correlated with tech savvy (Kumar et al., 2010). Consumers pre purchase satisfaction influence the purchase decision related to the product. If consumer is satisfied with the food product prior the purchase then at the point of purchase, product label information equals the satisfaction of the consumer (Chen-Yu and Hong, 2002). Study defined that in comparison of offline purchase, online purchases are seems risky as there are few factors missing like real contact with consumers (Laroche et al., 2005). It was also seen that consumers who purchased some product online before are less feared and want to purchase online again because they get confidence. Past satisfactory expectations leads to intentions of repurchase about online purchase (Shim et al., 2001). Hence, following hypothesizes are set up:

H₄: There is significant relationship between Information Consumption and Brand Image.

H₅: There is significant relationship between Prior Purchase Satisfaction and Brand Image.

Expertise of Sender

Researcher defined that consumer consider expert advice more than any other individual who possess professional knowledge (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987) and their expertise place a positive impact on purchase intention of the consumer (Lin et al., 2013). Experts' knowledge helps the consumers to select a particular product or brand as the experts plays the role of opinion leader (Jacoby and Hoyer, 1981). The person who is an expert in a particular product or other product category should share the information related to product, as this information will pursued by the people rather than any other information (Gilly et al., 1998). Therefore, reviews based on expertise of sender help to setup following hypothesis:

H₆: There is significant relationship between Expertise of sender and Brand Image.

Brand Image

Brand image is a perception about a brand and expressed by associations of brand in the consumers' mind. Brand association involves emotional dimension/attitude for a brand (Keller, 1998). Researchers conducted their research in respect of outlet malls of Taiwan and identified the impact of discounted price and brand image on consumers' intention to purchase. The study found that consumers' purchase intention influenced by brand image (Chao and Liao, 2016). Brand image creation in consumers mind is a tough competition among various outlet malls and rather than size of shopping malls, their image influence the consumers more (Howell and Rogers, 1980). Moderating effect of brand image and product involvement present among the E-WOM and intention to purchase (Lin et al., 2013). Without expenditure, advertisement can be done through WOM communication. It was seen that motivation and brand image place an impact on WOM and brand image affected by motivation (Mira et al., 2014). Wants and needs can be identified with the help of brand image and it also helps in making differences between other brands which are in competition (Anwar et al., 2011). Researcher found powerful effect of brand image on the attitude of consumers for a brand (Elseidi and El-Baz, 2016) and positive connection among E-WOM, intention to purchase and brand image (Torlak et al., 2014). Following hypothesis have been setup based on reviews of brand image:

H₇: There is significant relationship between Brand image and Purchase decision.

RESEARCH GAP

There are many factors which influence the purchase decision of consumer. Today consumer search on internet to confirm their decisions and they go for experts, WOM, blogs, sites etc. People use online and offline WOM related to a product and they consult with their friends, relatives and family members etc. Al-Sanad (2016) revealed that smart phone purchase decision of youth is influenced by celebrities, family, work colleagues and friends. Also positive and negative WOM influence the buying decision of consumer. Therefore, in this paper the impact of WOM on purchase decision of consumer have been studied.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following are the methods in which study has been divided:

Development of Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed to achieve the research objectives and for data collection. The weightage was given to measurement scale, type, wording, number and relevance of the questions.

Population Size and Sample Size

The survey was conducted from the people who use WOM communication. Universe of the study was Haryana state in India. Data was collected from 20 blocks of 10 districts in Haryana and 600 questionnaires were distributed to collect the data.

Description of the Data

Questionnaire's first part included the information related to demographic like; income, age, gender, sex etc. The survey was conducted and data was collected from the individuals from of different age groups, gender, educational qualification, income, marital status and occupation who are using smart phone.

Procedure for the Collection of Data

Questionnaire was prepared for the research and to collect the data multistage sampling method was used. Data was collected from the individuals who were willing to answer. From 600 questionnaires only 552 questionnaires were found valid for further analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Statistical techniques like confirmatory factor analysis, Partial least square structural equation modeling were used to analyze the data.

Results

The below mentioned table 1 is showing the demographic characteristics of the sample. Sample consists of 58.2 percent of male and 41.8 percent female. Majority of the respondents were single (60 percent). Most of the consumers were post graduated (37 percent) followed by graduate (36.2 percent). Around 54.2 percent of the respondents had less than 20,000 incomes per month followed by above 50,000 (23.6 percent).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Sample

Particulars	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	321	58.2
	Female	231	41.8
Age	<20	142	25.7
	20-30	311	56.3
	30-40	77	13.9
	> 40	22	4.0
Marital Status	Single	331	60.0
	Married	216	39.1
	Widow/divorced	5	.9
Qualification	Upto 12 th	84	15.2
	Graduate	200	36.2
	Post graduate	204	37.0
	M.Phil./Ph. D	54	9.8
	Diploma	10	1.8
Occupation	Government employee	110	19.9
	Private sector	49	8.9
	Student	378	68.5
	Other(Self- employed/Housewife/Retired)	15	2.7
Income	<20,000	299	54.2
	20,000-30,000	80	14.5
	30,000-40,000	24	4.3
	40,000-50,000	19	3.4
	>50,000	130	23.6

Source: Author’s compilation

CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis)

Based on the findings of indicator variables’ modification index (Jöreskog & Sorbom, 1986) and confirmatory factor analysis, one item of E-WOM quality, three items of online WOM, one item from offline WOM and one item from information consumption was eliminated due to less reliability of the statements as shown in figure 1. Table 2

reveals that value of AVE is higher than 50 percent (0.5) indicating thereby that all the constructs’ explaining indicators variance more than half (Hair et al., 2010). The Cronbach’s alpha value for all the constructs were more than 0.7 and value of composite reliability were more than 0.7 (threshold value) which indicated that internal consistency and reliability was good (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

Table 2: CFA Results after using PLS-SEM 3.0.

Construct	CCR	AVE	Cronbach’s Alpha
E-WOM Quality (EQUA)	0.862	0.61	0.861
Online Word of Mouth (EWOM)	0.865	0.682	0.864
Offline Word of Mouth (WOM)	0.895	0.682	0.897
Prior Purchase Satisfaction (PPSAT)	0.82	0.537	0.816
Information Consumption (INFOCONS)	0.774	0.534	0.772
Expertise of Sender (SENEXPP)	0.853	0.66	0.85
Brand Image (BI)	0.835	0.629	0.833
Purchase Decision (PDEC)	0.888	0.725	0.888

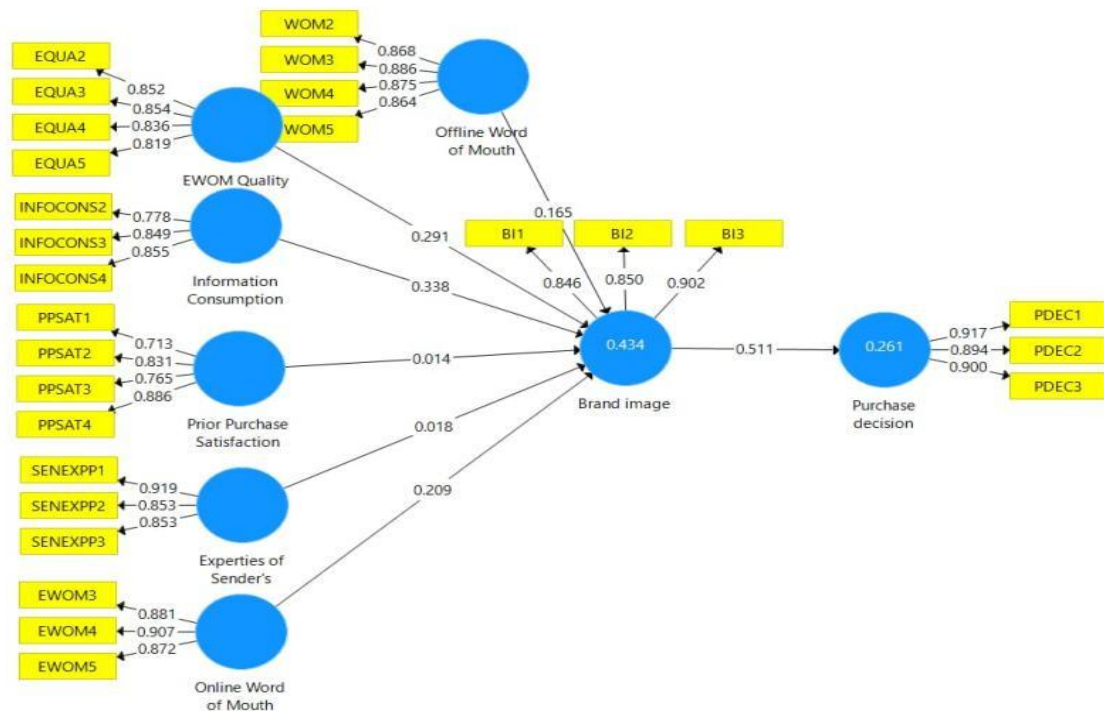
CCR: composite construct reliability; AVE: average variance extracted.

Table 3: CFA Results

Construct	Standardized Loadings	t-value	Item-to-total Correlation
E-WOM Quality (EQUA)			
EQUA2	0.808	15.954	0.808
EQUA3	0.807	18.178	0.807
EQUA4	0.798	17.277	0.798
EQUA5	0.708	16.197	0.708

Online Word of Mouth (EWOM)			
EWOM3	0.865	27.034	0.865
EWOM4	0.862	28.496	0.862
EWOM5	0.745	25.169	0.745
Offline Word of Mouth (WOM)			
WOM2	0.889	18.339	0.889
WOM3	0.747	13.691	0.747
WOM4	0.757	18.32	0.757
WOM5	0.897	17.946	0.897
Satisfaction from Prior Purchase (PPSAT)			
SAT1	0.624	9.916	0.624
SAT2	0.807	10.542	0.807
SAT3	0.637	10.538	0.637
SAT4	0.839	19.345	0.839
Information Consumption (INFOCONS)			
INFOCONS2	0.643	17.022	0.643
INFOCONS3	0.775	21.138	0.775
INFOCONS4	0.767	20.833	0.767
Expertise of Sender (SENEXPP)			
SENEXPP 1	0.881	17.628	0.881
SENEXPP 2	0.776	12.814	0.776
SENEXPP 3	0.776	8.203	0.776
Brand Image (BI)			
BI1	0.78	28.843	0.78
BI2	0.738	29.535	0.738
BI3	0.856	36.091	0.856
Purchase Decision (PDEC)			
PDEC1	0.845	15.954	0.845
PDEC2	0.865	18.178	0.865
PDEC3	0.845	17.277	0.845

Notes: Normed fit index (NFI) = 0.897; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.034; ***p < 0.001.



Source: Author's compilation by using PLS-SEM 3.0

Figure 1: Diagram of Constructs by using PLS-SEM 3.0

Table 4: Hypothesis Result

	Hypothesized Path	Standardized Coefficients	t-value	Results
H1	Online Word of Mouth→Brand Image	0.209***	4.829***	Supported
H2	Offline Word of Mouth →Brand Image	0.165***	4.888***	Supported
H3	Ewom quality→Brand Image	0.291***	6.995***	Supported
H4	Information Consumption→Brand Image	0.338***	9.242***	Supported
H5	Prior Purchase Satisfaction →Brand Image	0.014	0.446	Not Supported
H6	Expertise of Sender→Brand Image	0.018	0.497	Not Supported
H7	Brand Image→Purchase Decision	0.511***	16.117***	Supported

Source: Author's compilation by using PLS-SEM 3.0.

Notes: Normed fit index (NFI) = 0.835; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.047; *p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001.

DISCUSSION

People used to share their experiences with others through WOM communication and these experiences help the people in taking their purchase decisions. The study examined the impact of WOM communication on brand image and the effect of brand image on purchase decision of smart phone. Total 7 hypotheses were formulated to get the result with the help of PLS SEM. H₁, H₂, H₃ and H₄ were found supported. Results revealed that E-WOM quality (Lin et al., 2013), online WOM (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Torlak et al., 2014), information consumption and offline WOM have significant effect on brand image of smart phone. Based on the findings it was seen that expertise impact of sender (H₆) and prior purchase satisfaction (H₅) was not significantly influencing the brand image of smart phone. H₇ was found supported by Lien et al. (2015). It was concluded that brand image significantly influence the purchase decision of the consumers (Torlak et al., 2014; Lien et al., 2015; Chao and Liao, 2016).

CONCLUSION

WOM communication is very important for consumer decision making. Finding reveals that E-WOM quality, offline WOM, online WOM and information consumption influence the brand image of smart phones. Expertise of sender and prior purchase satisfaction do not significantly influence the brand image of smart phones and on the other hand brand image significantly influence the purchase decision. People collect online reviews when they want to purchase a Smartphone and if they don't read them they feel worried about their decision. Therefore, online communication channels must be the focus point for marketers and

firm to influence consumers' intention for brand (Alrwashdeh et al., 2019). This research only tested the impact of WOM communication on brand image and impact of brand image on purchase decision; further research can be conducted on mediation and moderation impact. The study can also be carried out on the other variables and impact of demographic variables as a moderator.

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