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Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) in the Marketing Context

A State of the Art
Analysis and Future
Directions

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*To my mother and husband for your love and never-ending support. **Elvira Ismagilova***

*To Kirti and Viral. **Yogesh K. Dwivedi***

*To my Bampa who always enjoyed a bit of WOM (gossip) on the shop floor.
Emma L. Slade*

*To Marie, Emily, and of course, Ian.
Michael D. Williams*

Foreword

This rich and very timely book by Elvira Ismagilova, Yogesh K. Dwivedi, Emma L. Slade, and Michael D. Williams demonstrates how critical eWOM communication is and offers a thought-provoking addition which really presents and opens up the relevance of the eWOM debate. Throughout, the authors have painstakingly brought together leading edge thoughts on this important topic and have directed their efforts towards developing knowledge through debating the key concepts and theoretical frameworks, while asking important and bold questions. Their approach shows a genuine intellectual interest in the subject area. What is more, they have gone to a great trouble to deal with the subject at length by covering the critical issues in an approachable and interesting manner, without overlooking the difficult theoretical and practical problems that impact on both research and practice.

Ismagilova, Dwivedi, Slade, and Williams approach eWOM from a marketing perspective. To move the field forward, each chapter provides a thoughtful review of current knowledge and understanding. This is supported by interesting accounts and relevant examples which show the range of topics critical to the eWOM agenda. This approach means that within each chapter, the authors are strongly positioned to summarize the key points around the topic, present the realities of eWOM communications, provide a thoughtful future research agenda, and give critical direction for practitioners too. Throughout, it should be noted, the authors align these aspects very well.

In their thoughtful introductory chapter, the authors set the tone and the scene incredibly well to show the real power of eWOM. This is followed by Chap. 2 which provides an interesting historical account relating to word of mouth (WOM), its characteristics, power, and influence on consumer behaviour. This informed position allows the authors to show how eWOM developed from traditional WOM communications, thanks to the new communication mechanisms and technology. Ismagilova, Dwivedi, Slade, and Williams also show how eWOM can impact on the purchasing intentions of consumers, showing why the topic of eWOM communications is extremely relevant for all operating in today's World. The authors propose a new definition of eWOM in Chap. 3: *the dynamic and ongoing information exchange process between potential, actual, or former consumer's experiences regarding a*

product, service, brand, company, or media personality, which is available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet which emphasizes the important dynamic process that is eWOM. In Chap. 4, the authors show why people engage in eWOM and send eWOM communications. In doing so, they deal with the antecedents of eWOM and the motivations for sending and receiving eWOM communications. This allows the authors in Chap. 5 to show just how persuasive eWOM communications can be. Chapter 6 demonstrates the impact and consequences of eWOM and how this relates to information, changes in attitude, and purchasing intentions and how these critical aspects can influence sales of products and services. This leads well into Chap. 7 which focuses very nicely on why it is important to pay attention to eWOM communications and how it is possible to respond to eWOM while capturing and analysing eWOM communications and their impact. Chapter 8 concludes the book well and draws things together in a concise manner by synthesizing the key elements of the book and its contribution to the eWOM debate.

Anyone interested in the topic of eWOM will really enjoy this book immensely and will feel inspired by its thoughtful appreciation of the subject and the interesting questions it poses. Congratulations to the authors on this timely and critical addition, an essential read for students, academics, marketing practitioners, and those keen to understand the notion and impact of eWOM communications.

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Foreword

I am like a super excited kid who just started using an old public library and have been asked to inaugurate the new library building. A student of digital marketing and social media in business practices, one is overwhelmed by the amount of material available, especially in the content aggregating portals. Most of them claim to be experts or practitioners and offer ten different steps or five point strategy to exploit the electronic media. Unfortunately, they are backed only with anecdotal evidences. On the other side, academic literature in different journals presents us with material, often with contrasting but enriching multidisciplinary perspectives. A young research scholar in this domain is often overwhelmed by the importance of the topic, but not adequately supported by a systematic review of the field. An instructor who is risking to teach a course on digital marketing needs to scramble many material to build a coherent story. The book in your hand is addressing all these issues. Either you are young scholar or a seasoned researcher you are getting a detailed analysis with neatly structured presentation of electronic word of mouth (eWOM). This is a very timely and directly useful book!

Needless to say eWOM is an important and emerging topic in the marketing context. Though electronic means, in other words, new media or social media can be used in businesses in all possible functions. Though there are differences between developed and developing countries in terms on Internet penetration, use of electronic devices, and impact on human behaviour, the potential use in future cannot be ignored. Right from recruiting people through LinkedIn to winning back the customers through continuous engagement in Facebook, identifying inputs for new product development to gathering insights on loopholes in the supply chain management, social media is increasingly playing an important role. The ever growing user-generated content and its different forms add to the complexity of this growth. Beyond private enterprises, governments and not for profits are also exploring social media platforms for either delivering services or monitoring the interactions apart from advocacy and consultations. In all the above instances, the unifying theme is about how do people trust information from others and pass it on. In other words, we call this as eWOM. Once a researcher is familiar with the eWOM and its working, it is easy to apply in various domains or explore the appropriate strategies.

This book is an outcome of collected efforts of four people, a mix of young and bright scholars and proven researchers located in Swansea University which has now the legacy of leading the research in digital marketing or various facets of digital economy. The book delivers what it promises in the title. I am glad that the team has gathered together and put together this book.

To the best of my knowledge, the book provides an in-depth review of the literature which will benefit any researcher who is likely to venture into this domain. There are no omissions and the frameworks emerging out of the review are fresh and provide useful directions.

It is not a convention to offer a summary of a book in a foreword which I would like to overlook as I want people to read this book. The book has six main chapters. The first, introduction chapter, is brief and sets the context for the book with popular examples. The second chapter delineates the evolution of eWOM from the classic literature and leads the readers to the contemporary times. The third chapter delves into eWOM, its definitions, and how they are different from traditional WOM and the emerging themes. Both the chapters offer two tables each—one on definitions and other on emerging themes which can be used directly in the class. The fourth chapter dissects eWOM in terms of antecedents, and motivations to seek and provide. The fifth chapter expands on how eWOM communications are persuasive and factors that influence helpfulness and credibility of eWOM. The sixth chapter discusses the impact of eWOM on information adoption and the consequences, especially attitude and purchase intentions. The sixth chapter offers strategy suggestions on managing eWOM. One can pick up any chapter for the need and read it as well.

Given the outbreak of information and communication technologies and their significant impact on various business functions, there is/will be growing interest among future researchers and practitioners to explore this topic. The book is suitable for master and PhD students in the field of marketing, ICTD, information systems, management, communication, and development informatics. Consultants are also likely to refer this book for upgradation of knowledge.

Looking forward to seeing this in hand!

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Preface

The Internet has changed social communications and social behaviour and led to the development of new forms of communication channels and platforms, providing opportunities to create and share user-generated content. In the context of increasing usage of the Internet and social media, traditional “face-to-face” communications have developed into electronic communications. People can now collect and disseminate information using a variety of Internet platforms such as e-mail, blogs, forums, online communities, and review websites. Individuals are now able to share information not only with their friends and relatives but also with complete strangers as communication networks have an increasing numbers of contributors and audiences. As a new form of communication, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is *the dynamic and ongoing information exchange process between potential, actual, or former consumers regarding a product, service, brand, or company, which is available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet* (adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Kietzmann and Canhoto 2013; Thorson and Rodgers 2006; Xun and Reynolds 2010).

This new phenomenon is influencing marketing strategies used by companies. It is considered that eWOM communications are perceived more credible in comparison with traditional media and information provided by companies and have more impact on consumer decision-making. Previous studies have confirmed the significant impact of eWOM communications on consumer attitude towards products/services, purchase decisions, and level of sales. While eWOM brings extraordinary opportunities for marketers, it also creates new challenges. As a result, to be able to use this new phenomenon successfully, an understanding of different factors that are influencing eWOM communications is necessary.

Even though eWOM communications have developed from traditional word of mouth (WOM), they have some important differences that can influence their effect and should be taken into consideration by companies. Because eWOM communications are spread via the Internet, the perceived credibility of eWOM must be different from traditional WOM, which happens face-to-face. Unlike in traditional WOM communications, eWOM takes place in an online environment where communicators and receivers are spatially separated and social cues, which help when judging

credibility of communications, are often missing. The ways consumers perceive credibility of these communications will influence its persuasiveness, which in turn will affect information adoption and as a result sales. Also, eWOM communications have wider reach, stay in public repositories for a long time, and can be easily accessed by other consumers, which in case of negative eWOM can damage or even ruin the business. That is why it is important for companies to know how to react to and manage it.

eWOM communications are considered an effective marketing tool which should not be ignored. In the modern competitive marketing world, companies cannot just focus on traditional advertising; companies should focus on creating online communities around their products and services in order to get a competitive advantage and be successful. It is important to understand why consumers engage in eWOM communications (what are the motivations to provide and seek eWOM), how consumers evaluate its persuasiveness (which factors influence helpfulness and credibility of eWOM), the impact these communications have (how eWOM communications can influence information adoption, information overload, attitude, purchase intention, and level of sales), and how companies can monitor and manage them (how to monitor eWOM across different online platforms and what are the appropriate ways to answer negative or positive eWOM). Thus, this book covers all these important areas of eWOM communications.

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) in the Marketing Context: A State of the Art Analysis and Future Directions is a book that provides the reader with a comprehensive overview of the current literature on eWOM communications, outlining future directions for both practitioners and researchers. Through covering various aspects of eWOM communications the book ensures its importance for marketing. Continued research of this topic with directions for knowledge and practice is crucial for developing and improving marketing strategies for all companies, for which this book lays a solid foundation.

Wales, UK

Elvira Ismagilova
Yogesh K. Dwivedi
Emma L. Slade
Michael D. Williams

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In March 2008, a musician called Dave Carroll and his band, the Sons of Maxwell, had a trip from Halifax to Nebraska through Chicago's O'Hare airport. According to Carroll's claim, his guitar was severely damaged by United Airlines baggage handlers at O'Hare airport. While he was ready to get off the airplane, he could hear that another passenger screamed: "My God! They're throwing guitars out there!" Later, when he got his luggage, he discovered that his \$3500 Taylor guitar was broken. To get compensated for the guitar, Dave Carroll experienced a customer service nightmare. For 9 months the musician tried to get his claim processed with United Airlines. The company rejected his claim stating that he had waited longer than 24 h to process it. Still the musician has not stopped. He tried to call them and email them; he even said that instead of reimbursing his money United Airlines could just offer him \$1200 in flight vouchers, which cover the cost of the guitar's repair. Still, United Airlines said a firm "No" (Wilson 2011).

In response to the company's actions, the musician wrote a song about the incident with United Airlines titled "United Breaks Guitars" and posted it on YouTube in July 2009. The video went viral and today has nearly 16 million views (YouTube 2009). After the video reached 150,000 views, the airline company contacted Dave and offered payment to remove the video. However, he rejected the offer saying that it was not about the money anymore (Tran 2009; Wilson 2011).

The impact of the song went far beyond YouTube. Newspapers and news broadcast media were doing stories about it with the musician invited as a guest on many TV shows and radio stations to retell the story of "United Breaks Guitars". As a result, the dissatisfied experience with United Airlines was shared with millions of people all over the world. Of course, it affected people's decision in choosing an airline (Tran 2009; Wilson 2011). According to BBC (2009), United Airlines' stock price went down by 10% within 3–4 weeks after the video had been released, which resulted in a decrease in valuation of \$180 million.

The example illustrates that there is no doubt that the Internet and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have greatly changed how we live and function (Barnes and Jacobsen 2014; Maceli et al. 2015). Face-to-face communications

are moving online leading to an unprecedented amount of information generated by consumers which influence consumers' decision-making and companies' sales (Barnes and Jacobsen 2014). The ways consumers communicate with each other and gather and exchange information about products and services have changed significantly over the last decade (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010). Thanks to the Internet consumers can now express their complaints and negative experiences with reduced time and costs to a multitude of people via emails, blogs, forums, websites, and social networking platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) (Barnes and Jacobsen 2014). The United Airlines case illustrated above provides a great example of how the Internet and new technology changed the use and power of consumer communications. It became quicker and easier for consumers to share their experience with other people. Also, Internet technology has erased the geographical boundaries of communications. Most probably, if this incident happened 30 years ago, almost no one would even know about it and the company could get away with it easily. Now, consumers' complaints are heard and observed not just by a few people, but by a multitude of people globally, which can have a huge impact on businesses. Negative eWOM can lead to a negative perception of a brand or company (van Noort and Willemsen 2011). Thus in the era of Internet, eWOM communications have become a powerful tool which can introduce new opportunities and challenges for companies and consumers.

The power of eWOM communication has been well established in the consumer literature (Cheung and Thadani 2012). Previous studies have found that consumers consider eWOM as more credible and persuasive than traditional media (e.g. advertising and personal selling) (Channel Advisor 2010; Cheung and Thadani 2012; Nielsen 2009). Research has investigated the influence of eWOM communications on information adoption (Lis 2013; Luo et al. 2014a, b; Yu and Natalia 2013), attitude change (Bartikowski and Walsh 2014; Huang and Korfiatis 2015; Kim et al. 2015), and purchase intention (Jeong and Koo 2015; Ladhari and Michaud 2015; Ziegele and Weber 2015), which in turn influence the level of sales (Floyd et al. 2014; You et al. 2015; Zhou and Duan 2015). Such existing research provides evidence of the paramount importance for companies to recognize the power of eWOM and develop strategies which allow businesses to manage these communications.

Although eWOM communications have attracted attention from researchers, few published studies provide a detailed overview of the existing research in this area and fail to collate key points for researchers and practitioners derived from it. Hence, the key purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive overview of eWOM communications from a marketing perspective by analysing and synthesizing existing literature and identifying future research directions for academicians and practitioners. This book will be valuable for students, especially postgraduate and doctoral researchers, university academics who are interested in marketing and business management, and marketing professionals who wish to advance their knowledge of the subject.

The remaining chapters of this book are outlined as follows:

Chapter 2 presents the concept and power of traditional word-of-mouth communications, as well as the advances in WOM research.

Chapter 3 introduces the concept of eWOM communications and discusses the differences between WOM and eWOM communications. The chapter also outlines new challenges and opportunities introduced by the development and growth of eWOM communications both for companies and consumers, and briefly presents advances in eWOM research.

Chapter 4 outlines and discusses advances in research on antecedents and motivations of engagement in eWOM communications from the point of view of senders of eWOM (people who provide eWOM) and receivers of eWOM (people who seek eWOM).

Chapter 5 evaluates the current literature related to the persuasiveness of eWOM communications by discussing the factors that influence credibility and helpfulness of eWOM communications.

Chapter 6 reviews the existing studies on impact of eWOM communications, such as information adoption, information overload, changes in consumer attitude, purchase intention, and sales, both from the consumer and organization perspectives.

Chapter 7 offers an overview of the techniques to manage eWOM communications, discusses why it is important to pay attention to eWOM communications, and outlines strategies on responding to eWOM.

Chapter 8 provides closing remarks with a summary of key points.

Chapter 2

Traditional Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

Being the oldest and one of the most important channels of information exchange between people, WOM communications attracted a great deal of attention from researchers. It is well established in academic literature that the power of WOM influences consumer decision-making and it is more effective in comparison with marketer-initiated communications (Buttle 1998; Steffes and Burgee 2009). As will be discussed in more detail through the chapter, previous studies found that WOM communications can influence consumer attitude towards products and services, brand adoption, and purchase intention. As a result, it has continued to be an important area for marketing research. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of what is known about traditional WOM communications.

This chapter starts by providing an overview of existing definitions of traditional WOM, followed by its characteristics. Next, the power of WOM communications is considered followed by explanation of why it is more powerful in comparison with traditional mass media. After this, the advances in WOM research are highlighted, which can be categorized into three themes: antecedents of WOM communications, effectiveness of WOM communications, and impact of WOM communications. The chapter ends with a discussion of the importance of WOM communications for businesses and consumers providing key points for practitioners and outlining future research directions.

2.1 Defining WOM

WOM is the oldest and one of the most important channels of information dispersion between people (Rui et al. 2010). The expression “word-of-mouth” has been used in daily English language for centuries. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, WOM was first mentioned in 1533. The dictionary defines this term as “oral communication”, “oral publicity”, or “written and other method(s) of expression” (Nyilasy 2005). WOM was an early tool for people to exchange news. People spread news by

WOM on crossroads, at markets or campfires (Stephens 1950). Messengers on horseback were sent from battlefields to other part of the country to report on victories or defeats (Ketkar 2012). In twelfth century England, messengers were used to travel the kingdom to carry the king's word (Mason 2014). Even nowadays, in very small rural areas, people use WOM as their main source of local news (Owen 2016). It can be argued that WOM communications are more important in developing and resource-constrained countries where news media is less prominent.

In marketing and communication literature, it refers only to interpersonal communications about commercial entities (Nyilasy 2005). Arndt (1967a, p 3) defines it as "oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product or a service". According to Nyilasy (2005) this definition consists of three important parts. First, the definition emphasizes that WOM is an interpersonal communication. It distinguishes WOM from mass communication such as advertising and other impersonal channels. Second, the content of these communications should be commercial. While in everyday language individuals can use WOM for any kind of interpersonal communication, WOM in marketing refers to the message about commercial entities, products, product categories, and brands. Third, despite the fact that the content of WOM communications is commercial, communicators are not motivated commercially or at least this is the receiver's perception. It is enough that the communicator is perceived to be unbiased. So, WOM is commercial in content but non-commercial in perception (Nyilasy 2005). The definition proposed by Arndt (1967a) just considers communications regarding a brand, product, or service but does not take into consideration the communications about organizations.

Due to the constant development in WOM research, new definitions appeared. Westbrook (1987, p 261) includes subjects of communication between customers in the definition of WOM, defining WOM as "informal communications directed at other consumers about ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers". This definition does not define whether or not the source of the communications is considered as independent of commercial influence, which has been identified in other conceptualizations. For example, Webster (1970, p 186) defined WOM as "interpersonal communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a product or a service". Bone (1992, p 579) proposed that WOM is "an exchange of comments, thoughts, and ideas among two or more individuals in which none of the individuals represent a marketing source". Litvin et al. (2008, p 459) stated that it is "the communication between consumers about a product, service, or a company in which the sources are considered independent of commercial influence".

Although definitions vary somewhat researchers largely agree that WOM consists of oral interpersonal communications (Nyilasy 2005). However, WOM is not necessarily positively valenced (Richins 1984; Singh 1990). Negative WOM is defined as "interpersonal communication among consumers concerning a marketing organization or product which denigrates the object of communication" (Richins 1984, p 697) or "complaining to friends and relatives" (Singh 1990, p 3). In contrast, positive WOM is defined as "product related information transmitted by satisfied customers"

(Holmes and Lett 1977, p 35). These definitions can be easily integrated into the general definition of WOM (Nyilasy 2005).

Based on the previous definitions of WOM and their limitations, summarized in Table 2.1, we propose a new definition of WOM as follows:

Oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator, whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, product, service, or organization.

2.2 Characteristics of WOM

WOM communications can be characterized by valence, focus, timing, solicitation, degree of management intervention, and credibility (Buttle 1998; Cakmak and Isaac 2012; Chiosa 2014; Schoefer 1998; Tabbane and Debabi 2015).

Valence. WOM communications can be negative or positive in their valence. Positive WOM occurs when customers satisfied with a product or service share about it with other people (Buttle 1998). Negative WOM is a consumer response to dissatisfaction with a product or service (Richins 1984). In a study conducted by the US Office of Consumer Affairs, it was found that one dissatisfied individual may tell around nine other people about the disappointing experience. On the other hand, it has been found that satisfied people will only usually tell their story to five other people (Mangold et al. 1999).

Focus. Management's focus does not only include WOM between consumers. The extent of WOM activity can include people with whom the organization and its employees have contact, such as customers, suppliers, agents, competitors, the general public, and other stakeholders (Buttle 1998; Haywood 1989).

Timing. WOM communications can be used and spread by customers before or after a purchase is made. WOM communications can be an important source of pre-purchase information for consumers in their decision-making process. This type of WOM is known as input WOM. Consumers can also transmit WOM after their purchase or service experience. This type of WOM is known as output WOM (Buttle 1998).

Solicitation. Not all WOM communications are initiated by customers. As a result, WOM communications can be solicited or unsolicited. It can be offered even though it is not asked for. In case when the information is sought, the customer might look for WOM from opinion leaders (Buttle 1998; Schoefer 1998).

Intervention. WOM communications can be spontaneously generated. However, more and more companies make an effort to stimulate and manage WOM activity. Some companies view customer WOM as the most powerful marketing tool with minimal financial costs (Buttle 1998). Particularly, marketers' strategies are focused on influencing opinion leaders directly and stimulating WOM communication through advertising. For instance, when Domino's Pizza introduced its "half an

Table 2.1 Summary of definitions of WOM

Author	Definition	Limitations	Examples
Arndt (1967a, p 3)	Oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial.	Does not consider the communications about organizations.	Breazeale (2009), Buttle (1998), Chatterjee (2001), Gelb and Johnson (1995), Lam and Mizerski (2005), Mauri and Minazzi (2013), Sweeney et al. 2005
Webster (1970, p 186)	Interpersonal communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a product or a service.	Does not mention communications about brand.	Nyilasy (2005)
Holmes and Lett (1977, p 35)	Product related information transmitted by satisfied customers.	Only considers positive WOM; does not consider communications from dissatisfied customers.	Nyilasy (2005), van Scheers and Prinsloo (2014)
Richins (1984, p 697)	Interpersonal communication among consumers concerning a marketing organization or product which denigrates the object of communication.	Does not consider the fact that WOM communications are perceived as non-commercial by consumers.	Audrain-Pontevia and Kimmel (2008), Coombs and Holladay (2007), Laczniak et al. (1996), Mohammad and Turney (2013)
Westbrook (1987, p 261)	Informal communications directed at other consumers about ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers.	Does not define whether or not the source of the communications is considered as independent of commercial influence.	De Matos and Rossi (2008), Gremler et al. (2001), Van Rijnsoever et al. (2012), Zwass (2010)
Singh (1990, p 3)	Complaining to friends and relatives.	Sole focus on definition of negative WOM communications.	Bach and Kim (2012), Nyilasy (2005), Von der Heyde and dos Santos (2007)
Bone (1992, p 579)	An exchange of comments, thoughts, and ideas among two or more individuals in which none of the individuals represent a marketing source.	Does not specify content of communication between customers.	Carl (2006), Edwards et al. (2008), Goyette et al. (2010)
Litvin et al. (2008, p 459)	The communication between consumers about a product, service, or a company in which the sources are considered independent of commercial influence.	Does not consider the communications about brand.	Lopez and Sicilia (2011), Sotiriadis and Van Zyl (2013)

hour or it's free" advertising, lots of people were intrigued. They tested the claim made by the company and after spread the word (Haywood 1989). Also, marketers try to manage negative WOM by using effective complaint handling procedures (Bolfing 1989; Fornell and Wernerfelt 1987).

2.3 The Power of WOM

Since 1950 WOM has been a topic of concern for consumer behaviour researchers (Arndt 1967b). Research has proven that personal conversations and information exchange between people affect consumer behaviour (Wang et al. 2014). One of the main features of WOM is the independence of the source of information—the source does not have any commercial interest in sharing of WOM (Anderson 1998; Arndt 1967b; Harrison-Walker 2001). That is why consumers consider WOM more credible and reliable than information generated by firms (Herr et al. 1991; Lopez and Sicilia 2014; Miquel-Romero and Adame-Sánchez 2013; Wu and Wang 2011). Researchers believe that WOM affects consumers' decisions more than market-created sources of information such as advertising, newspapers, and sales staff (Buttle 1998; Day 1971; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Herr et al. 1991). Additionally, compared with traditional mass media communication, WOM has a greater impact on consumers because of clarification and feedback opportunities (Murray 1991).

WOM is a widely accepted non-commercial information source that has a huge effect on consumer suggestion formation and purchase decision (Richins 1983). Because the receiver of the information trusts the sender of the message, it lowers any anxiety, vulnerability, and uncertainty about a transaction (De Matos and Rossi 2008). WOM has a distinctive ability to affect consumer decisions because of the perceived source credibility and the flexibility of interpersonal communication (Breazeale 2009; Day 1971; Richins 1983; Tybout et al. 1981). It also increases product awareness and persuades individuals to try new products and services (Berger 2014).

Researchers find that positive WOM has a significant influence on consumer decision-making (Richins 1983). Interestingly, research discovered that negative WOM can be even more influential than positive WOM (Bolfing 1989; Tybout et al. 1981). It happens because dissatisfied customers tell more people about their dissatisfaction experience than satisfied customers (Arndt 1967b). Some customers who find the information useful in decision-making can perceive even negative WOM as positive (Buttle 1998).

In addition to organic WOM, some companies use referral programs as a customer acquisition tool (Buttle 1998; Wirtz et al. 2013). Referral programs involve companies' existing customers being rewarded for recommending the provider and its products or services to friends and acquaintances (Schmitt et al. 2011; Wirtz et al. 2013). Unlike organic WOM, referral campaigns are managed by the provider (Neumann 2015; Schmitt et al. 2011).

During the 1990s when market research went online, there was a shift from a primary focus on consumer behaviour to strategy (Allenby and Ginter 1995; Breazeale 2009; Buttle 1998; Hahn et al. 1994; Horsky 1990). Recent strategy research explores issues such as the role of WOM in customer acquisition (Brown et al. 2005; Kumar and Krishnan 2002; Ryu and Feick 2007; Wangenheim and Bayon 2007), increasing company value (Luo 2007; Villanueva et al. 2008), and keeping customers (Maxham and Netemeyer 2002). Another stream of recent WOM studies (Allsop et al. 2007; Gershoff et al. 2007) examines consumers' perception of WOM providers and how it affects consumers' decision-making (Neumann 2015).

Traditionally, WOM is recognized as one of the most influential resources of information spread (Breazeale 2009; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Maxham and Netemeyer 2002). It is well established in academic literature that the power of WOM influences consumer decision-making (Steffes and Burgee 2009). Thus, it is an important area for marketing research. Nevertheless, traditional WOM only works within network boundaries (Chan and Ngai 2011).

2.4 Advances in WOM Research

The main themes in WOM literature can be summarized in three categories (see overview in Table 2.2). The first category of studies considers the causes of WOM. Studies investigate antecedents of WOM from the perspective of the receiver and sender of WOM communications. It is found by researchers that the main antecedents of WOM communications are attitude towards product or service (Holmes and Lett 1977), satisfaction (File et al. 1994; Gremler et al. 2001) and dissatisfaction (Richins 1983). Motivations to engage in WOM communications include cognitive dissonance reduction, economic incentives, being perceived as well informed by others, and altruism (Arndt 1967c). Consumers use WOM communications in situations in which formal information sources have not reduced perceived risk and uncertainty (Murray 1991). Findings show that WOM is the most important source that consumers use in order to acquire risk-reducing information (Lutz and Reilly 1974). Studies have also found that tie strength can influence the way people transmit WOM communications (Brown and Reingen 1987; Granovetter 1973; Wirtz and Chew 2002). For example, Wirtz and Chew (2002) reported that consumers are engaging in WOM communications with strong ties (e.g. relatives and friends) more often than with weak ties (e.g. seldom-contacted acquaintances).

The second category of studies investigates what factors make individuals rely more on WOM communications. Researchers have found that communicator characteristics, such as similarity, credibility, and trustworthiness of the source, can influence the perceived credibility of WOM communications (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Bearden et al. 1989; Price et al. 1989). Also, tie strength between receiver and the communicator plays an important part in effectiveness of information exchange (Bansal and Voyer 2000). Studies investigated that people trust information received from strong ties more than information from weak ties. Additionally, some studies find

Table 2.2 Themes in WOM research

Theme	Summary	Limitations and future research directions	Example of studies
Causes of WOM	Attitude towards product/service, satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the product/service, trust, and commitment are the main antecedents of WOM. Motivations to start WOM communications include cognitive dissonance reduction, economic incentives, being perceived as well informed by others, and altruism. Risk reduction is one of the most important reasons for people to seek WOM.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Most of the studies used women lived in one community as a sample for the study which can limit the generalizability of the results. Future studies can conduct a repetition of the research in diverse market situations. Most of the studies are conducted in one particular country. It can limit the application of the results to other countries due to cultural and social differences. Studies used students as a sample. Future research should use more diverse sample of the participants. Studies considered particular product, brand, or service. Future research can use several brands from various product classes or services. Additional factors that may influence WOM such as personality variables (including sociability), situational variables (e.g. proximity of others when the satisfaction/dissatisfaction occurs) and attitudinal variables (e.g. attitudes towards business), also need investigation. 	Anderson (1998), Arndt (1967c), De Matos and Rossi (2008), File et al. (1994), Gremler et al. (2001), Holmes and Lett (1977), Hugstad et al. (1987), Lutz and Reilly (1974), Murray (1991), Parthasarathy and Forlani (2010), Richins (1983), Wirtz and Chew (2002)
Persuasiveness of WOM	The effect of WOM communications depends on communicator characteristics (similarity, credibility, trustworthiness), tie strength, and receiver's expertise.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Most of the studies are conducted in one particular country. It can limit the application of the results to other countries due to cultural and social differences. Studies considered particular product, brand, or service. Future research can consider the effectiveness of WOM using a variety of product and services that range in terms of price and perceived risk. 	Bansal and Voyer (2000), Bearden and Etzel (1982), Bearden et al. (1989), Price et al. (1989)
Effects of WOM	Studies found that WOM communications can influence purchase intention, adoption of innovations, brand awareness, and attitude change.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Studies mostly employ quantitative research approach, such as surveys and experiments to investigate factors influencing effect of WOM communications. Future studies can use qualitative research approach such as interviews and focus groups in order to investigate how WOM communications can affect consumers. Studies investigate the effect of WOM on receiver; however, the effect of WOM communications on sender is an under-research area. 	Arndt (1967b), Bansal and Voyer (2000), Bearden and Etzel (1982), Bone (1995), Burzynski and Bayer (1977), Day (1971), Engel et al. (1969), Udel (1966), Herr et al. (1991), Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955)

that receiver expertise about product or service can influence the effectiveness of WOM communications (Bansal and Voyer 2000). Expertise is defined as “the extent to which the source is perceived as being capable of providing correct information, and expertise is expected to induce persuasion because receivers have little motivation to check the veracity of the source’s assertions by retrieving and rehearsing their own thoughts” (Bristol 1990, p 73).

The third category studies the impact of WOM communications. Marketing literature acknowledges that WOM communications influence consumer behaviour (Buttle 1998). In fact, a number of studies evidence the power of WOM on the receiver. It has been found that WOM communications influence attitude towards product and service (Bone 1995; Burzynski and Bayer 1977; Herr et al. 1991), adoption of innovations (Engel et al. 1969), brand awareness (Udell 1966), and purchase intention (Arndt 1967b; Bansal and Voyer 2000; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955).

2.5 Discussion and Concluding Points

WOM is an influential and powerful form of communication (Haywood 1989). The main themes of research regarding WOM communications are the causes of WOM (Gremler et al. 2001; Holmes and Lett 1977; Hugstad et al. 1987), its persuasiveness (Bansal and Voyer 2000; Bearden and Etzel 1982), and its impact on the receiver (Bearden and Etzel 1982).

While previous studies have focussed on various antecedents of WOM communications such as trust and commitment, satisfaction was one of the antecedents which was researched the most intensively likely due to its longevity within marketing literature and its applicability across various products and services (Lang 2013). It is found that satisfied customers are more likely to engage in positive WOM, while dissatisfaction leads to negative WOM. Nevertheless, some researchers argue that satisfaction can influence WOM valence positively and negatively (Lang 2013; Parthasarathy and Forlani 2010). For example, Parthasarathy and Forlani (2010) found that satisfied customers can provide negative WOM about products they have been using. Also, it was found by previous studies that the relationships between satisfaction and WOM volume can be different across different contexts. For example, Anderson (1998) investigated that the correlation of satisfaction with the amount of WOM communications across different products is lower in the UK but higher in Sweden.

Previous studies have investigated the influence of WOM communication on purchase intention, adoption of innovations, brand awareness, and attitude change. It has been found that WOM is more important for the decision-making process when purchasing services rather than products (Buttle 1998; Murray 1991). As the main characteristics of services are intangibility and the inseparability of production and consumption, it makes consumers to rely on opinions of other people before use

Summary of Key Points

- WOM is oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product, a service, or an organization.
- WOM is more effective than traditional mass media communications.
- WOM can influence consumer behaviour.
- The main effects of WOM communications are attitude change, brand awareness, and purchase intention.
- The main reason for people to seek WOM is to reduce perceived risk.
- The effectiveness of WOM communications depends on communicator characteristics, receiver's expertise, and tie strength.
- People share WOM with others when they are satisfied/dissatisfied with a product or service.
- People pay attention to WOM especially when purchasing services.

and purchase. Murray (1991) found that service consumers rely on information from family, friends, and peers rather than traditional media.

Since it is established by the research that WOM communications can influence consumer behaviour, it is very important for companies to manage and pay attention to them. One of the studies reported that 34% of consumers who were dissatisfied with a product told others about their dissatisfaction (Diener and Greysier 1978). As a result, it can have long-lasting effects for the company in terms of negative image and reduced sales (Richins 1983). While it is important for all companies to pay attention to WOM communication, managers of high involvement brands should pay even more attention to WOM communications.

In situations where a consumer is dissatisfied, product and service managers should try to reduce negative WOM. Studies have found that if it is easy for consumers to complain to the company the likelihood of them spreading negative WOM will be lower (Blodgett et al. 1995; Richins 1983). Furthermore, ensuring that customers feel the company takes complaints seriously and is willing to set things right can help to avoid the spread of negative WOM (Maxham and Netemeyer 2002; Nyilasy 2005).

Even though it is found by researchers that WOM is more effective than traditional mass media communications, it does not mean that managers should not pay attention to the traditional marketing communication methods. For example, advertising can induce WOM communications. Also, brand image, which is created by the company, can moderate the influence of WOM. Individuals who have prior beliefs about a brand are more resistant to the influence of WOM communications. Thus, tactics, which focus on managing WOM communications directly, should be a part of traditional marketing communication mixes but not a replacement (Nyilasy 2005).

Points for Practitioners

- It is important for companies to monitor WOM communications.
- Managers of high involvement brands should pay extra attention to WOM communications.
- Marketers can prevent negative WOM by making it easier to complain directly to the company.
- Managers should not stop paying attention to the traditional marketing communication methods.

Even though there is a substantial amount of research done in the area of traditional WOM communications, there are still some research gaps in this area. Studies examine why consumers provide or seek WOM (Arndt 1967b, c; Hugstad et al. 1987; Lutz and Reilly 1974; Murray 1991). However, future studies should investigate why consumers do not provide or seek WOM so that these factors can be addressed. Additionally, factors that may influence WOM such as personality variables (including sociability), situational variables (e.g. proximity of others when the satisfaction/dissatisfaction occurs), and attitudinal variables (e.g. attitudes towards business) need an investigation.

Previous studies have mainly evaluated positive or negative WOM (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Burzynski and Bayer 1977; Herr et al. 1991). However consumers are faced with neutral WOM communications as well. Future research should investigate the way consumers evaluate neutral WOM. Knowing how consumers evaluate neutral messages will help to deepen the understanding of the role of WOM on attitude formation and purchase intention.

Most extant studies consider the impact of WOM communications only on the receiver (Bone 1995; Burzynski and Bayer 1977; Day 1971; Engel et al. 1969; Herr et al. 1991; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Udell 1966). However, as a result of talking to other people senders of WOM communications can internalize their feelings towards products and services and even change their attitude towards them. Thus, future research should study the impact of WOM communications on senders, which will allow the companies to develop new proactive strategies to enhance traditional communications about the services or products.

Studies on effectiveness of WOM communications mostly employ a quantitative research approach, such as surveys or experiments (Bansal and Voyer 2000; Bearden and Etzel 1982; Burzynski and Bayer 1977). Future studies can use a qualitative research approach, such as interviews or focus groups, in order to investigate the finer intricacies between WOM communications and consumers' behaviour.

Studies considered particular products, brands, or services (Bansal and Voyer 2000; Gremler et al. 2001; Holmes and Lett 1977). Future comparative research can study WOM communications using a variety of products and services that range in terms of price and perceived risk.

It is well established in academic literature that WOM is a persuasive and very influential form of communication (Breazeale 2009; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Steffes and Burgee 2009); however, traditional WOM only works within network boundaries (Chan and Ngai 2011). The advancement of new technologies and the evolution of means of communications made the communication with a large number of people faster and easier (Berger 2014). As a result, high number of studies started investigating how technology changed WOM communications.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Investigate why consumers do not engage in WOM communications.
- Study factors that can influence the causes of WOM (e.g. personality variables, situational variables, and attitudinal variables).
- Investigate neutral WOM.
- Study the impact of WOM communication on senders.
- Use a qualitative research approach to study the effect of WOM communications.
- Consider the effectiveness of WOM using a variety of products and services that range in terms of price and perceived risk.

This chapter has provided an overview on WOM communications by presenting the existing definitions of WOM, outlining its characteristics, emphasizing its power on consumer decision-making, highlighting its importance for companies, and discussing advances in WOM research. Chapter 3 presents eWOM, which developed from traditional WOM communications thanks to the advancement of new communication technologies. The influence of eWOM can affect attitude and purchase intention of consumers and, as a result, sales. Therefore, the topic of eWOM communications has received much attention from scholars.

Chapter 3

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

With the growth of Internet technologies more and more consumers are using it as a tool for information seeking about a product or a company. Enhancement of the Internet, popularity of e-commerce, and widespread diffusion of social media applications led to the emergence of eWOM. Although eWOM may be less personal than traditional WOM, it is seen as more powerful because it has significant reach and is publicly available (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

This chapter starts by providing an overview of existing definitions of eWOM and discussing the difference between traditional and electronic WOM communications. After this, characteristics of eWOM are discussed followed by new challenges and opportunities introduced by the development and growth of eWOM communications for companies and consumers. The next subsection presents the advances in eWOM research, which can be categorized into three themes: engaging in eWOM, persuasiveness of eWOM, and impact of eWOM. The section ends with a discussion of the importance of eWOM communications for business and consumers providing key points for practitioners and outlining future research directions.

3.1 What is eWOM?

With the increasing number of studies about WOM communications in the new Internet environment, definitions of eWOM communications appeared. One of the definitions of eWOM which was developed from the traditional concept of WOM is “all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers” (Litvin et al. 2008, p 461). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p 39) offer a more focused definition which limits the boundaries of eWOM and specifies eWOM receivers and providers: “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company which is made available to multitude of the people and institutes via the Internet”. This definition is the most

widespread definition of eWOM in marketing literature (Trenz and Berger 2013). However, it is interesting to note that unlike conceptualizations of traditional WOM (see Chap. 2), Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) do not emphasize that the source of the communications is perceived as non-commercial by receivers, which is also typical of other definitions of eWOM. One reason for this is that influential online reviewers can be paid to share their unbiased thoughts about a product, service, brand, or company.

Drawing on Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Thorson and Rodgers (2006, p 40) define eWOM as “positive or negative statements made about a product, company, or media personality that are made widely available via the Internet”. However, this definition does not specify the source of eWOM communications. Another definition of eWOM is provided by Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013, p 39): “any statement based on positive, neutral, or negative experiences made by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product, service, brand, or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (through websites, social networks, instant messengers, news feeds, etc.)”. This definition is similar to the one provided by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) but it considers that content of the communications can be neutral and not just positive or negative.

Xun and Reynolds (2010) argue that the definition provided by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) “constrains eWOM as a static conceptualisation, leaving its potential as an information exchange process unexplored” (p 20) and proposed that eWOM is a “dynamic and ongoing information exchange process” (p 21). Other definitions of eWOM communications focus on types of Internet platforms where consumers can use eWOM. For example, Goldsmith (2006) defines eWOM as “communication on the Internet, which can be diffused by many Internet applications such as online forums, electronic bulletin board systems, blogs, review sites, and social networking sites” (p 410). This definition does not specify the content of eWOM communications. Table 3.1 provides a summary of the definitions on eWOM communications.

Based on the previous definitions of eWOM communications and their limitations, the new definition of eWOM is proposed:

eWOM is the dynamic and ongoing information exchange process between potential, actual, or former consumers regarding a product, service, brand, or company, which is available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet.

This definition emphasizes that eWOM communication is not a static process, but dynamic and ongoing information exchange, as messages can spread online spontaneously. Also, this definition specifies the content and source of this recommendations and the fact that they occur online.

eWOM communications take place in different settings. For example, consumers can post their reviews and opinions about a product or service on blogs, social networking sites (SNSs), discussion forums, and review websites (Cheung and Thadani 2010). The anonymous and interactive nature of the Internet allows consumers to give and seek opinions about the product or service experience of people who they have never met. As a result, eWOM affects consumers’ brand choices and sales of goods and services (Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006). Previous research has investi-

Table 3.1 Summary of definitions of eWOM

Author	Definition	Limitations	Examples
Bronner and de Hoog (2011, p 15)	Consumer's comments about products and services posted on the Internet.	Does not consider communications about brand.	Lange-Faria and Elliot (2012), Rathore and Panwar (2015)
Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p 39)	Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company which is made available to multitude of the people and institutes via the Internet.	This definition does not consider that communications can also be neutral, not just positive or negative. Also, does not consider communications about brand.	Andreassen and Stroukens (2009), Bronner and de Hoog (2010a), Feng and Papatla (2011), Jalilvand et al. (2011), Jeong and Jang (2011), Mauri and Minazzi (2013), Rathore and Panwar (2015), Cheung et al. (2008), Taylor et al. (2012), Yoo et al. (2013)
Goldsmith (2006, p 410)	Communication on the Internet, which can be diffused by many Internet applications such as online forums, electronic bulletin board systems, blogs, review sites, and SNSs.	Does not specify the content of the communications.	Floyd et al. (2014), Yang et al. (2012)
Thorson and Rodgers (2006, p 40)	Positive or negative statements made about a product, company, or media personality that are made widely available via the Internet.	It does not consider that communications can be also neutral, not just positive or negative. It does not specify the source of communications.	Church et al. (2015), Kuhn and Burns (2008), Rathore and Panwar (2015)
Litvin et al. (2008, p 461)	All informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers.	This definition is broad. It does not identify the source of the communications.	Bronner and de Hoog (2010b), Fakharyan et al. (2012), Jeong and Jang (2011), Rathore and Panwar, (2015)
Xun and Reynolds (2010, p 21)	Dynamic and ongoing information exchange process.	Does not specify the content of the communications.	Chaudhary (2011), Deka et al. (2015), Kaijasilta (2013)
Kietzmann and Camboto (2013, p 39)	Any statement based on positive, neutral, or negative experiences made by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product, service, brand, or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (through websites, social networks, instant messagers, news feeds...).	Constrains eWOM as a static conceptualization, leaving its potential as an information exchange process unexplored.	Rathore and Panwar (2015), Raymond (2016), Scholz et al. (2014)

gated several types of eWOM communications, such as discussion forums, UseNet groups, product reviews, blogs, and social networking sites (SNSs) (e.g. Baek et al. 2012; Cheng and Ho 2015; Kozinets et al. 2010; Ku et al. 2012; Lin et al. 2012; Lis 2013; Luo et al. 2015; Willemsen et al. 2012; Wu 2013).

The box below provides some interesting statistics regarding eWOM communications, which shows the importance of eWOM for consumers and companies (Charlton 2015):

1. 92% of consumers now read online reviews.
2. 63% of consumers are more likely to make a purchase from a website with user reviews.
3. 50 or more reviews per product can lead to a 4.6% increase in conversion rates.
4. Consumer reviews are 12 times more trusted than descriptions provided by manufacturers.
5. eWOM communications lead to an average 18% uplift in sales.

3.2 Characteristics of eWOM Communications

Researchers have found that eWOM communications have a number of characteristics (Dellarocas 2003; Dellarocas and Narayan 2007; King et al. 2014; Ku et al. 2012). First, eWOM's volume and reach are unprecedented (Dellarocas 2003). eWOM communications are able to reach a vast number of people in a short period of time. It is possible because both communicators and consumers have more options available for spreading eWOM, compared with traditional WOM, which leads to greater awareness (Kiecker and Cowles 2002).

Second, the outcome of eWOM is affected by platform dispersion, defined as “the extent to which product-related conversations are taking place across a broad range of communities” (Godes and Mayzlin 2004, p 546). As a result, the nature of the platform can have a large impact on the incidence and evolution of eWOM (e.g. which products are discussed and how regularly). Third, eWOM is persistent and stays in public repositories (Dellarocas and Narayan 2007). This information is available to other consumers who are looking for opinions about services and products (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010). Consumers are busy and have limited “attention budget” to provide their opinion. It leads to under-reporting bias (Hu et al. 2009). More than that, the content of the message and the source characteristics become more salient when consumers evaluate credibility and usefulness of eWOM. Persistence and observability mean that current eWOM influences future eWOM (Dellarocas and Narayan 2007).

Another characteristic of eWOM is anonymity. The Internet is an anonymous medium (Ku et al. 2012). Sellers' self-interested behaviour reduces the credibility and usefulness of eWOM. Salience of valence is also a characteristic of eWOM. Valence refers to the positive or negative rating assigned by consumers when they evaluate the product or service (King et al. 2014). A further characteristic proposed

by researchers is community engagement. eWOM platforms support collections of people in order to form specialized, non-geographically bound consumer communities (De Valck et al. 2009).

The outlined characteristics of eWOM communications make it different from traditional WOM communications. Even though traditional WOM and eWOM provide consumer opinions about products or services, they are different in several dimensions (Lopez and Sicilia 2014). First, in traditional WOM communication information is shared between small groups of individuals and societies (Avery et al. 1999; Dellarocas 2003; Li and Hitt 2008; Steffes and Burgee 2009). Hence, the influence of traditional WOM is usually limited to a local social network (Brown and Reingen 1987; Shi 2003), while the impact of eWOM can reach further than local communities because consumers all over the world have access to it via the Internet (Chen and Xie 2008). As a result, eWOM enables customers to exchange information about a product or service beyond geographical or temporal limitations (Chen et al. 2011a; Dellarocas et al. 2010). Thus, the boundary of communication in the case of eWOM is much larger compared with traditional WOM; more contributors and audiences are involved, and the reach of these kinds of communications goes beyond small personal networks (Wang et al. 2014).

While traditional WOM communications usually happen in a face-to-face context, eWOM takes place in a more complex, computer-mediated context. eWOM is spread via different types of platform (email, instant messaging, blogs, forums, online communities, review sites, etc.), while traditional WOM is a face-to-face communication (King et al. 2014). In traditional WOM, conversations are mostly private in nature. In eWOM, participants engage in communication with a network of people (Kozinets et al. 2010) in online communities where conversations are more visible (King et al. 2014). Tie strength between information senders and receivers is also different. While traditional WOM happens between relatives, friends, and acquaintances (strong ties), most eWOM communications occur between strangers (weak ties) (King et al. 2014). Another difference between eWOM and traditional WOM is the anonymity of the information sender in the electronic context (Pan and Zhang 2011; Trenz and Berger 2013).

In contrast with traditional WOM, eWOM has unprecedented speed of diffusion. In traditional WOM, people share information amongst small groups of individuals in synchronous mode (Avery et al. 1999; Dellarocas 2003; Li and Hitt 2008; Steffes and Burgee 2009). In contrast, eWOM involves multiway information sharing in asynchronous mode (Cheung and Thadani 2010; Hung and Li 2007). Unlike traditional WOM, eWOM is more persistent and accessible. Most of the information presented on the Internet is archived and, as a result, will be available for an indefinite period of time (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Herr et al. 1991; Hung and Li 2007; Lee et al. 2008). Another difference is that eWOM communications are more measurable compared to traditional WOM (Cheung and Thadani 2010; Lee et al. 2008; Park and Kim 2008). It is easy to observe eWOM because of its presentation format, persistence, and quantity (Cheung and Thadani 2010). Finally, eWOM is more voluminous in quantity compared to information received from traditional contacts in the offline world (Chatterjee 2001; Pan and Zhang 2011; Sen 2008). The differences between traditional and online WOM are summarized in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Differences between traditional and electronic WOM

Characteristics	Citations	Key findings
Size of the network	Avery et al. (1999), Brown and Reingen (1987), Chen and Xie (2008), Chen et al. (2011a), Dellarocas et al. (2010), Dellarocas (2003), Li and Hitt (2008), Shi (2003), Steffes and Burgee (2009)	In traditional WOM communication information is shared between small groups of individuals and societies while the impact of eWOM can reach further than local community, because consumers all over the world can have an access to it via the Internet.
Context	King et al. (2014)	Traditional WOM communications usually happen in a face-to-face context, while eWOM takes place in a more complex computer-mediated environment.
Tie strength	King et al. (2014)	While traditional WOM happens between relatives, friends, and acquaintances (strong ties), most of eWOM occurs between strangers (weak ties).
Privacy	Kozinets et al. (2010), King et al. (2014)	In traditional WOM, conversations are mostly private in nature, while in eWOM they are more visible.
Anonymity	Pan and Zhang (2011), Trenz and Berger (2013)	While in traditional WOM reviewer is known, in eWOM reviewer is mostly anonymous.
Speed of diffusion	Avery et al. (1999), Cheung and Thadani (2010), Dellarocas (2003), Hung and Li (2007), Li and Hitt (2008), Steffes and Burgee (2009)	In traditional WOM, people share information amongst small groups of individuals in synchronous mode. eWOM involves multiway information sharing in asynchronous mode, which results in high speed of diffusion.
Persistence and accessibility	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Herr et al. (1991), Hung and Li (2007), Lee et al. (2008)	eWOM communications are more persistent and accessible for an indefinite period of time.
Measurability	Cheung and Thadani (2010), Lee et al. (2008), Park and Kim (2008)	eWOM communications are more measurable comparing to traditional WOM.
Volume	Chatterjee (2001), Pan and Zhang (2011), Sen (2008)	eWOM available online is more voluminous in quantity compared to traditional WOM.

3.3 New Opportunities and Challenges Presented by eWOM

Since the development of eWOM communications, there are some changes that have occurred in the buying environment both for consumers and companies. Studies find that consumers are faced with the following challenges (Chatterjee 2001; Dellarocas 2003; Friedman and Resnick 2001; Lee and Youn 2009; Willemsen 2013). First, it is hard to form impressions of eWOM senders and their characteristics. In brick-and-mortar settings, consumers are faced with traditional cues which can be used in the interpretation of opinions. These cues can be familiarity with the source of information, source's facial expression, and so on. The absence of these

cues can lead to difficulties for consumers to form impression about the eWOM senders and their characteristics (Chatterjee 2001; Dellarcas 2003; Lee and Youn 2009; Willemsen 2013). Second, in the online environment, identities can be changed very easily, which can lead to strategic manipulation (Dellarcas 2003). For instance, community members can cheat other members, and then vanish and reappear with new online identities and clean records (Friedman and Resnick 2001). Third, the mediated nature of eWOM communications leads to challenges related to trustworthiness of their operators (Dellarcas 2003). And finally, eWOM communications do not have any standard format (Lee and Youn 2009; Metzger 2007). The content of eWOM is very diverse and can range from simple recommendations with negative or positive statements about the product or service to detailed evaluations; as a result it can be difficult for consumers to evaluate the helpfulness of the message (Willemsen 2013).

As well as introducing new challenges for consumers, eWOM communications also brought some opportunities (Jalilvand et al. 2011; Varadarajan and Yadav 2002). First, by using eWOM communications, consumers are able to receive information about products and services from vast, geographically dispersed groups of people (Jalilvand et al. 2011). Second, consumers can access price and non-product attributes which help to make more informed buying decisions (Varadarajan and Yadav 2002). Additionally, eWOM is an alternative source for consumers to receive information about products and services based on buyers' considerations, reducing the influence from companies in comparison with traditional marketing and advertising (Jalilvand et al. 2011; Varadarajan and Yadav 2002).

eWOM communications also introduced some opportunities and challenges for companies (Dellarcas 2003; Jalilvand et al. 2011; Mayzlin 2006). First is brand building and customer acquisition. eWOM can serve as an effective tool for acquiring and retaining customers together with advertising (Dellarcas 2003; Mayzlin 2006). However, by using eWOM, bad news can spread quickly and as a result can harm the business (Dellarcas 2003). An example of how negative eWOM can spread fast and ruin the reputation of a business is the case of Lemp Brewpub & Kitchen in India, which is presented in the box below:

In 2013, a group of eight friends posted an anonymous blog about their experience at Lemp Brewpub & Kitchen, Gurgaon, India. On the blog they stated that they decided to go to this local pub because of a promotion of a fun filled Hawaiian Brunch, advertised on a popular online restaurant database www.zomato.com. However, Lemp could not offer the Hawaiian Brunch, which led to an argument between the group of friends and staff of Lemp. According to the blog post, the expected Hawaiian Brunch turned into a horrible experience which ended at the local police station. Additionally, the writer of this blog attached photographs of the incident taking place. The next day the blog went viral which led to a dramatic drop of Lemp's ratings on www.zomato.com. Within just a few hours the number of reviews soared from 382 to more than 900 and most of them were negative. The rating of the pub dropped dramatically as well. Even after months, the pub could not recover its reputation (Kapoor and Gunta 2016).

Second is product development and quality control. eWOM can help a company to understand consumers' reactions to its products and services in a better way. However, eWOM communications can reveal information to companies' competitors and spread information about product and service flaws (Dellarocas 2003). As a result of challenges and opportunities presented by eWOM communications, it is important for companies to pay much attention to eWOM and know the ways to use it as part of their business strategies.

3.4 Advances in Research

eWOM communication is attracting more and more attention from academics. Figure 3.1 depicts the number of articles on eWOM communications published annually from 2000 to 2016 which shows an increasing interest from scholars towards online interpersonal communications.

Studies on eWOM communications can be divided into three overarching categories. One category of studies considers motivations to engage in eWOM communications (Hansen and Lee 2013; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). These have found that the main motivations for consumers to provide eWOM are altruism, self-enhancement, venting feelings, social benefits, and economic incentives (Cheung and Lee 2012; Bronner and de Hoog 2011; Gheorghe and Liao 2012; Ahrens et al. 2013). On the other hand, the main motivations to seek eWOM are risk reduction, social approval, reduction of search time and effort, getting product (usage) information, and social interaction benefits (Akyuz 2013; Burton and Khammash 2010; Huang et al. 2013; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003; Reichelt et al. 2014; Song and Sun 2011).

Another category of studies focusses on persuasiveness of eWOM communications (Robinson et al. 2012; Willemsen et al. 2012; Yin et al. 2014). Researchers have

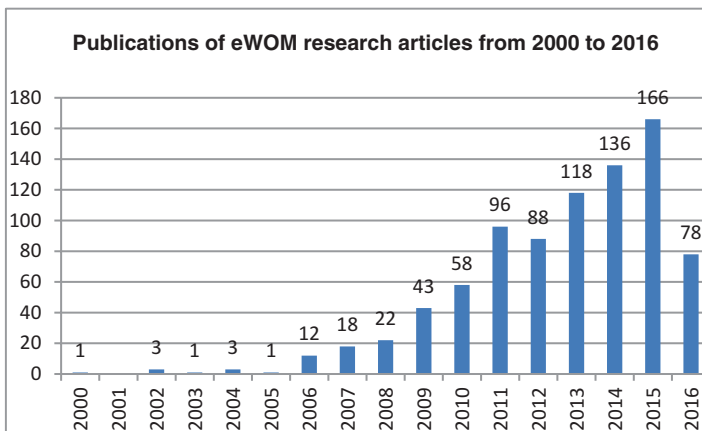


Fig. 3.1 Publications of eWOM research articles from years 2000 to July 2016 (*Source*: Scopus)

investigated how consumers evaluate helpfulness and credibility of eWOM. They have found that persuasiveness of eWOM messages can be affected by source (Baek et al. 2012; Cheng and Ho 2015; Willemsen et al. 2012), message (Luo et al. 2015; Moore 2015; Yin et al. 2014), and receiver characteristics (Breazeale 2009; Cheung et al. 2009).

The third category of studies researches the impact of eWOM communications (Dhar and Chang 2009; Flanagan et al. 2014; Henke 2013). A growing number of empirical studies find that eWOM communications impact on consumers' purchase intentions (Akyuz 2013; Bartikowski and Walsh 2014), consumer attitudes (Chih et al. 2013; Henke 2013), information acceptance (Aghakhani and Karimi 2013; Cheung et al. 2008; Lee and Yi 2010), information overload (Luo et al. 2013; Park et al. 2006), and sales (Baek et al. 2014; Blal and Sturman 2014; Cadario 2014).

Table 3.3 presents an overview of these three research themes together with limitations and directions for future research, which will be discussed in depth in subsequent chapters.

3.5 Discussion and Concluding Points

The growth of Internet technology has led to the development of eWOM communications (Cheung and Thadani 2012). Even though eWOM communications have some similarities with traditional WOM, its differences introduce new opportunities for companies and consumers. Previous research has noted that sometimes retailers ignore the difference between traditional WOM and eWOM (Floyd et al. 2014). Understanding differences between these two forms of communications can assist marketers to develop successful eWOM strategies for their products and services. It can also help academics to conceptualize and measure online interpersonal communication developed within the new medium.

The characteristics of eWOM, such as reach, speed of diffusion, and public availability of messages, have empowered consumers. Consumers are not quiet any more. They can share their satisfying or disappointing experiences with the whole world (Armellini and Vilanueva 2011). Positive eWOM communications can improve consumers' attitudes towards a product/service and increase sales, while negative eWOM can cause serious and sometimes even irreversible damage to the business (Armellini and Vilanueva 2011; Cheung and Thadani 2012; Kapoor and Gunta 2016). Even though the impact of eWOM on consumer attitude, purchase intention, and level of sales is well recognized (Aghakhani and Karimi 2013; Baek et al. 2014; Luo et al. 2013), still some companies underestimate its importance. By monitoring and managing eWOM communications correctly, companies can get some valuable information such as consumers' opinions and their likes or dislikes about a product, brand, or service (Ravaglia et al. 2015a, b; Rathore et al. 2016). Also, paying attention to eWOM communications will help to identify problems faster and allocate the necessary resources to solve them (Wei and Ke 2011).

Table 3.3 Themes in eWOM research

Theme	Summary	Limitations and future research directions	Example of studies
Engaging in eWOM	Main motivations for consumers to engage in eWOM are altruism, self-enhancement, venting feelings, social benefits, economic incentives, risk reduction, social approval, reduction of search time and effort, getting product (usage) information, and social interaction benefits.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Studies consider just written eWOM. Future research can investigate whether video reviews are more desirable for appraising creative products than functional products. 2. Future research should investigate why people do not engage in eWOM. 3. The impact of personal characteristics such as income, age, gender, education, and personality has not been considered. Future research should consider the influence of personal characteristics on engaging in eWOM. 	Ahrens et al. (2013), Akyuz (2013), Bi (2011), Bronner and de Hoog (2011), Burton and Khammash (2010), Cheung and Lee (2012), Choi and Scott (2013), Gheorghie and Liao (2012), Guo et al. (2009b), Hansen and Lee (2013), Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003), Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Mardhiah et al. (2013)
Persuasiveness of eWOM	Message, source, and receiver characteristics influence perceived helpfulness and credibility of eWOM communications.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Most of the studies consider just one particular type of platform. Future research could be made based on the type of Internet platform. 2. Most of the studies consider written eWOM. As a result, evaluation of visual eWOM is an under-researched area. Future research could consider the need of visual information for different industries and product categories. 3. Studies examine the evaluation of positive or negative eWOM. Future research should investigate the way consumers evaluate neutral eWOM. 	Baek et al. (2014), Baek et al. (2012), Bial and Sturman (2014), Breazeale (2009), Cadario (2014), Cheng and Ho (2015), Cheung (2014), Cheung et al. (2009), Doh and Hwang (2009), Guo et al. (2009a), Luo et al. (2015), Moore (2015), Park and Lee (2008), Peng et al. (2014), Robinson et al. (2012), Willemssen et al. (2012), Yin et al. (2014)
Impact of eWOM	It is found that eWOM communications affect information acceptance, information overload attitude, purchase intention, and sales.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One product or service is only considered in most of the studies. 2. Future research should explore the impact of negative eWOM on consumer purchase decision-making and identify effective strategies that can help companies to fight back. 3. Future research should investigate how the effect of valence and valence intensity of eWOM is mediated by personal differences (e.g. susceptibility to interpersonal influence and self-esteem). 	Aghakhani and Karimi (2013), Akyuz (2013), Baek et al. (2014), Bartikowski and Walsh (2014), Beneke et al. (2015), Bial and Sturman (2014), Cadario (2014), Cheung et al. (2008), Cheung (2014), Chih et al. (2013), Cui and Guo (2009), Dhar and Chang (2009), Flanagan et al. (2014), Henke (2013), Hsu et al. (2013), Huang and Korfiatis (2015), Lee and Yi (2010), Lis (2013), Luo et al. (2013), Park et al. (2006)

Researchers have investigated motivations for people to engage in eWOM communications. It was found that different motivations to provide eWOM lead to positive or negative eWOM. Additionally, motivations of people can determine the frequency of them visiting an online platform (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Motivations to engage in eWOM communications can influence the way consumers evaluate persuasiveness of eWOM; thus, factors influencing persuasiveness of eWOM communications can vary. For example, for consumers with promotion consumption goals positive messages will be more helpful for their decision-making (Zhang et al. 2010). When consumers consider a message to be persuasive, it will lead to information adoption, change in consumer attitude, purchase intention and, hence, sales (Baek et al. 2014; Cheung et al. 2008; Jeong and Koo 2015; Tsao and Hsieh 2015; Baek et al. 2014). So, motivations to engage in eWOM communications and eWOM persuasiveness and impact are connected and should be studied together to understand the process and its consequences for consumers and companies. Additionally, studies indicated factors which can moderate eWOM communication process such as consumer characteristics, product type, and platform type (Cheung and Thadani 2012; Jeong and Koo 2015; Lee et al. 2008; Pfeffer et al. 2014).

Summary of Key Points

- Main characteristics of eWOM: enhanced volume, dispersion, persistence and observability, anonymity and deception, salience of valence, and community engagement.
- Difference between traditional and electronic WOM: size of the network, context, privacy, tie strength, anonymity, speed of diffusion, persistence and accessibility, measurability, and volume.
- Opportunities and challenges for companies introduced by eWOM: brand building and customer acquisition, product development and quality control, and marketing strategies.
- Challenges for consumers: difficulties in evaluating eWOM senders, manipulation of online identities, and the absence of a standard format of eWOM. Opportunities for consumers: alternative source of communication, receiving information from geographically dispersed groups of people, and access to price and non-product attributes.
- Studies on eWOM can be divided into three themes: engaging in eWOM, persuasiveness of eWOM, and impact of eWOM.

eWOM communications play an important role in the consumer decision-making process. A recent study conducted amongst 5000 shoppers in five countries showed that eWOM is the most important source for making buying decisions followed by advice from friends and family (Cisco Internet Business Solution Group 2013). Other studies have found that 70% of people trust eWOM (Nielsen 2012) and that 65% of potential consumers selected a brand that they have not been considering before because of eWOM communications (Weber Shandwick 2012).

As a result of the influence of eWOM it is an important marketing technique in brand communications (Dwivedi et al. 2015) and marketers have become increasingly interested in using it. Viral marketing is an example of harnessing eWOM as a marketing tool. It is based on provocative messages which stimulate unpaid peer-to-peer communication of marketing-related information from identified sponsors. As a result, lots of companies have started making substantial efforts to encourage positive eWOM communications (Goldenberg et al. 2001) and incorporate eWOM-based viral marketing or “buzz marketing” as part of integrated marketing communications strategies (Godes and Mayzlin 2004). For example, food company Frito-Lay initiated a campaign, “Do Us a Flavor”, to give an opportunity to their customers to create a new flavour of potato chips. In 2013, more than 3.8 million submissions were sent (Mathur and Mathur 2015). This is a good example of how companies can use eWOM advertising successfully in marketing campaigns to raise brand awareness and build relationships with their customers.

When developing marketing strategies, companies should take into consideration motivations for people to engage in eWOM communications. Knowing the reading motives can help companies to develop a more customized website environment for their customers (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003). It has been proposed that if companies can understand reasons why consumers engage in eWOM, they can better contribute to the way in which eWOM communications can influence consumers’ purchase decisions (Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006).

Companies should ensure consumers are able to engage in eWOM communications on their website by including the opportunity for customer ratings and online reviews, which could improve sales. When buying online consumers are not able to touch, smell, or taste the product due to spatial separation (Shareef et al. 2016); however, they can use eWOM communications in order to reduce anxiety. Despite this, some companies do not provide opportunities for consumers to engage in eWOM communications on their website, especially small- and medium-sized enterprises (Abed et al. 2016). This may be a result of fear of negative eWOM. In order to decrease the number of negative eWOM communications, it is important for the company to give consumers the opportunity to contact them directly and receive a response promptly. When dealing with negative eWOM communications, companies should answer with apologies and determination to improve the factors that have caused the dissatisfaction (Lee and Song 2010; Wang et al. 2013).

Points for Practitioners

- eWOM is one of the most popular sources of information used by consumers, thus it is important for companies to pay attention and manage eWOM by monitoring different online platforms, responding to eWOM communications, and using them for the business.
- Companies should invest substantial effort to encourage positive eWOM and they can incorporate eWOM-based “viral marketing” or “buzz marketing” as part of integrated marketing communications strategies.

- To develop successful marketing strategies, companies should take into consideration motivations for people to engage in eWOM communications.
- It is important to provide consumers the opportunity to engage in eWOM communications on a company's website to help in their decision-making.
- It is important for companies to prevent negative eWOM communications by providing opportunities for consumers to contact them directly.

Even though there is a substantial amount of research done in the area of eWOM communications, there are still some research gaps in this area. For example, previous studies investigated the impact of just eWOM communications on business (Hsu et al. 2013; Huang and Korfiatis 2015; Lee and Yi 2010). Thus, future research can investigate how both traditional and eWOM communications can influence business if used together, advancing the use of marketing strategies.

Even though previous studies investigated why consumers seek and provide eWOM (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Mardhiyah et al. 2013), the impact of individual characteristics such as income, age, gender, education, and personality on consumer engagement in eWOM communications has not been considered. Future research should consider this gap, which will help to advance the knowledge of information dissemination on the Internet and enable more effective targeting.

Most of the studies consider written eWOM (Cheng and Zhou 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003; Kim et al. 2013) but visual eWOM is an under-researched area. Future research should consider the need of visual information for different industries and product categories. Also, researchers can consider how the perception of the message is changed once it is presented in a visual form. Understanding consumers' visual orientation will help to conduct effective marketing communications.

Previous studies have mainly evaluated positive or negative eWOM (Kim and Gupta 2012; Ladhari and Michaud 2015; Lis 2013). However, consumers are faced with neutral eWOM communications as well. Future research should investigate the way consumers evaluate neutral eWOM. Knowing how consumers evaluate neutral messages can help marketers understand the influence of eWOM on attitude and sales in greater detail. Future research can also explore the impact of negative eWOM on consumer purchase decision-making and identify effective strategies that can help companies to fight back depending on senders characteristics (e.g. motives, loyalty, personal characteristics) and product/service characteristics (e.g. price of the product).

Recommendations for Future Research

- Investigate how eWOM and traditional WOM could be used together and the potential impact of this collaboration.
- The impact of individual characteristics (income, age, gender, education, personality) is not considered by previous studies. Future research should consider the influence of personal characteristics on engaging in eWOM.
- Most of the studies consider written eWOM. As a result, evaluation of visual eWOM is an under-researched area. Future research could consider the need of visual information for different industries and product categories.
- Studies examine the evaluation of positive or negative eWOM. Future research should investigate the way consumers evaluate neutral eWOM.
- Explore the impact of negative eWOM on consumer purchase decision-making and identify effective strategies that can help companies to fight back.

This chapter has presented the existing definitions of eWOM communications and outlined its characteristics and differences in comparison with traditional WOM. New challenges and opportunities introduced by eWOM communications for consumers and companies were presented. Existing research on eWOM communications can be classified into three themes: engaging in eWOM (why people seek and provide eWOM), persuasiveness of eWOM (what makes eWOM helpful and credible), and impact of eWOM (how eWOM influences consumers and companies).

Chapter 4 presents antecedents and motivations for consumers to engage in eWOM communications. Understanding consumers' motivations to provide and seek eWOM is beneficial for marketers and managers of companies. Thus, a number of studies have investigated this issue providing a rich source of information for the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Engaging in eWOM

A great number of studies (Abrantes et al. 2013; Cheung and Lee 2012; Gheorghe and Liao 2012; Mardhiyah et al. 2013; Musallam and Magalhães 2012; Wang et al. 2013) address the question of why consumers engage in eWOM. By identifying underlying motivations for people to engage in eWOM, researchers are able to understand, and influence, individual online information assimilation which can affect consumer purchase decisions, customer loyalty, and consumer commitment to the community. The objective of this chapter is to provide a review of the existing literature on antecedents and motivations to engage in eWOM communications from the perspective of senders of eWOM (people who give eWOM) and receivers of eWOM (people who seek eWOM). Knowing these motivations to engage in eWOM can help marketers to encourage people to post more and as a result have an impact on sales.

This chapter starts with a discussion of why people send eWOM communications, outlining the main antecedents and motivations. Following this, the motivations for consumers to receive eWOM are considered. The chapter ends with a summary of key points, discussion of future research directions and recommendations for practitioners.

4.1 Antecedents of eWOM

The sender of eWOM is defined as a person who transmits the communications (Cheung and Thadani 2012). Studies investigate what kinds of eWOM communications are more likely to be disseminated by consumers (Assael 2004; Hornik et al. 2015). Hornik et al. (2015) find a strong tendency towards negativity in the dissemination of eWOM—consumers spread negative eWOM to more recipients, for a longer period of time, and in a more elaborated manner compared to positive eWOM. Some academics consider negative eWOM to be more powerful and impacting than positive eWOM (Assael 2004; Chen et al. 2011b; East et al. 2008;

Hornik et al. 2015; Libai et al. 2013). A better understanding of the flow of eWOM communication will allow firms to effectively act and react to negative eWOM (Hornik et al. 2015).

Antecedents of eWOM determine eWOM behaviour (De Matos and Rossi 2008). eWOM is a consumption experience shared by customers who purchase the product, experience the service, or interact with the brand. Some customers choose to share their consumption experience with their friends or post it on product review websites, which can be used by other people. Nevertheless, not every customer shares their opinion after consumption. As a result, researchers became interested in exploring factors influencing people's eWOM sharing intention (Wolny and Mueller 2013). Satisfaction, loyalty, commitment, and trust are found to be the main antecedents of eWOM (De Matos and Rossi 2008; Lee and Jaafar 2011; Martin et al. 2008; Neumann 2015; Sichtmann 2007; Walsh and Beatty 2007).

Satisfaction. Satisfaction refers to the condition that happens as a result of a pleasant consumption fulfilment (Oliver 1997). A number of studies have investigated the effect of satisfaction on eWOM (De Matos and Rossi 2008; Kietzmann and Canhoto 2013; Lee et al. 2013a, b; Pourabedin and Migin 2015). It has been found that satisfied customers engage in positive eWOM (De Matos and Rossi 2008). Some authors explain the positive relationship amongst satisfaction and eWOM with the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm (Jones and Reynolds 2006). The confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm proposes that customers evaluate a product/service performance and compare this evaluation with their prior expectations (Oliver 1980). Other studies propose that customer satisfaction also contains emotional dimensions, not just cognitive components (Oliver 1993, 1997), and that satisfaction based on emotions leads to recommendation behaviour (Martin et al. 2008; Neumann 2015). De Matos and Rossi (2008) propose some reasons for customers to spread eWOM based on their level of satisfaction. First, customers will be motivated to share about positive experiences with others if the product or service performance exceeds expectations. Second, if the customers' expectations are not met creating dissatisfaction, the customer will engage in eWOM as a form of reducing and sharing their negative emotions.

Loyalty. Loyalty is defined as an intention to repeat buying and perform other behaviours that show a motivation to remain with the provider of the services or products (Sirdeshmukh et al. 2002). According to Reichheld (1993), the act of referring a friend puts the actor's social image at risk. As a result, eWOM communications would not happen without an individual's loyalty. A number of studies consider eWOM as an indicator of loyalty (Lee et al. 2013a, b; Tsao and Hsieh 2012). Recent studies confirm that loyalty has a positive effect on eWOM by showing that loyal customers provide more eWOM (Lee and Jaafar 2011; Sichtmann 2007; Walsh and Beatty 2007). For example, Lee and Jaafar (2011) investigated the impact of customer loyalty on eWOM communications in the context of internet banking in Malaysia. By conducting a survey amongst 220 internet banking users, the results showed that greater customer loyalty is directly and positively related with greater levels of positive eWOM in respect to internet banking websites. They explained

their findings by the fact that customer loyalty to the website of a financial service provider is closely associated to the levels of satisfaction with that website.

Commitment. Commitment is defined as a consumer's desire to maintain a relationship with an organization (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Some researchers measure commitment using a unidimensional approach (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2002; Lacey et al. 2007), while others employ a multidimensional conceptualization (Fullerton 2003; Harrison-Walker 2001). Using a multidimensional approach to commitment, the researchers distinguish affective (positive emotional attachment) and calculative or continuance (perceived costs connected with leaving the company) commitment (De Matos and Rossi 2008). In the unidimensional approach, consumer commitment reflects only the affective dimension (Neumann 2015). Researchers find that consumer commitment has an impact on providing eWOM (De Matos and Rossi 2008; Lis and Horst 2013; Tsao and Hsieh 2012). For instance, applying meta-analysis De Matos and Rossi (2008) find that commitment has a strong positive impact on eWOM. Customers who have affective commitment are more likely to make an effort to support the company and engage in positive eWOM. In contrast, continuance commitment is negatively related to eWOM behaviour (Harrison-Walker 2001). Another study by Tsao and Hsieh (2012) found that customer commitment relates positively to positive eWOM communication in the context of clothing and medical services.

Trust. Trust is defined as "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Moorman et al. 1992, p 315). Morgan and Hunt (1994, p 23) refer to trust as "when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity". As a result, confidence and reliability are important components of trust in the context of marketing (De Matos and Rossi 2008). Several studies find an impact of trust on eWOM (De Matos and Rossi 2008; Sichtmann 2007; Tsao and Hsieh 2012). For instance, Sichtmann (2007) observed that trust in a corporate brand impacts customers' eWOM behaviour in a positive way. De Matos and Rossi (2008) receive similar results in their meta-analysis study.

4.2 Motivations to Send eWOM

As eWOM is an expanded form of traditional WOM, it is logical that studies have found they share core motivations to engage in communications regarding a product or a service (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). A motivation is defined as a force that drives individuals to take an action (Neumann 2015). Thus it is important to identify motivations in order to understand an individual's behaviour. Motivation comes from tension-systems, which create a state of disequilibrium. As people usually have a basic desire for balance, when the state is unbalanced they will try to restore the equilibrium by selecting a goal; this goal will release them from the tension (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Based on the previous literature on traditional and online WOM, the main motivations to engage in eWOM are altruism, self-enhancement, venting feelings, social benefits, and economic incentives.

Altruism. Altruism is defined as the aim of increasing welfare of one or more people other than oneself (Cheung and Lee 2012). People who have altruistic motives volunteer themselves to share eWOM with other customers without expecting any reward in return. For instance, individuals share purchasing experiences just because other people need it (Allen and Meyer 1996). Also, individuals can have empathetic emotions towards an individual and will help this person (Cheung and Lee 2012). Concern for other customers is closely related to altruism (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Motivation to help a company is the result of the individual satisfaction with a product or service and the desire to help the company. The intended effect of eWOM in this case is that the firm will become or stay successful. This motive can be supported by equity theory (Oliver and Swan 1989), which proposes that people desire equitable and fair exchanges. If an individual feels that he/she got a higher output/input ratio than the firm, then helping the company by engaging in eWOM about this company is a way to equalize the output/input ratio (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Altruism is also connected to the enjoyment in helping other customers and companies, and it is the feeling of pleasure obtained from helping others. Studies have found that enjoyment in helping others motivates consumers to engage in eWOM (Cheung and Lee 2012; Hansen and Lee 2013; Lee et al. 2013a, b; Tong et al. 2013).

A study conducted by Bronner and de Hoog (2011) investigated motivations with which vacationers post eWOM. The findings show that altruism is one of the important motivations to post online reviews. Ho and Dempsey (2010) examine internet users' motivations to pass along online content. In order to investigate the motives, they use a survey of 82 undergraduate students. Results show that the need to be altruistic affects users' motivations to forward online content. Magalhaes and Musallam (2014) sought to identify the key factors leading consumers to engage in eWOM on Twitter. They use a questionnaire method and find that concern for other consumers and a desire to help the company motivate people to engage in eWOM on Twitter. Mardhiyah et al. (2013) focus on medical service to analyse the factors influencing consumer intention to engage in negative WOM communication. Using questionnaires and a sample of 123 people, the results show that altruism was one of the motivations to engage in negative eWOM. People engaged in eWOM communications to prevent other potential consumers from using this medical service.

Self-enhancement. Self-enhancement is a fundamental human motivation. Individuals like to present themselves positively. The things that people talk about influence how other individuals see them (Berger 2014). As a result, people usually share information that helps them to look good rather than bad (Chung and Darke 2006; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Some researchers propose that status seeking is the main purpose for people to write eWOM (Berger 2014; Lampel and Bhalla 2007). Also individuals share eWOM because they would like to get an informal recognition and be seen as experts (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Plume et al. (2016) provide an in-depth review of literature considering motivations related to personality implicated in eWOM.

Bronner and de Hoog (2011) investigated motives of vacationers to contribute to review sites and found self-enhancement to be one of the motivations. Using a

questionnaire based on the consumer experience of using openrice.com, a study conducted by Cheung and Lee (2012) shows that enhancement of reputations affects motivation to post eWOM. Hansen and Lee (2013) find that self-enhancement of their reputations significantly motivates people to post positive eWOM. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) employed an online sample of 200 German web-based opinion platform users and found that self-enhancement is one of the primary reasons why consumers publish their experience on online platforms. Another study, conducted by Yap et al. (2013), finds similar results in the financial service context. Additionally, this study investigates how particular motivations are associated with different eWOM message characteristics.

Venting feelings. Social sharing of emotions helps individuals to regulate their emotions (Rime 2009). It can help individuals to deal with negative experiences which cause negative feelings. As a result, eWOM helps to reduce the emotional impact (Pennebaker et al. 2001)—by expressing anger individuals feel better (Berger 2014). It is found that angry or dissatisfied customers share eWOM to vent their feelings (Berger 2014; Wetzer et al. 2007). Also, sharing eWOM lets consumers regulate their emotions through punishing a company for a negative experience (Gregoire and Fisher 2008; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Wang et al. 2013). On the other hand, motivations to engage in eWOM can be to express positive emotions, which are experienced during a successful consumption experience (Sundaram et al. 1998). The reason for expression of positive emotions is that an individual's positive consumption experience brings a psychological tension because of a strong desire to share the joy of the experience with other people. This tension can be reduced by sharing eWOM, leading them to vent positive feelings (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

Mardhiyah et al. (2013) aforementioned medical service study shows that venting negative feelings is another of the motives for engaging in negative eWOM. Also, it shows that consumers chose negative eWOM because they perceive that it would have a stronger impact on a company. In the same service context, a study conducted by Gheorghe and Liao (2012) had similar results. Matta and Frost (2011) investigated what motivates top reviewers to engage in eWOM. Using data from amazon.com, the study found that anxiety reduction is one of the motivations for engaging in eWOM. A study, performed by Musallam and Magalhães (2012), finds that venting negative feelings is one of the primary factors to express opinion in Twitter. Wang et al. (2013) find that the desire for revenge and psychological relief can be fulfilled if the consumer employs eWOM to review an unsatisfactory product.

Social benefits. By sharing eWOM on the Internet, a consumer becomes part of a virtual community. Affiliation with a virtual community can represent a social benefit to an individual for reasons of identification and social integration (see Plume et al. 2016). As a result, consumers engage in eWOM to participate and be part of the virtual community (McWilliam 2000). Precisely, an individual can write comments on online platforms because this behaviour shows his/her participation and presence

with the community and enables him/her to obtain social benefits from this community membership (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

A study by Cheung and Lee (2012) used questionnaires of 203 individuals and shows that the sense of belonging is one of the motivations for people to engage in eWOM. Similarly, Hansen and Lee (2013) employed a survey method and found evidence that a sense of belonging has the most impact on consumers' intentions to engage in eWOM. Also, Choi and Scott (2013) found that female SNS users engage in eWOM to feel the sense of belonging to the community. A study of 200 German customers by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explored the motivations consumers have for articulation of their views in web-based opinion platforms. The results showed that social benefit is one of the primary reasons for consumers to publish their experience on web-based opinion platforms. Another study conducted by Munzel and Kunz (2014) showed that social bonding motivates people to comment on other's reviews and forward other users' reviews. The study tested the findings by using questionnaire and sample of 693 users of tripadvisor.com.

Economic incentives. Consumers are motivated to engage in eWOM to get an economic incentive. These can be in the form of web points or coupons provided through opinion platforms in exchange for eWOM (Amblee and Bui 2008). The motivation of economic incentives comes from the distinctive characteristic of eWOM. In contrast with traditional WOM, eWOM is exchanged through the assistance of a third party.

A study by Ahrens et al. (2013) explored on the ways in which existing customers can be used as a tool for increasing the acquisition of new customers with the aid of financial rewards for successful referrals. The study involved a large-field experiment with 45,000 members of an online mall. The findings showed that the magnitude of financial incentives and the relative magnitude of the incentives for the senders and receivers both influenced e-referral rates. Another study, conducted by Guo et al. (2009b), employed a sample of 167 university students in order to investigate how to maximize consumers' positive eWOM. It was found that economic incentives can affect consumers' spread of eWOM. Jin et al. (2010) investigated users' continuance intention to spread eWOM in an online opinion platform, and found that extrinsic rewards motivate consumers' continuance intention to contribute eWOM.

A chain of UK pubs, Hungry Horse, motivates consumers to leave a review by offering them a financial incentive. Their statement says: "Providing you with a great experience means everything to us, which is why we want to hear from you. Please provide your feedback on your last visit to one of our pubs in this survey. As a thank you, we will enter you into a draw with a chance to win £1000" (Hungry Horse 2016).

In another example, Amazon allows consumers to rate reviews and has created a reputation system for people who write online reviews. Reviewers with high ratings are featured first in the listings, given an honorary title, and membership in an honorary group. Additionally, they are sometimes chosen to receive new products to review ahead of them arriving for general sale. This is the combination of using motivations such as economic incentives, self-enhancement, and social benefits together (Matta and Frost 2011). It appears that such a strategy works well as in 2010 Amazon was reported as being the largest single source of online consumer reviews (Business Wire 2010).

The box below provides real-life examples of how companies motivate consumers to engage in eWOM:

While most of the studies generalize motivations for all eWOM senders (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Matta and Frost 2011), Munzel and Kunz (2014) study different types of consumers who contribute to eWOM. Based on the literature about social capital, social exchange theory, and transformative consumer research, the authors conduct a study of 693 individuals on a hotel review website. Using content analysis and a latent profile analysis, they find the following types of contributors: lurkers (mostly first-time writers), creators (mostly interested in writing reviews), and multipliers (prefer to comment on and forward others' reviews). Creators are mostly driven by altruistic motives. Lurkers are driven by individual benefit motives. Multipliers are mostly driven by social motivations. It is an important issue for managers to identify and profile contributors, especially in the context of virtual communities (Wasko and Faraj 2005).

Some studies show that there are factors that can moderate the motivations of engaging in eWOM, such as tie strength (Guo et al. 2009b; Luo and Zhong 2015; Song and Sun 2011), demographics (Kim et al. 2011; Han 2008), and product type (Dellarocas et al. 2010; Fan 2011; Feng and Papatla 2012; Henke 2013; Ogut and Cezar 2012). Research has also considered the role that eWOM motivations have on frequency of consumers' engagement with eWOM. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) found that motivations of social benefits have the strongest positive impact on platform visiting frequency and the number of comments provided, and that venting negative feelings is negatively related to the frequency of platform visit. As a result, differences in consumers' eWOM behaviour such as frequency of providing eWOM will be affected in different ways depending on their eWOM motivations (Han 2008).

Table 4.1 summarizes all motivations for consumers to provide eWOM communications, outlining the relevance for marketers, as well as limitations of current studies.

Table 4.1 Motivations to provide eWOM

Characteristics	Citation	Key findings	Relevance	Limitations and future research
Altruism	Cheung and Lee (2012), Guo et al. (2009b), Hansen and Lee (2013), Ho and Dempsey (2010), Lee et al. (2013a, b), Magalhães and Musallam (2014), Mardhiyah et al. (2013), Matta and Frost (2011), Munzel and Kunz (2014), Musallam and Magalhães (2012), Pourabedin and Migin (2015), Shen et al. (2011), Tong et al. (2013), Wolny and Mueller (2013), Yen and Tang (2015), Zhang and Lee (2012)	Concern for other consumers, helping the company, and enjoyment of helping positively affect motivations to engage in eWOM.	Online platforms can provide a mechanism where individuals who provide useful eWOM recommendations are identified and informed about their help to other users. Also, allowing contributors and readers to connect through person-to-person messages can help readers to show appreciation for the received reviews.	1. Sample of participants. Most studies use students. Future research should include a more diverse sample of potential users in different age categories, professions, and experience of using eWOM. 2. Most of the studies are self-reported which can lead to response bias. 3. The impact of individual characteristics (e.g. income, age, gender, education, personality) is not considered. Future research should consider the influence of personal characteristics on posting eWOM. 4. Future research can investigate why consumers are not interested in spreading eWOM.
Self-enhancement	Bronner and de Hoog (2011), Cheung and Lee (2012), Guo et al. (2009b), Hansen and Lee (2013), Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), Jin et al. (2010), Magalhães and Musallam (2014), Matta and Frost (2011), Munzel and Kunz (2014), Musallam and Magalhães (2012), Son et al. (2012), Wang et al. (2014), Yap et al. (2013)	Status seeking, getting informal recognition, and being seen as experts is positively connected to providing eWOM.	Online platforms can add publicly visible cues to the reviewer's profile such as length of membership and number of reviews written. They can also introduce profile badges such as "reviewer of the month" or "expert" which would attract more attention from other users and enhance their status.	
Venting feelings	Gheorghe and Liao (2012), Mardhiyah et al. (2013), Matta and Frost (2011), Musallam and Magalhães (2012), Wang et al. (2013), Yap et al. (2013), Yen and Tang (2015)	Expressing positive or negative emotions motivates people to engage in eWOM.	Companies should address negative messages with valid reasons, apologies, and determination to improve product quality. Also, companies can try to reduce negative eWOM by making it easy for consumers to contact the company directly and answer the consumer's complaint promptly.	

<p>Social benefits</p>	<p>Bronner and de Hoog (2011), Cheung and Lee (2012), Choi and Scott (2013), Guo et al. (2009b), Hansen and Lee (2013), Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), José-Cabezudo and Camarero-Izquierdo (2012), Luarn et al. (2014), Matta and Frost (2011), Munzel and Kunz (2014), Niu et al. (2010), Wolny and Mueller (2013), Yap et al. (2013), Yen and Tang (2015), Zhang and Lee (2012)</p>	<p>Affiliation with a virtual community for identification and social integration motivate people to engage in eWOM.</p>	<p>Online platform providers can allow consumers to create their own personal profile where they can add other users as friends and directly communicate with them. Also publicly visible cues to the reviewer's profile such as length of membership can be added.</p>	<p>5. Future research could examine eWOM in a cross-cultural setting. 6. Studies do not connect how particular motivations are associated with particular platforms.</p>
<p>Economic incentives</p>	<p>Ahrens et al. (2013), Guo et al. (2009b), Jeong and Moon (2009), Jin et al. (2010), Lee et al. (2013a, b), Matta and Frost (2011), Niu et al. (2010), Son et al. (2012)</p>	<p>Consumers are motivated to engage in eWOM to get an economic incentive which can be in the form of web points or coupons provided through opinion platforms.</p>	<p>Opinion platforms can provide coupons, free delivery, or web points in order to increase individuals' participation in eWOM.</p>	

4.3 Motivations to Receive eWOM

eWOM receivers are individuals who seek others' opinions to evaluate products or services (Watts and Dodds 2007) or who respond to such communications (Cheung and Thadani 2012). In order to understand the impact of eWOM on consumer decision-making, it is necessary to identify motives that influence their eWOM seeking behaviour (Burton and Khammash 2010). There are several motives for using or receiving eWOM including risk reduction, social approval, reduction of searching time and effort, getting product (usage) information, and social interaction benefits.

Risk reduction. Consumers use eWOM in order to decrease the perceived risk in making purchase decisions (Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006). Studies find that individuals tend to rely on interpersonal information sources when the perceived risk of making a purchase is high (Bansal and Voyer 2000). As a result, consumers think that eWOM information will provide them with clarification and feedback opportunities and decrease before-purchase uncertainty about a product or service (Silverman 2011). Thus, collecting eWOM information helps build receivers' trust and confidence and effectively reduces perceived risks of the purchase (Ha 2002).

Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003) investigated motives of consumers to read the articulation of other consumers using a sample of 2903 German consumers. The results showed that risk reduction in buying decisions is one of the motives to read others recommendations. Another study conducted by Kim et al. (2011) explored motivating factors for consumers to read online hotel reviews, through an online survey with 781 respondents in Las Vegas. The result shows that risk reduction is one of the main motivations for individuals to seek eWOM. Zhang and Lv (2010) found similar results using a survey method and sample of 127 college students in the context of computer consumption.

Social approval. Social approval is connected to information search process for the social function of consumption (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003). Consumers are motivated to seek eWOM in order to purchase a product or service which is accepted by other people, be aware of a product's social image, compare their idea about a product with other people, or pursue other individuals' approval of their purchase decision (Han 2008; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003).

A study conducted by Huang et al. (2013) used focus groups to understand consumers' motives for reading book reviews on the Internet and found that social approval is one of the motives for engaging in this type of eWOM. Another study by Kim et al. (2011) found that social approval is one of the main reasons for consumers to read online hotel reviews.

Reduction of searching time and effort. People seek eWOM in order to reduce search time and effort in purchase decision-making (Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006). High volumes of information and wide varieties of products make it difficult for consumers to know all the alternatives (Han 2008). In this case, eWOM is a convenient way to obtain buying-related information with less time spent on searching activities.

Hennig-Thurau and Walsh's (2003) study illustrates that consumers read online eWOM mainly to save decision-making time and make better purchase decisions.

The results of structural equation modelling used in this study show that their motives for retrieving eWOM strongly influence their online behaviour. Khammash and Griffiths (2011) find similar results through an interpretive case study approach using online opinion platform ciao.com. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2011) show that reduction of search time and effort motivates consumers to read online hotel reviews.

Getting product (usage) information. Consumers read eWOM in order to receive product-related information (Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003). By using eWOM, consumers can receive information about new products and services, learn how to consume products, and solve problems connected with consuming a product. Consumers tend to rely on eWOM as product characteristics become more complex and technical (Godes et al. 2005). The reason for this can be that eWOM is provided by actual product buyers and users and, as a result, is more relevant to consumers compared with information which is provided by markets or manufactures (Bickart and Schindler 2001).

A study conducted by Burton and Khammash (2010) collected data from ciao.com to show that consumers use eWOM in order to get product information. Chu and Kim (2011) investigated the determinants of eWOM derived via SNSs. Analysis of a self-administrated survey, involving 363 students, showed that information influence is associated with SNS users seeking eWOM. The aforementioned study by Huang et al. (2013) also found that getting product information motivates people to read internet book reviews. Kasabov (2014) investigated motives of Chinese consumers to use eWOM in SNSs and found that information is a key motivation to seek eWOM in SNSs.

Social interaction benefits. Because the Internet plays a role in facilitating interpersonal communications and activities, individuals can take part in other consumers' shopping experiences or have a sense of belonging to a community by looking for other consumers' postings on online eWOM platforms (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003). Burton and Khammash (2010) investigated motivations for reading customer reviews on a consumer opinion platform within the UK market using an interview method. They found that social interaction benefit motivates consumers to seek eWOM. A further study by Khammash and Griffiths (2011) has similar results using platform ciao.com.

The box below provides real business examples of how companies make their websites more convenient for consumers to use in order to look for eWOM.

Catalogue retailer Argos provides an aggregated rating for each item they sell. In this way consumers can check the overall rating of an item to save time instead of going through all reviews. Another example of features which platform operators use to save customers searching time is the opportunity to sort reviews. For example, pharmacy chain Boots lets consumers sort reviews by most relevant, featured reviews, top contributors, newest, oldest, highest rating, lowest rating, most helpful, longest, and shortest. By using this technique, the company enables users to personalize their search and save time while looking for product-related information shared by other users.

Studies have found that motivations for engaging in eWOM can affect the frequency of visits to online opinion platforms (Han 2008; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). For instance, individuals who are motivated by the interest in social interaction benefits seek eWOM on a regular basis. However, consumers whose motivation is risk reduction in purchase decision tend to seek eWOM occasionally only when they need it. Thus, differences in consumers' eWOM behaviour, such as frequency of seeking comments, will be affected in different ways depending on their eWOM motivations (Han 2008). Also, Munzel and Kunz (2014) claim that people who read others' eWOM perceive a social debt and feel the obligation to give something back to the community. It means that seeking eWOM can lead to producing eWOM.

Table 4.2 presents the motivations to seek eWOM communications, which have been discussed above.

4.4 Discussion and Concluding Points

The Internet environment provides many different ways for consumers to share their opinions and personal experiences with others (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003). The question why people provide and seek others' articulations through the Internet has attracted interest from numerous researchers. Specifically, studies have investigated both senders' and receivers' motivations to engage in eWOM communications (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Magalhaes and Musallam 2014; Matta and Frost 2011). Studies have found that the main antecedents of providing eWOM are satisfaction, loyalty, commitment, and trust (De Matos and Rossi 2008; Lee and Jaafar 2011; Martin et al. 2008; Neumann 2015; Sichtmann 2007; Walsh and Beatty 2007). Using both qualitative and quantitative techniques, previous studies have found that the main motivations for people engaging in eWOM are altruism, self-enhancement, venting feelings, social benefits, economic incentives, risk reduction, social approval, reduction of search time and effort, getting product (usage) information, and social interaction benefits (Akyuz 2013; Bronner and de Hoog 2011; Burton and Khamash 2010; Gheorghe and Liao 2012; Guo et al. 2009b; Hansen and Lee 2013; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003; Lee et al. 2013a, b; Matta and Frost 2011). While most of the studies generalize motivations to articulate eWOM for all senders (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003; Huang et al. 2013; Kim et al. 2011), Munzel and Kunz (2014) found that there are different types of consumers such as lurkers, creators, and multipliers who have different motivations. Also, it was found that motivations to engage in eWOM can affect how often consumers seek or provide eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Han 2008).

It is important to understand the difference between antecedents and motivations. Antecedents determine consumers' motivations to engage in eWOM (Yen and Tang 2015). For example, when a consumer has a feeling of commitment it predicts why this consumer feels the need to help the company by engaging in eWOM. Another example of how antecedents of eWOM can influence consumer motivations to

Table 4.2 Motivations to seek eWOM

Motivations to seek eWOM	Citation	Key findings	Relevance	Limitations and future research
Risk reduction	Akyuz (2013), Burton and Khammash (2010), Awad and Ragowsky (2008), Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006), Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003), Khammash and Griffiths (2011), Kim et al. (2011), Zhang and Lv (2010)	Consumers use eWOM in order to decrease the perceived risk in making purchase decisions, especially when perceived risk of the purchase is high.	It is important for the managers of online platforms to monitor their customer reviews in terms of availability, appropriateness of language, and having sufficient content.	1. Sample of the participants. Most of the studies use students. Future research should include a more diverse sample of potential users in different age categories, professions, and experience of using eWOM. 2. Most of the studies are self-reported which can lead to response bias. 3. Future research should investigate why people do not seek eWOM.
Social approval	Huang et al. (2013), Kim et al. (2011), Matta and Frost (2011), Yap et al. (2013)	Consumers are motivated to seek eWOM in order to purchase a product or service which is accepted by other people, be aware of a product's social image, compare their idea about a product with other people, or receive other individuals' approval for their purchase decision.	Marketers should encourage consumers to interact with each other and to share new topics using the company website.	
Reduction of search time and effort	Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003), Burton and Khammash (2010), Khammash and Griffiths (2011), Kim et al. (2011), Munzel and Kunz (2014)	People seek eWOM in order to reduce search time and effort in purchase decision-making. High volumes of information and wide varieties of products make it difficult for consumers to know all the alternatives.	Marketers should provide aggregated recommendation ratings.	

(continued)

Table 4.2 (continued)

Motivations to seek eWOM	Citation	Key findings	Relevance	Limitations and future research
Getting product (usage) information	Bi (2011), Burton and Khammash (2010), Chu and Kim (2011), Henning-Henning-Thurau and Walsh (2003), Huang et al. (2013), Kasabov (2014), Khammash and Griffiths (2011), Miquel-Romero and Adame-Sanchez (2013), Reichelt et al. (2014), Song and Sun (2011)	Using eWOM, consumers can receive information about new products and services, learn how to consume products, and solve problems connected with consuming a product.	Opinion portal providers can create an additional section on their website such as Quick Fix information or Tips and Hints. These sections can provide an individual with basic information which can help them to solve small product issues.	4. Future research should study the impact of demographic variables on reading motivations in order to help target responses.
Social interaction benefits	Burton and Khammash (2010), Khammash and Griffiths (2011)	Individuals can partake in other consumers' shopping experiences or have a sense of belonging to a community by looking for other consumers' postings on online eWOM platforms.	Website operators can help consumers take advantage of social benefit by creating the feeling of a virtual community and enabling consumers to share more feeling to compare their evaluations.	

engage in eWOM can be the case when the consumer is highly satisfied with the product or service he might be motivated by the need to share this excitement with other consumers.

Summary of Key Points

- Satisfaction, loyalty, commitment, and trust are found to be the main antecedents of eWOM.
- Motivations for people to provide eWOM include altruism, self-enhancement, venting feelings, social benefits, and economic incentives.
- Motivations of people who seek eWOM include risk reduction, social approval, reduction of search time and effort, getting product (usage) information, and social interaction benefits.
- Frequency of engaging in eWOM communications is influenced by motivations to seek and provide eWOM.
- Knowing and understanding consumers' motivations to provide eWOM will lead to better understanding of information exchange behaviour on the Internet.

It is important to identify motives for engaging in eWOM because it helps to understand and predict information exchange behaviour on the Internet (Han 2008). Also, studying eWOM motivations can help ascertain their influence on how often consumers engage in providing eWOM. By identifying underlying motivations for people to engage in eWOM, researchers are able to understand, and influence, individual online information assimilation which can affect consumer purchase decisions, customer loyalty, and consumer commitment to the community (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003).

Understanding motivations for providing eWOM can be useful not only for researchers but also for marketers and managers. It can help managers to improve reader engagement and information assimilation (Burton and Khammash 2010). Marketers should try to identify “social influencers” or “market mavens” on SNSs and encourage them to spread positive product information regarding selected brands or discourage them from sharing negative eWOM within their personal networks.

Knowing motivations to engage in eWOM allows platform operators to design their service in a more customer-oriented way (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). For example, for individuals who are motivated by social relationships, online platform providers can allow consumers to create their own personal profile, where they can add other users as friends and directly communicate with them. Also, publicly visible cues on the reviewer's profile such as length of membership can be added (Cheung and Lee 2012).

For people who are motivated by altruism, online platforms can use a mechanism where individuals who provide useful eWOM recommendations are identified and informed about their help to other users. Also, allowing contributors and readers to

connect through person-to-person messages can help readers to show their appreciation for the received reviews (Cheung and Lee 2012). For people who are motivated by economic incentives, opinion platforms can provide coupons, free delivery, or web points in order to increase individuals' participation in eWOM. To engage people motivated by self-enhancement, online platforms can add publicly visible cues to reviewers' profiles such as number of reviews written and helpfulness votes. Also, they can introduce a badge such as "reviewer of the month" or "expert" which would attract more attention from other users and enhance their status (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

In the case of venting negative feelings, which produces negative eWOM, the company should address the negative message with valid reasons, apologies, and determination to improve product quality (Wang et al. 2013). Also, the company can try to reduce negative eWOM by making it easy for consumers to contact the company directly and answer the consumer's complaint promptly.

Understanding consumers' motivations to seek eWOM can be beneficial for marketers and managers of companies. Marketers should consider social relationship factors in order to develop personalized marketing communications strategies to fulfil SNSs users' needs (e.g. gaining social capital). For example, when targeting consumers who are susceptible to interpersonal influence, eWOM marketing could be a good online communication technique as these SNS users are more likely to follow social influences (Chu and Kim 2011). Also, rewarding the best reviewers could attract a greater number of readers and hence, attract sponsors to the site who want to create links to their retail sites.

Marketers should target customers with particular reading motivations to influence and encourage them positively to read about their products. Knowing the reading motives can help platform providers to develop a more customized environment. Platform providers should take into consideration the different effects of reading motives on readers' behaviour. For example, for customers who is motivated by social approval platform providers can structure information in accordance to the readers' information search process and increase the amount of accessible information dealing with products relevant to individuals' social positioning (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003).

Website operators can help consumers to take advantage of social benefit by creating the feeling of a virtual community and enabling consumers to share more feelings to compare their evaluations. Also, encouraging consumers to interact with each other and to share new topics using the company website can attract potential customers for the purpose of social reassurance (Kim et al. 2011). Considering the high importance of risk reduction as a motive for reading eWOM, it is important for managers of online platforms to monitor their customer reviews in terms of availability, appropriateness of language, and having sufficient content (Khammash and Griffiths 2011).

Taking into account the importance of seeking eWOM to get product (usage) information, website managers might need to dedicate a section in their website for Tips and Hints or Quick Fix information. These sections can provide individuals with basic information in order to help them to solve non-major problems that may

be encountered when using their products and services. Also, using the example of opinion portals, their providers could devote a section in their communities especially for new products and services so it would be easier for consumers to find these new products (Khammash and Griffiths 2011). For people who are motivated to read eWOM because of the reduction of search time and effort, marketers should provide aggregated recommendation ratings and all the information about competing products in the same place.

Points for Practitioners

- Marketers should try to identify “social influencers” or “market mavens” in social networking sites and encourage them to spread positive product information.
- Knowing motivations to engage in eWOM enables platform operators to design their service in a more customer-oriented way.
- Marketers should target customers with particular reading motivations to positively influence and encourage them to read about their products.
- Knowing the reading motives can help platform providers to develop a more customized environment.

Some studies have investigated motivations for users to engage in eWOM for particular platforms (Choi and Scott 2013; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003; Kasabov 2014; Khammash and Griffiths 2011). For example, Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003) studied motivations to read eWOM using an online opinion platform. Another study conducted by Choi and Scott (2013) using SNSs showed that users engage in eWOM to feel the sense of belonging to a community. Additionally, it was found that motivations to engage in eWOM could vary depending on the Internet platform. For example, Dirks (2014) found that sharing experiences on Facebook was motivated by self-enhancement and social benefits while sharing on an opinion platform was driven by altruism and venting feelings to punish a company. However, limited research has been done in connecting certain eWOM motivations with particular internet platforms. As a result, future research is needed to study how motivations to engage in eWOM can depend on the type of online platform and whether or not eWOM motives influence the channel choice to engage in eWOM communications. It would advance our understanding on information exchange behaviour on the Internet and can be used by companies in their marketing strategies.

Even though studies have investigated why people engage in eWOM communications (Bi 2011; Bronner and de Hoog 2011; Burton and Khammash 2010; Cheung and Lee 2012; Chu and Kim 2011; Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003; Musallam and Magalhães 2012; Pourabedin and Migin 2015), they did not consider the impact of individual characteristics such as income, age, gender, education, and personality on engaging in eWOM. Knowing this will help companies to create specific marketing strategies to involve different groups of people in

disseminating eWOM. Additionally, existing studies do not examine engagement in eWOM in different cross-cultural settings (Burton and Khammash 2010; Cheung and Lee 2012; Chu and Sung 2015; Guo et al. 2009b; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Current cross-cultural studies propose that different cultures produce distinctly different media usage and communication styles that, in turn, influence consumer behaviour online (Pfeil et al. 2006). As a result, opinion giving and seeking behaviour can be different from country to country because of cultural variations. Therefore, an investigation in different cultural contexts will help understanding of the effect of culture in social relationships and eWOM communications.

A great number of studies examine why consumers provide or seek eWOM on the Internet (Bi 2011; Bronner and de Hoog 2011; Burton and Khammash 2010; Cheung and Lee 2012; Chu and Kim 2011; Goldsmith and Horowitz 2006; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003; Musallam and Magalhães 2012; Pourabedin and Migin 2015). However, future studies should investigate why consumers do not provide or seek eWOM. It will help both researchers and marketers to identify and eliminate factors that might be preventing consumers in providing and seeking eWOM.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Consider the influence of personal characteristics on providing and seeking eWOM.
- Investigate why consumers do not provide or seek eWOM.
- Explore the role of cultural context on consumers providing and seeking eWOM.
- Examine how motivations to engage in eWOM can depend on type of online platform and whether or not eWOM motives influence the channel choice to engage in eWOM communications.

This chapter has explored the motivations for consumers to provide and seek eWOM. Knowing motivations of people to engage in eWOM will advance understanding of information exchange behaviour on the Internet. [Chapter 5](#) investigates persuasiveness of eWOM communications. In order to be persuasive, messages should be considered as helpful and credible. Many studies prove the link between credibility and helpfulness of eWOM and information acceptance, which can influence attitude and purchase intentions of consumers, and hence sales. As a result, understanding why people perceive communications as helpful and credible is an important area for marketing research.

Chapter 5

Persuasiveness of eWOM Communications

Consumers use eWOM as one of the most important information sources to make buying decisions (Tsao and Hsieh 2015). Persuasiveness of eWOM communications is linked with the credibility and helpfulness of the content. Studies show that eWOM is perceived as more credible and relevant to customers than market created sources of information on the Internet (Gruen et al. 2006). Many studies prove the link between credibility and helpfulness of eWOM and information adoption, which can influence consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions and, hence, sales (Cheung 2014; Cheung et al. 2009; Lis 2013; Teng et al. 2014). Thus, it is important to understand how consumers evaluate persuasiveness of eWOM (O'Reilly and Marx 2011).

The aim of this chapter is to provide a review of the existing literature related to the persuasiveness of eWOM communications. It begins with an overview of the factors influencing credibility of eWOM communications. Next, factors which help consumers to evaluate helpfulness of eWOM communications are discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the persuasiveness of eWOM providing key points for practitioners and presenting directions for future studies.

5.1 Credibility vs. Helpfulness

Studies on eWOM communications focus on two aspects of persuasiveness of eWOM—helpfulness and credibility (Cheung and Thadani 2012; Lis 2013; Kim and Gupta 2012; Yin et al. 2014). eWOM credibility is the degree to which an individual perceives the recommendation from others as believable, true, or factual (Cheng and Zhou 2010). Helpfulness (or usefulness) is defined as the degree to which the information assists consumers in making their purchase decisions (Davis 1989). Following the Yale model which states that persuasiveness of communications depends on communicator, message, and recipient (Russell and Jarvis 2003), factors for both

Table 5.1 Factors influencing helpfulness and credibility of eWOM

	Factor	Credibility	Helpfulness
eWOM message	Argument strength	✓	
	Sidedness	✓	
	Valence	✓	✓
	Ratio of positive and negative messages	✓	
	Image	✓	✓
	Intensity	✓	✓
	Length		✓
	Percent of negative words		✓
	Objectivity/subjectivity		✓
	Emotions		✓
	Detailed information		✓
	Review type		✓
	Review format		✓
	Review diagnosticity		✓
	Technical information		✓
	Argument diversity		✓
	Expertise claim		✓
	Persuasive words		✓
	Recommendation consistency	✓	
	Recommendation rating	✓	
	Average product rating	✓	✓
	Rating inconsistency		✓
	Quality	✓	✓
Volume	✓	✓	
Source of eWOM	Expertise	✓	✓
	Trustworthiness	✓	✓
	Reputation	✓	
	Attractiveness	✓	
	Perceived social relationships	✓	
	Type of platform	✓	✓
	Reviewer ranking and number of followers		✓
Receiver of eWOM	Propensity to trust	✓	
	Confirmation with prior beliefs	✓	
	Level of involvement	✓	✓
	Cultural characteristics	✓	
	Previous experience with seller	✓	
	Prior knowledge	✓	
	Consumer expertise		✓

helpfulness and credibility of eWOM are divided by eWOM message, source of eWOM, and receiver of eWOM. Some factors determining helpfulness and credibility of eWOM are the same but some are different. Table 5.1 above indicates the factors that influence helpfulness and credibility of eWOM.

5.2 Credibility of eWOM

Wathen and Burkell (2002) state that an important early stage in the information persuasion process is the individual's judgment of the credibility of information, which determines how much the receiver learns from and adopts the received information. Thus, if people believe that received information is credible, they will have more confidence to adopt eWOM information and use it in order to make purchase decisions (Sussman and Siegal 2003). Many studies prove the link between information credibility and adoption of the information (Cheung et al. 2009; McKnight et al. 2002). Recognizing that many online exchanges occur between people who have no prior relationship, it is important to consider how these exchanges are evaluated and assessed as "trustworthy" or credible (O'Reilly and Marx 2011).

Some studies focus on manipulation of eWOM communications (Hu et al. 2011; Huang et al. 2012; Larson and Denton 2014). Hu et al.'s (2011) study used data collected from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and showed that the lower the quality and average rating of the products a vendor is selling, the higher the likelihood that the vendor is going to conduct online manipulation. This leads to the situation when online reviews become less informative. This can result in consumers' totally discarding an online review, defying the purpose of eWOM. Another study performed by Huang et al. (2012) established criteria to help separate commercial (fake) from non-commercial (authentic) book reviews. The results demonstrated that structure and format, attributes of content, information orientation, number of words, lexical richness, personal pronouns, and paralinguistic features can provide valuable clues for judgment of online review authenticity (Huang et al. 2012).

The box below provides a real-life example of how companies act to ensure credible reviews:

In 2015, Amazon started legal action against more than 1000 people who provided fake reviews on its website. Also, it filed a lawsuit against four websites which sell reviews on their sites. These lawsuits come after the company employed investigators to actually hire reviewers to create reviews. According to Amazon spokeswoman Julie Law their goal was to make reviews as useful as possible for customers and so they "continue to use a number of mechanisms to detect and remove the small fractions of reviews that violate our guidelines" (Kline 2015).

Studies investigating persuasiveness of eWOM communications (e.g. Cheng and Ho 2015; Luo et al. 2015; Park and Lee 2008) have often used the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) which separates the central route (when individual considers an idea logically) and peripheral route (where individual employs pre-existing ideas and superficial qualities to be persuaded by the message) (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Individuals use the central route when they are motivated and can think on the

issue, whereas the peripheral route is used when either ability or motivation is low (Baek et al. 2012; Petty and Cacioppo 1984). Factors such as argument quality (Cheung and Thadani 2012; Chu and Kamal 2008; Zhang and Watts 2008) and information sidedness (Cheung et al. 2009, 2012) are considered as central route factors, while source credibility (Cheung et al. 2008; Zhang and Watts 2008), information consistency (Zhang and Watts 2004), and information rating (Cheung et al. 2009; Duan et al. 2008) are considered as peripheral route factors. As a result, depending on the motivations to read the review, consumers use different routes of information processing. Table 5.2 presents the determinants of eWOM credibility.

5.2.1 eWOM Message

The credibility of an eWOM message can be influenced by its content (Cheung et al. 2009; Doh and Hwang 2009), quality (Guo et al. 2009a; Tsao and Hsieh 2015), recommendation consistency (Moran and Muzellec 2014), rating (Lis 2013), and volume (Fan et al. 2013). These factors are discussed in more detail below.

Content. Argument strength, sidedness, valence, intensity, and other factors can influence credibility of eWOM message (Cheung et al. 2009; Doh and Hwang 2009; Jensen et al. 2013; Jeong and Moon 2009). For example, Teng et al. (2014) stated that argument quality influences credibility of eWOM. High quality reviews provide consumers with more problem-solving evidence, which can help them to assess the credibility of the review they read. Another study conducted by Doh and Hwang (2009) proposed that the ratio between positive and negative messages can influence eWOM credibility. By using 143 responses from self-administrated surveys in Korea, the study found that a few negative messages can increase credibility of eWOM. As a result, one negative message in a ten-message set will not harm the product and will make eWOM reviews even more credible (Doh and Hwang 2009). Another experimental study conducted by Jensen et al. (2013) found that reviews containing both positive and negative information will be perceived as more credible than the ones which present only positive or negative sides of the product or business. Also, this study found that high affective intensity in product reviews, measured by the number of emotion-laden words in the review, negatively influences credibility of an eWOM message.

Consumers are presented with positive and negative reviews. Some studies find that negative information has more influence than positive information (Cheung et al. 2009; Chiou and Cheng 2003). Previous studies have found that negative information is weighted more heavily than positive information when consumers form overall product judgments. One reason for this is that consumers perceive negative product information more diagnostic than positive information (Bone 1995). A study conducted by Chiou and Cheng (2003) observed that negative eWOM is perceived more persuasive than positive eWOM in the case of online reviews about cellular phones. A reason for this could be that a negative message

Table 5.2 Factors determining credibility of eWOM

	Factor	Details	References
eWOM message	Content	Argument strength, sidedness, valence, ratio of positive and negative messages, image, intensity	Cheung et al. (2009), Doh and Hwang (2009), Jensen et al. (2013), Jeong and Moon (2009), Lee and Yi (2010), Lim and Van Der Heide (2015), Lin et al. (2012), Luo et al. (2014a, b, 2015), O'Reilly and Marx (2011), Pan and Chiou (2011), Wang and Wei (2006)
	Recommendation consistency	The degree to which the eWOM message is consistent with other consumers' reviews about the same product or service	Cheung et al. (2009), Guo et al. (2009a), Luo et al. (2014a, b, 2015), Moran and Muzellec (2014)
Source of eWOM	Rating	Recommendation rating, average product rating	Cheung et al. (2009), Ku et al. (2012), Lis (2013), Luo et al. (2014a, b)
	Quality	Relevance, timeliness, accuracy, comprehensiveness	Guo et al. (2009a), Luo et al. (2014a, b), Tsao and Hsieh (2015)
	Volume	Total number of posted online reviews	Fan et al. (2013), Park et al. (2007)
	Expertise	The degree to which a person is able to provide the correct information	Cheng and Zhou (2010), Fan and Sun (2012), Ho and Chien (2010), Lim and Van Der Heide (2015), Lis (2013), Luo et al. (2015), Moran and Muzellec (2014), Pan (2014), Qiu et al. (2012), Shuang (2013), Wang and Wei (2006), Willemssen et al. (2012), Yu and Natalia (2013)
	Trustworthiness	Recipient's degree of trust of the message communicator	Ho and Chien (2010), Levy and Gvili (2015), Lim and Van Der Heide (2015), Luo et al. (2015), Pan (2014), Wang and Wei (2006), Willemssen et al. (2012), Yu and Natalia (2013)
	Reputation	Reputations of the website/platform and reviewer	Chih et al. (2013), Guo et al. (2009a)
	Attractiveness	Similarity, familiarity, and likability	Lim and Van Der Heide (2015), Shuang (2013), Teng et al. (2014), Yu and Natalia (2013);
	Perceived social relationships	Homophily and tie strength	Fan and Sun (2012), Pan (2014)
	Type of platform	Consumer-generated vs marketer-generated	Hajji (2016), Lee and Youn (2009), Sussan et al. (2006), Teng et al. (2014)

(continued)

Table 5.2 (continued)

	Factor	Details	References
Receiver of eWOM	Propensity to trust	Willingness to rely on other individuals	Cheng and Zhou (2010), Guo et al. (2009a)
	Confirmation with prior beliefs	The degree of confirmation/disconfirmation between receiver's prior beliefs and the received information about the product/service	Cheung et al. (2009)
	Level of involvement	The degree of psychological identification and emotional ties the receiver has with the product/service	Doh and Hwang (2009), Lis (2013)
	Cultural characteristics	Individualism–collectivism orientation	Luo et al. (2014a, b)
	Previous experience with seller	Previous experience with the provider of product/service	O'Reilly and Marx (2011), Pan (2014)
	Prior knowledge	Level of expertise	Doh and Hwang (2009)

reduces the possibility that the information is posted by marketers or a person who wants to covertly promote the product or service. However, a study by Lim and Van Der Heide (2015), which investigated perceived credibility of reviews in the restaurant context, indicated that receivers perceive a positive review to be more credible than a negative review. Also, results demonstrate that the receiver's familiarity with a community platform is a moderator of people's cue-taking and further demonstrates the user's complementary combination of profile cues. Considering these studies (Cheung et al. 2009; Chiou and Cheng 2003; Lim and Van Der Heide 2015), it can be seen that weight given to negative and positive reviews can depend on service/product types.

In the literature related to economics of information, goods and services are divided into three categories: search, experience, and credence (Cheung and Lee 2012; Fan 2011). An experience product is defined as a product with features difficult to observe before purchase is made. In contrast, a search good is defined as a product with features easily evaluated before buying it. Credence goods include features that consumers cannot verify with confidence even after using them (Pan and Chiou 2011). It is difficult for consumers to evaluate credence goods even after purchase and consumption due to their intangible nature of the attributes, which increases the need for the experience and opinions of other consumers who use the product already. As a result, information received from eWOM tends to be persuasive for consumers (Chang and Wu 2014; Fan 2011). Before buying credence goods, consumers are more motivated to seek eWOM and take it seriously because it helps them to reduce uncertainty. Tsao and Hsieh (2015) found that credibility of positive eWOM is stronger for credence goods than it is for search goods. Pan and Chiou (2011) claimed that negative messages are perceived more trustworthy than positive messages in the case of experience goods.

Taking into account previous studies on information processing (David and Glore 2010; Fogg et al. 2003), which propose that the way information is presented can influence credibility, Lin et al. (2012) found that visual information has an impact on perception of credibility of the eWOM message. Results indicated that participants rated eWOM articles in blogs with visual information significantly more credible than identical articles without visual information.

Recommendation consistency. Recommendation consistency refers to the degree to which a current eWOM recommendation is in line with other recommendations about the same product or service experience (Cheung et al. 2009). Reviews about a product or service are usually written by more than one reviewer but presented to readers together. As a result, readers can easily get opinions from different users and compare consistency between these online communications (Cheung et al. 2009). If a message is in line with recommendations from other consumers, then the reader will perceive this review more credible. However, if a recommendation is not in line with the majority of other messages about the same product or service, then the reader will feel confused and consider the current eWOM recommendation lacking credibility (Cheung et al. 2009; Moran and Muzellec 2014). Studies have found that recommendation consistency influences perceived eWOM credibility. For example, by employing

users of a popular consumer discussion forum, Cheung et al. (2009) determined that recommendation consistency positively influences perceived eWOM credibility.

Rating. Recommendation rating refers to the overall rating given by others for an eWOM communication (Cheung et al. 2009). People can give a high or low score to the message according to their perception of it. As a result, an aggregated rating is an average representation of how previous readers evaluated and perceived this recommendation. Studies have found that this recommendation rating score influences the way people perceive message credibility (Cheung et al. 2009; Lis 2013). For example, if a product has a low aggregated rating but one individual review rates the product highly, a reader would question the credibility of this message.

Quality. Studies show that eWOM credibility is affected by the quality of information (Guo et al. 2009a; Tsao and Hsieh 2015). Quality of information includes various components such as relevance, timeliness, accuracy, and comprehensiveness (Luo et al. 2014a, b; Tsao and Hsieh 2015). High quality eWOM provides consumers with more problem-solving evidence, which can help them assess the credibility of the review they read (Tsao and Hsieh 2015). A study conducted by Tsao and Hsieh (2015) found that eWOM with high quality positively influences eWOM credibility.

Volume. When consumers search for eWOM, the number of eWOM messages makes information more observable (Cheung and Thadani 2010). The volume eWOM indicates the popularity of the product or service. Empirical studies found that the number of eWOM communications positively influences credibility of eWOM communications (Park et al. 2007; Sher and Lee 2009). For example, by using an experimental survey with 435 respondents, Fan et al. (2013) found that a higher quantity of eWOM positively influenced the perceived eWOM credibility for consumers. However, high volume of eWOM messages can result in information overload which may lead to confusion and decreased purchase intention (Furner and Zinko 2016; Singh et al. 2016).

5.2.2 Source of eWOM

Characteristics of information source can influence the perceived credibility of eWOM communications (Cheung et al. 2009; Lis 2013). Existing studies found that the perception of the source depends on source expertise (Cheng and Zhou 2010; Fan and Sun 2012), trustworthiness (Ho and Chien 2010; Levy and Gvili 2015), reputation (Chih et al. 2013; Guo et al. 2009a), attractiveness (Lim and Van Der Heide 2015; Shuang 2013), perceived social relationships between the information source and the receiver (Fan and Sun 2012; Pan 2014), and type of platform (Hajli 2016; Teng et al. 2014).

Expertise. Sender's expertise is defined as the degree to which a person is able to provide the correct information (Cheng and Zhou 2010). People who have higher ranking expertise have greater awareness and knowledge about certain products, services, and alternatives available on the market (Cheng and Zhou 2010; Mitchell

and Dacin 1996). Studies have found that the level of expertise influences perceived credibility of eWOM (Cheng and Zhou 2010; Ho and Chien 2010). For example, through a study using data collected from 225 consumers, Cheng and Zhou (2010) found that individuals consider information which came from people with high level of expertise as more credible. Lis (2013) got similar results using 634 users of a leading online consumer discussion forum in Germany.

Trustworthiness. Along with expertise, perceived trustworthiness is another determinant of source credibility (Lis 2013). Trustworthiness is defined as recipient's degree of trust of the message communicator (Ho and Chien 2010). The credibility of information which is received from a trustworthy source is doubted less by eWOM receivers in comparison with one perceived as not trustworthy (Lis 2013). A study conducted by Shuang (2013) used an experimental procedure and discovered that perceived trustworthiness influences source credibility. Studies conducted by Cheng and Zhou (2010) and Lis (2013) garnered the same results.

Willemsen et al. (2012) examined the difference between claiming little knowledge of a product under review and claiming to know about a product as part of their profession on perceived source expertise and trustworthiness. The results indicated that experts are perceived as having more expert knowledge but simultaneously less trustworthiness than a layperson. However, these credibility assessments only occur when the expert status of the source is based on self-claim; when the expert status of the online source is based on peer rating, the information source is assessed to have both trustworthiness and expertise.

Reputation. Consumers use reputation of information source to determine the credibility of information received (Chih et al. 2013; Metzger 2007). A study conducted by Chih et al. (2013) investigated the perceived credibility of eWOM communications. It was found that when consumers perceived that a website has a high reputation, they will perceive positive eWOM on this website as more credible. So, reputation of information source influences credibility of eWOM communications.

Attractiveness. Studies suggest that there is a link between source attractiveness and eWOM source credibility (Ho and Chien 2010; Lim and Van Der Heide 2015; Teng et al. 2014; Yu and Natalia 2013). Source attractiveness is related to the similarity, familiarity, and likability of the source by the receiver of information. Familiarity refers to the knowledge of the source through related use. Likability refers to the negative or positive feelings that consumers have towards the information source. Similarity is a resemblance between the source and the eWOM receiver (Yu and Natalia 2013). A study conducted by Lim and Van Der Heide (2015) found that the more familiar the receiver was with the platform the more credible eWOM communications will be perceived. Another study by Yu and Natalia (2013) explored the credibility of visual eWOM by investigating [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) in Indonesia and Taiwan. Through analysis of questionnaire data from 500 respondents, the study found that source attractiveness influence perceived source credibility. Examining the context of food blogs, Ho and Chien (2010) found that the attractiveness of the source influenced perceived credibility of eWOM communications. Teng et al. (2014) received the same result studying antecedents of eWOM credibility on social media platform QQ.

Perceived social relationships. Individuals' social relationships influence the credibility of eWOM communications (Pan and Chiou 2011). Perceived social relationships between receiver and information source can be determined by homophily. Social homophily can be derived from demographics (age, gender, education, occupation) or perceived attributes (values, preferences) (Lis 2013). eWOM receivers consider information more credible when it comes from a source consistent with their own values, interests, and mindset (Fan and Sun 2012). Also, some scholars claim that eWOM communications can be affected by tie strength—the depth of a relationship between source and information seeker (Cheng and Zhou 2010). It is believed that information from strong ties tends to be perceived as more credible (Brown et al. 2007). Pan and Chiou (2011) found that perceived trustworthiness of eWOM on online forums is affected by the perceived strength of the social relationship between net pals by the information seeker. However, a study conducted by Koo (2016) found that neutral recommendations from people with weak ties were as effective as those from people with strong ties, as long as the recommendation providers were experienced. The results of these two aforementioned studies may be different because Koo (2016) also considered the effect of reviewer experience, which is deemed an effective predictor of message credibility (Reichelt et al. 2014; White 2005), but did not take valence of the message into consideration.

Type of platform. Platforms can be classified into two categories: consumer-generated and marketer-generated. Whether an online platform is consumer-generated or marketer-generated can be used as an important cue to consumers to judge both credibility and helpfulness of eWOM communications. Previous studies investigated the ways how online platforms affect eWOM persuasiveness (Hajli 2016; Lee and Youn 2009; Sussan et al. 2006; Teng et al. 2014). It was found that people perceive eWOM communications posted on marketer-generated platforms as more credible. Also, some studies investigated how social media influence credibility of eWOM (Hajli 2016; Teng et al. 2014). Using social media, people can communicate in online communities using different Web 2.0 technologies (recommendation, reviews, ratings, forums) (Hajli 2016). For instance, a recent study by Hajli (2016) found that social media makes eWOM seem more credible and useful, which leads to information adoption. The results of this study indicated that characteristics of social media such as continuing contact, relationships with familiar peers, social media interactivity, and disclosure of individuals' identity improve perceived credibility of eWOM communications. Thus, type of platform can influence credibility of eWOM communications.

5.2.3 Receiver of eWOM

The perceived credibility of an eWOM message can vary from person to person. Studies have found that propensity to trust (Cheng and Zhou 2010), confirmation with prior beliefs (Cheung et al. 2009), level of involvement (Lis 2013), cultural

characteristics (Luo et al. 2014a, b), previous experience with seller (Pan 2014), and receivers' prior knowledge (Doh and Hwang 2009) can influence credibility of eWOM communications.

Propensity to trust. Propensity to trust, or general willingness to trust other people, differs between individuals. It has been found that credibility of eWOM can be affected by trust propensity of the receiver (Cheng and Zhou 2010). For example, some receivers will consider the same message as more credible while others perceive it as less credible depending on their propensity to trust (Cheng and Zhou 2010). A study conducted by Guo et al. (2009a) found that the receiver's trust tendency has a positive influence on perceived credibility of online communications.

Confirmation with prior beliefs. When consumers perceive a message to be consistent with their prior knowledge or expectations about a product/service, they have more confidence in the received information (Cheung et al. 2009). Studies have observed that confirmation/disconfirmation with consumers' prior beliefs affects the credibility of received information (Cheung et al. 2009; Fogg et al. 2001). A study conducted by Cheung et al. (2009) found that confirmation of the receiver's prior belief will have a positive effect on perceived eWOM review credibility in the context of online forums.

Level of involvement. Involvement refers to the degree of psychological identification and strength of emotional ties the receiver has with a product/service (Cheung and Thadani 2010). As a result, consumers with low involvement have low need for information, while consumers with high involvement seek for information providing added value (Doh and Hwang 2009). Lis (2013) found that involvement strengthens the relationship between expertise and the perceived credibility of online consumer recommendations. Also, the study found that highly involved receivers are less influenced by the sender's trustworthiness than those with low involvement.

Cultural characteristics. People with different collectivism–individualism orientations perceive factors influencing eWOM communications in different ways (Luo et al. 2014a, b). Analysing data collected from forums in China, Luo et al. (2014a, b) discovered that cultural characteristics moderate the effect of information sidedness and information consistency on perceived eWOM credibility. Precisely, it was found that the higher the individualistic orientation the eWOM readers espouse, the stronger argument quality affects their perception of information credibility.

Previous experience with seller. eWOM receivers' previous experience with the provider of a product/service also affects credibility of eWOM communications. A study conducted by Pan (2014) found that if prior experience with a seller is perceived to be good, associated eWOM will be perceived to be more credible.

Prior knowledge. Consumers' previous knowledge determines the level of expertise regarding a product/service which can influence perceived credibility of eWOM communications. The results from a study conducted by Doh and Hwang (2009) demonstrated that individuals with greater prior knowledge can be more sensitive to negative messages than people without prior knowledge.

5.3 Helpfulness of eWOM

Individuals perceive information to be helpful when it provides support to their purchase decision (Davis 1989). For companies, eWOM is a useful tool which can be used to influence individuals' evaluation of their products and services (Mayzlin 2006). As a result, persuasive online reviews should affect attitude and purchase intention (Jeong and Koo 2015). The box below provides a real-life example of how Amazon used perceived helpfulness to increase revenue.

High numbers of reviews is important for consumer decision-making; however, when the number of reviews reaches a certain point, users need some help processing them. Amazon's solution was as simple as adding the question "was this review helpful to you?". Using this question, Amazon was able to place the most helpful reviews at the top. As a result of adding this small tweak, Amazon added \$2.7bn to its bottom line (Charlton 2009).

Reviews that are perceived as helpful by consumers affect consumer purchase decisions more than other reviews (Chen et al. 2008; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006). Thus, a great number of studies have investigated factors influencing helpfulness of online consumer reviews. Factors determining eWOM helpfulness are presented in Table 5.3.

5.3.1 eWOM Message

Factors such as message rating (Baek et al. 2012), content (Yin et al. 2014), quality (Cheung 2014), and volume (Park and Lee 2008) have a significant influence on perceived helpfulness of eWOM communications.

Rating. Through interviewing and a follow-up survey of 136 participants, Robinson et al. (2012) found that overall star rating influences helpfulness of eWOM communications. Another study by Mudambi and Schuff (2010) investigated how review rating influences review helpfulness for different types of goods. They found that review helpfulness increases when the rating is low or high for search goods and moderate for experience goods. A study conducted by Baek et al. (2012) attempted to analyse the relationships between rating inconsistency and perceived review helpfulness. The results indicated that the higher the difference between the review star rating and the product average rating, the lower the review helpfulness becomes.

Content. Kim and Gupta (2012) showed how emotions in an eWOM message influence its informative value. Using a between subject factorial experiment and sample of 129 undergraduate students, the results indicated that negative emotions in a single review decrease informative value. However, convergent negative

Table 5.3 Factors determining eWOM helpfulness

	Factor	Details	References
eWOM message	Rating	Rating inconsistency, overall star rating	Baek et al. (2012), Robinson et al. (2012)
	Content	Length, percent of negative words, image, valence, objectivity/subjectivity, emotions, emotion intensity, detailed information, explained actions and reactions, review format, review type (attributed value and simple recommendation), review diagnosticity, technical information, argument diversity, expertise claim, persuasive words	Ahmad and Laroche (2015), Baek et al. (2012), Cheng and Ho (2015), Jeong and Koo (2015), Kim and Gupta (2012), Lockie et al. (2015), Moore (2015), Park and Lee (2008), Park (2008a, b), Peng et al. (2014), Pollach (2006), Robinson et al. (2012), Teng et al. (2014), Weathers et al. (2015), Willemssen et al. (2011), Wu (2013), Yan et al. (2011), Yin et al. (2014)
	Quality	Relevance, timeliness, accuracy, comprehensiveness	Cheung (2014), Park and Kim (2008), Robinson et al. (2012), Teng et al. (2014)
	Volume	Total number of posted online reviews	Park and Lee (2008)
Source of eWOM	Reviewer ranking and number of followers	Evaluation of the reviewer by other individuals	Baek et al. (2012), Cheng and Ho (2015)
	Expertise	The degree to which person is able to provide the correct information	Cheng and Ho (2015), Weathers et al. (2015)
	Trustworthiness	Recipient's degree of message trust of the advice given by the information communicator	Cheung (2014), Peng et al. (2014)
Receiver of eWOM	Type of platform	Consumer-generated vs marketer-generated	Jeong and Koo (2015)
	Level of involvement	The degree of psychological identification and emotional ties the receiver has with the product/service	Breazeale (2009), Park and Lee (2008)
	Consumer expertise	Previous knowledge about the reviewed product or service	Park and Kim (2008)

emotions in multiple reviews positively affect informative value. Positive emotion in one review might not significantly affect perceived usefulness of the review, but convergent positive emotions in multiple reviews can do so. Some studies went beyond valence appraisal of emotions and used other dimensions (Ahmad and Laroche 2015; Yin et al. 2014). For example, the study conducted by Yin et al. (2014) investigated the link between emotional content of the reviews and its perceived helpfulness using certainty appraisal theory of emotions. Studying 1434 reviews from Yahoo!, the results showed that reviews containing content connected to anxiety are considered more helpful in comparison to ones which contain an indication of anger. A study conducted by Ahmad and Laroche (2015) also used certainty appraisal theory. They found that reviews expressing anxiety are less helpful in comparison with ones containing disgust. However, the results of these two studies contradict each other. In the study conducted by Yin et al. (2014), they find that uncertain emotions are more helpful, while Ahmad and Laroche (2015) claim that certain emotions are more helpful.

Jeong and Koo (2015) studied the simultaneous effect of review valence and objectivity/subjectivity of online reviews on usefulness of the message. Objective reviews include factual, attribute-centric, and statistical reviews and contain information such as prices, product specifications, and usage rate, whereas subjective reviews tend to be more personal, experience based, narrative, and thus subject to personal interpretations of the products/services. Using 480 participants in between subject design, this study found that objective negative online reviews are considered more helpful. Also, the results indicated that the effect of online review is moderated by eWOM platform type.

Wu (2013) explored relationships between information valence and perceived helpfulness of online reviews. Using data collected from Amazon and between subject experiments, the study showed that valence of a customer review is less important than the quality of the information provided in the review. This study demonstrated that negativity bias, which is documented in psychology literature, might not work in the context of eWOM. Negativity bias refers to the notion that negative information has a greater effect on evaluation than neutral or positive information (Lee et al. 2009). So, bad is not necessarily stronger than good in relation to the perceived value of consumer-generated reviews.

Willemsen et al. (2011) investigated how content characteristics affect helpfulness of the review. Using reviews from Amazon.com, the study showed that content characteristics are important in understanding the perceived helpfulness of reviews. Argumentation (density and diversity) affects perceived helpfulness as well as review valence. The study found that the presence of expertise claims is weakly related to the perceived helpfulness of reviews. Lockie et al. (2015) examined how content of the review can affect its helpfulness in the context of health service. After investigation of 234 online reviews and applying decision tree analysis in order to find patterns, the study demonstrated that reviews with a more narrative and experiential focus are perceived as more useful compared to ones which are based on facts or very short reviews.

Moore (2015) examined how explanation type used in eWOM can affect its helpfulness. The study distinguishes two types of explanations: the actions of the writers (e.g. I chose this product because...) or their reactions (I hate this product

because...). The results showed that readers find explained actions more helpful for utilitarian products and explained reactions more helpful for hedonic products.

The type of product an individual intends to purchase affects a consumer's behaviour (Baek et al. 2012). Also, consumers' behaviour depends on how much individuals intend to pay for the goods. Usually, people show more concern about high-priced goods rather than low-priced goods. As a result, people pay more attention to the reviews for high-priced goods in order to enhance their buying decision. For example, Weathers et al. (2015) identified the review factors that consumers employ to evaluate review helpfulness. Using 8327 reviews from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), the results show that review diagnosticity (uncertainty and equivocality) and review credibility (trust and expertise) which are moderated by product type (search and experienced) affect review helpfulness. Zhang et al. (2010) studied the effect of valence on eWOM persuasiveness. The results show that consumers do not consider positive and negative product reviews in the same way. For products which are connected with promotion consumption goals, consumers show positive bias—they consider positive reviews more persuasive than negative ones. For products associated with prevention consumption goals, consumers show negative bias—they consider negative reviews more persuasive than positive ones. Also a study conducted by Baek et al. (2012) showed that product type moderates the helpfulness of online consumer reviews.

Quality. Studies show that quality of information can influence perceived helpfulness of eWOM (Cheung 2014; Park and Kim 2008; Robinson et al. 2012). Various components of quality such as relevance, timeliness, accuracy, and comprehensiveness of eWOM message influence its perceived helpfulness. A study by Cheung (2014) found that quality of information has a positive influence on information usefulness.

Volume. Consumers are often presented with a large number of reviews. Researchers have investigated how volume of reviews can influence perceived helpfulness of eWOM communications. In a study by Park and Lee (2008), the results indicated that the impact of the number of reviews on perceived helpfulness of the review information set is stronger for attribute-value reviews (specific, clear, and having reasons for arguments) than simple-recommendation reviews (subjective, emotional, and no support for arguments). Another study conducted by Singh et al. (2016) stated that high volume of eWOM messages can be problematic for consumers due to the fact that too many messages cannot be read by receivers; as a result, good reviews which will be helpful for decision-making may be missed by readers. Thus, it can be seen that number of reviews can influence helpfulness of eWOM in different ways.

5.3.2 Source of eWOM

The receiver perceives the source as credible when the information from it can be trusted (Chaiken 1980). Researchers have found that factors such as ranking of the reviewer (Baek et al. 2012), expertise (Cheng and Ho 2015), trustworthiness (Cheung 2014), and platform type (Jeong and Koo 2015) influence perceived helpfulness of eWOM communications.

Ranking. A study conducted by Baek et al. (2012) using 75,226 online consumer reviews collected from Amazon.com found that reviews are perceived as more helpful when written by a top-ranked reviewer. Using content analysis of 983 customer reviews from restaurant websites, Cheng and Ho (2015) found that eWOM communications are perceived to be more helpful by readers when the reviewer has more followers.

Expertise. Studies observe that there is a relationship between the perceived level of reviewer expertise and eWOM helpfulness (Cheng and Ho 2015; Weathers et al. 2015). Cheng and Ho (2015) found that readers perceive a review as more useful when the reviewer is recognized as having a greater level of expertise.

Trustworthiness. Along with the reviewer's expertise, trustworthiness of the source can determine the perceived helpfulness of information. It is found that trustworthiness of the source positively influences eWOM helpfulness. For example, Cheung (2014) conducted a survey using a sample of 100 respondents and found that trustworthiness of information source has a positive influence on information helpfulness.

Platform type. Consumers may suspect that eWOM communications posted by various reviewers on marketer-generated websites are rewarded and the platform operator has selling intentions. Examples of marketer-generated websites include a brand's website (e.g. Amazon.com), corporate web pages, and commercially linked third-party websites (e.g. Mysimon.com and price.com). Consumer-generated websites are owned and operated by an independent organization or individual in order to impartially assist consumers with making informed decisions by providing and sharing their product and service experiences (e.g. Consumerreports.org, online discussion forum, and personal blogs) (Jeong and Koo 2015). Previous studies have found that platform type can influence the perceived helpfulness of online reviews. Jeong and Koo (2015) based their research on attribution theory, which predicts that if the consumer credits the review about a product or service to its actual performance, the consumer will perceive that the posted review is credible and helpful. By conducting an experiment with 480 participants, they found that objective negative reviews and subjective negative reviews posted on a consumer-generated website will be perceived more helpful than the same reviews posted on a marketer-generated website. Objective positive reviews and subjective positive reviews posted on a consumer-generated website will be rated lower than the same reviews posted on a marketer-generated website in terms of message helpfulness.

5.3.3 Receiver of eWOM

Helpfulness of the same message can be perceived differently by different message receivers. Studies on persuasiveness of eWOM communications have found that the level of consumer involvement and level of expertise can influence perceived helpfulness of eWOM communications (Breazeale 2009; Park and Kim 2008).

Level of involvement. The effect of informativeness of eWOM can be moderated by involvement according to ELM. A study conducted by Park and Lee (2008) found that low-involvement consumers focus on non-content cues such as product popularity and they do not take into consideration the message content. In contrast, high-involvement consumers focus on content of the message (Breazeale 2009).

Level of expertise. A study conducted by Park and Kim (2008) found that consumers' level of expertise influences how they perceive different types of reviews (benefit-centric and attribute-centric) in terms of review helpfulness. The study revealed that for consumers with high expertise, reviews framed as attribute centric were perceived more helpful than reviews framed as benefit centric; in contrast, for consumers with low expertise benefit-centric reviews were perceived to be more helpful than attribute centric.

5.4 Discussion and Concluding Points

The way consumers perceive the persuasiveness of eWOM communications can influence their attitude and purchase intention. As a result, the topic of persuasiveness of eWOM communications has received much attention from scholars (Cheng and Ho 2015; Kim and Gupta 2012; Luo et al. 2015; Park and Lee 2008). Consumers perceive messages to be persuasive if they are perceived helpful and credible. Studies have found that message (Baek et al. 2012; Robinson et al. 2012), source (Cheng and Zhou 2010; Fan and Sun 2012), and receiver characteristics (Luo et al. 2014a, b; O'Reilly and Marx 2011) can influence perceived helpfulness and credibility of the message, hence affecting perceived persuasiveness.

When evaluating helpfulness of eWOM messages, consumers pay more attention to context of the message compared to when they are evaluating credibility of the message. For example, it was found that length of the review, expertise claim, presence of technical information, emotion, and persuasive words can influence helpfulness but not credibility of eWOM. However, factors which are connected to characteristics of message evaluated by others such as overall product rating and recommendation rating are important for determining credibility of eWOM. Nevertheless, some factors such as valence, image, quality, and volume are perceived important for both credibility and helpfulness of eWOM messages.

When evaluating the information source to determine helpfulness of the message, consumers do not take into consideration its reputation, attractiveness, and perceived social relationships. However, these factors are important when they evaluate credibility of eWOM messages. For the message to be perceived as credible and helpful the information source should be perceived as trustworthy and have expertise. Additionally, platform type affects the persuasiveness of eWOM communications.

The review of research found that the same message can have different levels of persuasion depending on receiver characteristics (Cheng and Zhou 2010; Luo et al. 2014a, b). Receiver characteristics affect perceived credibility more than they affect

perceived helpfulness. For example, a receiver's propensity to trust, level of involvement, confirmation with prior beliefs, prior knowledge, and experience with a seller, as well as cultural characteristics, determine eWOM perceived credibility; whereas, helpfulness of eWOM is affected by involvement and expertise. It can be seen that for both helpfulness and credibility consumers' level of involvement determine message evaluation which can be explained using ELM.

Studies have found that product type plays a role in the way people evaluate eWOM messages in terms of helpfulness and credibility (Baek et al. 2012; Weathers et al. 2015). For example, when making a decision about credence goods, credibility of positive eWOM is stronger in comparison with search goods (Tsao and Hsieh 2015). It can be explained by the fact that due to the characteristics of the credence goods consumers need more external information on this type of product and they are not able to judge information about credence goods with objectivity. That is why consumers perceive positive eWOM about credence good more persuasive in comparison with search goods (Tsao and Hsieh 2015). In the case of experience goods, negative messages are perceived as more trustworthy (Pan and Chiou 2011), while for search goods the effect of valence on perceived persuasiveness is limited because consumers can evaluate product features objectively (Purnawirawan et al. 2015; Hao et al. 2010). Also, the effect of positive eWOM is greater for search goods than for experience goods. In the case of negative eWOM, there is no significant difference in its effect for experience and search goods (Hao et al. 2010). Studies explain this difference using attribution theory—consumers are more likely to attribute eWOM of search goods towards the product and attribute eWOM of experience goods to the reviewer (Hao et al. 2010). Some researchers found that for different types of product persuasiveness will depend on tie strength (Pan and Chiou 2011). For example, in the case of credence goods, positive or negative messages are considered persuasive if posted by a person with strong ties. For credence goods, negative messages are perceived more persuasive when posted by a person with a strong social relationship (Pan and Chiou 2011). Table 5.4 below provides a summary of previous findings regarding persuasiveness of eWOM for different types of products:

While most of the studies investigated factors which help consumers evaluate helpfulness and credibility of eWOM communications (Kim and Gupta 2012;

Table 5.4 Role of product type on message persuasiveness

Type of product	Positive eWOM	Negative eWOM
Search	The effect is greater than for experience goods.	The effect is not significant.
Experience	The effect is not significant. In case of strong ties, the message is considered as persuasive.	More persuasive than for search goods. In case of strong ties, the message is considered as persuasive.
Credence	Message is considered as more persuasive than for search goods.	More credible than positive when tie strength is strong.

Adapted from Hao et al. (2010), Pan and Chiou (2011), Purnawirawan et al. (2015), Tsao and Hsieh (2015)

Yin et al. 2014), some studies investigated how social media influences eWOM persuasiveness directly (Hajli 2016; Teng et al. 2014). The results of the studies show that characteristics of social media such as continuing contact, relationships with familiar peers, social media interactivity, and disclosure of individuals' identity improve persuasiveness of eWOM communications.

Summary of Key Points

- Persuasiveness of eWOM messages influences information adoption and purchase intention.
- Consumers perceive messages persuasive when perceived as helpful and credible.
- Helpfulness and credibility of eWOM communications are affected by message, source, and receiver characteristics.
- Factors affecting credibility of eWOM messages include content, recommendation consistency, rating, quality, and volume.
- Expertise, trustworthiness, reputation, attractiveness, perceived social relationships, and platform type influence perceived credibility of information source.
- Receiver characteristics, such as propensity to trust, confirmation with prior beliefs, level of involvement, cultural characteristics, previous experience with seller, and prior knowledge, can influence the perceived credibility of eWOM communications.
- Factors affecting helpfulness of eWOM messages include rating, content, quality, and volume.
- Source characteristics, such as reviewer ranking and number of followers, expertise, trustworthiness, and type of platform, influence perceived helpfulness of eWOM.
- Receiver characteristics such as level of involvement and consumer expertise influence perceived helpfulness of eWOM communications.
- Product type can influence persuasiveness of eWOM communications.

The findings from the studies provide useful suggestions for marketers to develop more effective eWOM marketing communications (Lin et al. 2012). The research illustrates that providing helpful and credible recommendations can be an effective way to increase eWOM persuasiveness and, as a result, purchase probability (Lis 2013).

It is important to provide online sites and communities with rich information, balanced and trustworthy consumer reviews, and opportunities for sharing (O'Reilly and Marx 2011). In order to improve information quality, and hence credibility, platform administrators can provide guidelines to users on how to provide good product reviews, such as which product aspects to consider and include in their

message (Cheung et al. 2009). For example, for a high-priced product and a search good, consumers could be encouraged to write more detailed messages (Baek et al. 2012). Additionally, websites can develop eWOM message forms in which reviewers are asked to write their opinions in a structured way that considers positive and negative points about a product (Willemsen et al. 2011). Retailers can provide standardized review forms for shoppers to complete to make reviews more helpful to readers. So, the reviewer will provide more critical and relevant information because the form would serve as a guide.

Online platform owners can encourage consumers to write more helpful online reviews, which can lead to the success of the online platform (Baek et al. 2012). They should provide consumers with opportunities to include visual information in their eWOM messages for particular types of goods (Lin et al. 2012). Also, to encourage consumers to write credible recommendations, platform providers can install bonus systems to reward users who frequently provide high quality and credible recommendations. Using a rating system for the improvement of trustworthiness can be useful as well (Lis 2013).

The reputation of review writers positively influences perceived credibility of eWOM. When information regarding message source is available, it can help the receiver to skilfully judge senders' consistency and reduce uncertainty. So, managers of digital channels should provide users with a level of functionality that allows them easily to track the message source and view a history of their comments and reviews (Levy and Gvili 2015). They should also enable eWOM receiver evaluation systems of eWOM providers.

From the findings relating to the influence of involvement, providers can introduce different rating systems for low-involvement and high-involvement products. For instance, for low-involvement products they can put the focus on short recommendations and a rating system with just a few criteria (e.g. star icons). For high-involvement products, the focus should rely more on the reviewer's expertise. For instance, reviews by highly qualified reviewers should be labelled so they are easier to notice (Lis 2013).

Sometimes managers of eWOM platforms should edit some eWOM messages, such as those containing foul language and personal attacks. However, managers should not edit emotions contained in messages because it could cause a loss of important information. Therefore, it is important for marketers to provide tools for eWOM senders to express their emotions in a non-offensive manner such as providing emotion icons (Kim and Gupta 2012).

Points for Practitioners

- Platform administrators can provide guidelines for users about how to provide persuasive product reviews.
- Directors of platforms should provide consumers with opportunities to include visual information in their eWOM messages for particular types of goods.

- Consumers should be encouraged to write credible recommendations.
- Users of online platforms should be provided with opportunities to check information about sources of eWOM messages.
- Providers can introduce different rating systems for low-involvement and high-involvement products.
- Managers of eWOM platforms should edit some eWOM messages, such as containing foul language and personal attacks.
- Emotions embedded in eWOM messages should be encouraged.

Most of the existing studies consider written eWOM (Baek et al. 2012; Cheng and Ho 2015; Cheng and Zhou 2010; Cheung et al. 2009; Kim and Gupta 2012). As a result, evaluation of visual eWOM is an under-researched area. Future research could consider the need of visual information for different industries and product categories (e.g. high-value versus low-value products) (Lin et al. 2012). Also, future research can consider how the perception of the message changes once it is presented in visual form. Understanding consumers' visual orientation will help to conduct effective marketing communications.

Some studies investigate the role social media plays in eWOM persuasiveness, using platforms such as SNS, forums, and chatrooms (Cheng and Ho 2015; Hajli 2016; Teng et al. 2014). However, factors influencing persuasiveness of eWOM may vary as a result of differences in technology base, communications methods, and conduct of members on different platforms. Thus, future research exploring and comparing how different types of social media platforms can influence persuasiveness of eWOM communications will allow marketers to develop better strategies for particular online platforms (Ismagilova et al. 2016).

Studies investigating emotions embedded in eWOM messages are limited. These studies investigate only certainty appraisal approach to study the effect of emotions on perceived helpfulness (Ahmad and Laroche 2015; Yin et al. 2014). Future research should consider different approaches to study the effect of emotion on evaluation of eWOM (e.g. fairness, agency appraisal). Also, previous studies do not consider the effect of other variables on the importance of emotions. Further research should investigate how product type, expertise, and consumer involvement can affect the influence of emotions on eWOM evaluation. Additionally, future research can study how emotions embedded in eWOM can help to determine reviewer's rationality, which can affect perceived helpfulness of eWOM. Investigating the impact of emotions on eWOM can help managers to improve attitude towards product and brand, and increase product sales (Ismagilova et al. 2016).

Studies mostly employ quantitative research methods, such as surveys (Cheung et al. 2009; Lis 2013; Luo et al. 2014a, b; Teng et al. 2014) and experiments (Jeong and Koo 2015; Park and Lee 2008; Tsao and Hsieh 2015) to investigate factors influencing persuasiveness of eWOM communications. Future studies can use qualitative research approaches such as interviews and focus groups in order to identify

the more intricate details of factors affecting persuasiveness of eWOM communications (Ismagilova et al. 2016). Even though scholars have considered receivers' differences in evaluating eWOM messages, understanding deeper differences in cognitive thinking and search patterns (global vs local) (Jeong and Koo 2015) would be useful to help marketers understand how consumers evaluate persuasiveness of eWOM in more detail.

Studies of eWOM persuasiveness provide different results regarding tie strength and persuasiveness of eWOM communications (Cheng and Zhou 2010; Koo 2016; Pan and Chiou 2011). Some studies claim that tie strength is important in perceived persuasiveness of the message while other studies state that, unlike in traditional WOM communications, tie strength between the receiver and communicator does not affect persuasiveness of eWOM communications significantly (Cheng and Zhou 2010; Koo 2016). Instead, the receiver puts more weight on homophile of information source (Fan and Sun 2012). Thus, future research is needed to understand how tie strength influences eWOM communications in more detail, which will advance the knowledge on eWOM persuasiveness.

Studies on persuasiveness of eWOM communications are conducted in Australia (Nguyen and Romaniuk 2014), Canada (Moore 2015), China (Cheng and Zhou 2010; Fong and Burton 2006; Guo et al. 2009a; Luo et al. 2015) Finland (Kulmala et al. 2013), Germany (Lis 2013; Ziegele and Weber 2015), Hong Kong (Cheung 2014), Italy (O'Reilly and Marx 2011), Netherlands (Willemssen et al. 2012), Portugal (Abrantes et al. 2013), South Korea (Jeong and Koo 2015; Jin et al. 2010), Taiwan (Cheng and Ho 2015; Chih et al. 2013; Ho and Chien 2010; Pan and Chiou 2011; Tsao and Hsieh 2015), and the USA (Chen et al. 2014; Daugherty and Hoffman 2014; Kim and Gupta 2012; Wu 2013). Current cross-cultural studies find that different cultures produce distinctly different media usage and communication style, which influence consumer behaviour online, thus future cross-cultural studies would be valuable.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Evaluation of visual eWOM is an under-researched area. Future research could consider the need of visual information for different industries and product categories. Also, future research can consider how the perception of the message is changed once it is presented in visual form.
- Future research exploring and comparing the influence of different types of social media platforms on persuasiveness of eWOM communications is needed.
- Future research should consider different approaches to study the effect of emotion on evaluation of eWOM. Additionally, future research should investigate the role of product type, expertise, and consumer involvement on the effect of emotions on eWOM evaluation.

- Future studies can use qualitative research approaches in order to identify the more intricate details of factors affecting persuasiveness of eWOM communications.
- Understanding deeper differences in cognitive thinking and search patterns would be useful to help marketers understand how consumers evaluate persuasiveness of eWOM in more detail.
- Future research should investigate in more detail how tie strength between the receiver and communicator can influence persuasiveness of eWOM.

This chapter looked at factors consumers use to evaluate persuasiveness of eWOM communications. It was found that persuasive eWOM leads to information adoption, change in attitude and purchase intention and as a result, change in sales. Chapter 6 will further discuss the impact eWOM communications have on individuals and companies.

Chapter 6

Impact of eWOM

Studies on the impact of eWOM can be classified into two categories (Pan 2014). First, market-level analysis, where researchers focus on market-level parameters, such as product sales. These studies use panel data from a website in order to investigate the impact of eWOM communications on product sales (Amblee and Bui 2007a; Baek et al. 2014). Second, individual-level analysis, where researchers consider eWOM as a process of personal influence, meaning communications between a sender and a receiver of eWOM can change the receiver's attitude and purchase decision (Baber et al. 2016; Lis 2013). Attitude, purchase intention, sales, information adoption, and information overload are the most investigated consequences of eWOM communications. Hence, exploring the impact of eWOM will advance understanding of consumer behaviour. Thus, the objective of this chapter is to provide a review of existing studies on impact of eWOM communications from both consumer and company perspectives.

This chapter starts with a discussion of the impact of eWOM on information adoption. After this, information overload as a consequence of eWOM is considered. The chapter then moves forward to explore changes in attitude and purchase intention as consequences of eWOM communications. Next, we provide a brief discussion on how eWOM communications can influence sales of products and services. Finally, the chapter is concluded with a discussion of the impact of eWOM communications, providing key points for practitioners, and outlining future research directions.

6.1 Information Adoption

Adoption of eWOM refers to the extent to which individuals accept and use eWOM communications in making purchase decisions (Cheung and Thadani 2012; Lis 2013; Sussman and Siegal 2003). A study conducted by Cheung (2014), collecting data from 100 users of high-traffic forums in Hong Kong, found that eWOM

communications can influence information adoption. Consumer adoption of eWOM can lead to changes in consumers' attitudes and, as a result, affect their purchase decisions. Hence, consumers' decision-making process is significantly affected by received information (Fan et al. 2013).

Researchers have identified a variety of factors that influence adoption of eWOM communications (Aghakhani and Karimi 2013; Chang and Wu 2014; Lis 2013; Shuang 2013; Wang et al. 2015; Yu and Natalia 2013). Figure 6.1 summarizes the relationships between different eWOM characteristics and information adoption, consumer attitude, and purchase decision.

Several studies have shown that eWOM credibility is a basic requirement for eWOM adoption (Chang and Wu 2014; Cheung et al. 2009; Lis 2013). Through online surveys with 634 participants, Lis (2013) found that information credibility affects eWOM adoption. The study showed that publishing credible eWOM can be

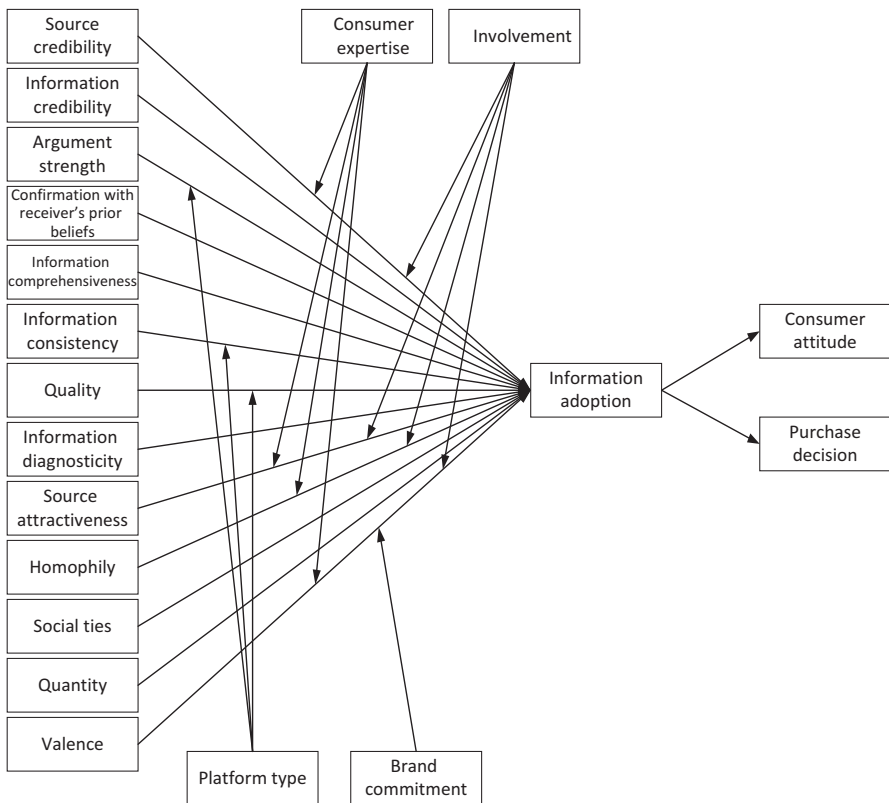


Fig. 6.1 Relationships between eWOM characteristics and information adoption (Sources: Aghakhani and Karimi (2013), Bansal and Voyer (2000), Chang and Wu (2014), Cheung et al. (2008, 2009a), Lis (2013), Luo et al. (2014a, b), Shuang (2013), Wang and Wei (2006), Wang et al. (2015), Yu and Natalia 2013))

an effective way to increase eWOM adoption and, as a result, purchase probability. It was found that the effect of source credibility on eWOM adoption is moderated by the level of consumer involvement. Chang and Wu (2014) investigated the effect of source credibility and information credibility on adoption of negative eWOM; they found there is a positive relationship between perceived information credibility and adoption of negative eWOM. Thus, the receivers of eWOM adopt the recommendation if they perceive that the source is reliable rather than unreliable. Using dual processing theory, a study conducted by Cheung et al. (2009a) found that dimensions of eWOM credibility such as argument strength, source credibility, and confirmation with receiver's prior beliefs influence eWOM adoption.

Some studies find that helpfulness of eWOM affects information adoption (Aghakhani and Karimi 2013; Cheung et al. 2008; Luo et al. 2014a, b; Shuang 2013; Wang et al. 2015; Yu and Natalia 2013). By using the information adoption model (Sussman and Siegal 2003), Cheung et al. (2008) found that eWOM usefulness has a strong and significant impact on consumers' decision to adopt eWOM. Another study conducted by Rabjohn et al. (2008) used a questionnaire of 154 people and found that information adoption within online communities is significantly affected by helpfulness of information. Luo et al. (2014a, b) used data collected from two popular and well-known websites in China (www.jd.com and www.pconline.com). The study observed that two central factors—information comprehensiveness and argument strength—and two peripheral factors—information consistency and quantity—can affect information adoption. Research performed by Shuang (2013) employed collection of text data, network ethnography, and in-depth interviews and found that information quality and source credibility positively affect information adoption.

Using an experiment Wang and Wei (2006) found that the perceived information diagnostic of the product information positively affects acceptance of eWOM messages. Also, the study found that eWOM information that is in line with a consumer's informational beliefs will lead to high acceptance of eWOM recommendations. Wang et al. (2015) acquired the same results that diagnosticity of the product review and the perceived informant credibility will have a positive effect on the acceptance of eWOM.

Aghakhani and Karimi (2013) investigated factors that influence acceptance of explicit (intentionally provided recommendations from one social networking site user to another user) and implicit (profile information that is not directed specifically at another user, which can have a potential unintended recommendation effect) eWOM on SNS using ELM. The study proposed that argument quality (central route) has a positive effect on acceptance of explicit eWOM on Facebook. Source credibility, sender attractiveness, homophily, and social ties, which represent peripheral routes, have a positive effect on acceptance of explicit and implicit eWOM on Facebook. Thus, this study claimed that credibility and usefulness of eWOM affect information adoption. Also, this study proposed that recipient expertise and involvement will have a moderated effect on information acceptance.

Luo et al. (2014a, b) found that the effects of three factors—information argument strength, information consistency, and quantity—on information adoption are

moderated by website attributes. Specifically, argument strength does not affect information adoption on commercial websites, while it significantly affects information adoption on third-party websites. Information consistency and quantity have a significant impact on eWOM adoption on commercial websites but no effect on third-party websites. Chang and Wu (2014) investigated the moderating role of brand commitment and found that it can prevent the receiver of information from accepting a negative eWOM message.

While most of the studies investigated adoption of written eWOM (Cheung et al. 2008; Luo et al. 2014a, b; Shuang 2013), Yu and Natalia (2013) investigated the adoption of visual eWOM on YouTube. The results showed that argument quality of a video review will positively affect eWOM adoption.

6.2 Information Overload

Usually individuals are confronted with large amounts of information from eWOM communications, which can lead to information overload. Information overload appears when the volume of presented information exceeds the capacity of an individual to process it (Park and Lee 2008). Consumers may not feel overloaded just because they encounter a large number of reviews; the content of reviews is different, from simple recommendations to attribute-value information and, as a result, they require different levels of cognitive effort to be processed. Information overload depends on the amount of information, type of information, and format of information. It can result in less satisfaction, less confidence, and more confusion about product choice (Park et al. 2006). Park et al. (2006) considered two facets of reviews: number and type. The results highlighted that information overload appears when a large number of attribute-value reviews are offered.

Luo et al. (2013) proposed that receivers of information will find it difficult to process large quantities of it, which will lead to confusion about the viewpoint of the review and, as a result, will reduce the usefulness of the information (Luo et al. 2013). From an online experiment the results showed that information consistency and information aggregation tools have an interactive effect on eWOM receivers' perceptions of information overload. Also, information overload negatively affect perceived information usefulness.

Most of the studies on information overload considered only PC based web-browsers (Luo et al. 2013). However, as more consumers use mobile devices while searching for information to help their decision-making process, the influence of information overload becomes more noticeable (Furner and Zinko 2016; Park et al. 2006; Park and Lee 2008). A study conducted by Furner and Zinko (2016) investigated the influence of information overload using traditional web-based platforms and mobile product review platforms. By using an experimental service setting (hotel services) the study indicated that information overload influences trust and purchase intention and its effect is more salient in the mobile environment. Findings showed that the extensiveness of information in online reviews increases trust and

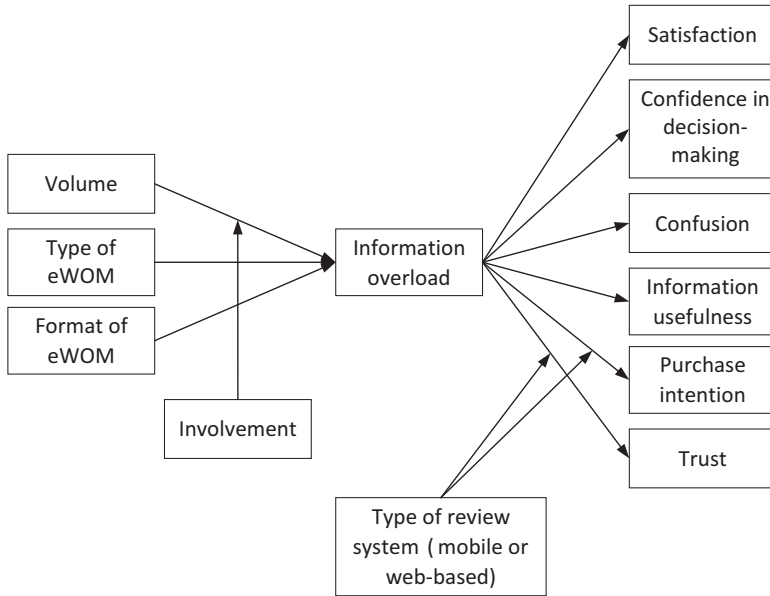


Fig. 6.2 Impact of eWOM on information overload and its effects (Sources: Furner and Zinko (2016), Luo et al. (2013), Park et al. (2006), Park and Lee (2008))

purchase intention until that information load becomes excessive, at which point trust and purchase intention start to go down.

While other studies have shown that information overload can lead to less satisfaction, less confidence, and more confusion about product choice (Luo et al. 2013; Park et al. 2006), a study by Park and Lee (2008) proposed that information overload is not always bad. A large number of online reviews deliver the signal of product popularity with a variety of product information. The study states that consumers with low involvement who focus on perceived popularity can overcome the information overload, which will result in an increase in their purchase intention.

Figure 6.2 below summarizes factors from previous studies and their relationships with information overload.

6.3 Impact of eWOM on Consumer Attitude

Attitude is defined as “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour” (Eagly and Chaiken 2007, p 582). Studies have found that eWOM has an impact on attitude towards product (Chih et al. 2013; Huang and Korfiatis 2015; Ladhari and Michaud 2015; Park 2008), brand (Lee et al. 2009; Sandes and Urdan 2013; Wu and Wang 2011), and website (Lee et al. 2009; Chih et al. 2013), which in turn can affect intention to

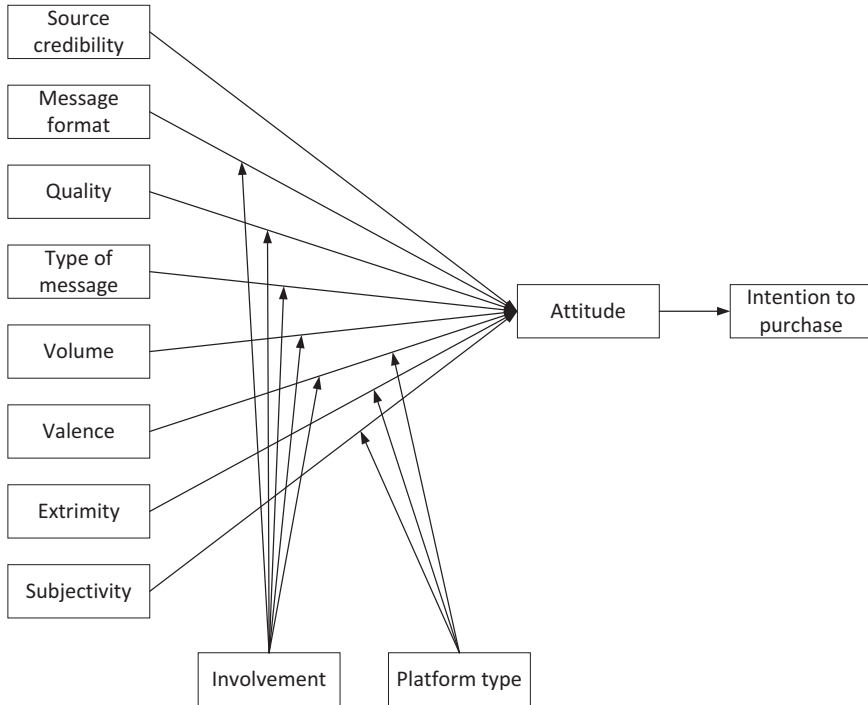


Fig. 6.3 Impact of eWOM on consumer attitude (*Sources:* Jeong and Koo (2015), Ladhari and Michaud (2015), Lee et al. (2008, 2009), Park (2008a, b), Park et al. (2006), Sandes and Urdan (2013), Wu and Wang (2011))

purchase (Cheung and Thadani 2012). For example, using software programs, Huang and Korfiatis (2015) identified that online reviews during a product trial influence formation of product attitude.

It has been found by previous studies that consumers' attitudes can be influenced by different factors. Figure 6.3 summarizes eWOM factors from previous studies found to influence consumer attitude.

Ladhari and Michaud (2015) found that comments generated on Facebook have an impact on attitudes towards a hotel; positive comments generated positive attitudes about the hotel. Park (2008a, b) investigated the effect of cognitive fit on consumers' attitudes towards products. The results revealed that consumers have more favourable attitudes when there is cognitive fit between the review format and information processing strategy. It concludes that consumers with high involvement have more favourable attitudes towards a product with the matrix review format. The effect of cognitive fit on attitude towards a product is greater for consumers with high involvement than for the ones with low involvement.

Other studies investigate eWOM impact on attitude towards brand. Wu and Wang (2011) showed that, in the case of eWOM, brand attitude is affected by source

credibility. Sandes and Urdan (2013), using exploratory and experimental methods, found that exposure to consumers' comments online can affect brand image. For instance, exposure to negative comments connected to a brand can make the image of the brand look worse, whereas exposure to positive comments about a brand can positively affect perceived brand image. Lee et al. (2009) conducted two studies in order to investigate the impact of valence and extremity of consumer online product reviews on attitude towards brand and website. Results from both experiments showed that extremely positive reviews increase attitude toward brand but even a moderate amount of negativity can vanish this effect. More than that, extremely negative reviews have a stronger impact on attitude towards brand comparing to moderately negative or extremely positive online reviews. The results of this study are in line with negativity and extremity effect, found in the impression formation literature (Fiske 1980; Skowronski and Carlston 1987), which predict that people weigh negative or extreme information more heavily than positive or moderate information (Lee et al. 2009).

While previous researchers studied the impact of eWOM on receivers of information (Huang and Korfiatis 2015; Ladhari and Michaud 2015; Lee et al. 2009; Park 2008a, b), Kim et al. (2015) investigated the effect of eWOM on senders. Precisely, they studied the impact of incentivized eWOM on communicator attitude. Using the "saying is believing" theoretical foundation, the study found that by generating and providing biased recommendations the communicator will believe the biased recommendations. Also, the senders will use these biased recommendations to update their attitude. It was shown that valence and number of opportunities to recommend have an impact on the change in attitude. The findings show that attitude of individuals communicating positive (negative) eWOM will become more positive (negative). Also, the more opportunities an individual has to communicate positive (negative) eWOM the more positive (negative) their change in attitude.

Previous studies have considered the moderating role of involvement on consumer attitude (Cheung and Thadani 2012; Lee et al. 2008). For instance, Lee et al. (2008) showed that as involvement increases, the effect of negative eWOM on consumer attitude is higher for high-quality eWOM than for low-quality eWOM. Wu and Wang (2011) found that product involvement has a moderating effect on the relationship between positive eWOM messages and brand attitude. Also, when product involvement is low, even though emotional appeal has a persuasive effect it cannot exceed the effect made by rational appeal. The study conducted by Park et al. (2006) analyzed the impact of online consumer reviews on information processing which depends on levels of involvement. It found that the number of simple recommendations has a positive impact on attitude towards product and purchase intention for low-involvement consumers; however, these recommendations do not change the attitude and intention for high-involvement consumers. For high-involvement consumers, the product attitude and purchase intention initially increase then go down gradually with the number of attribute-value reviews, drawing an inverted U shape.

A study conducted by Jeong and Koo (2015) investigated the moderating effect of online platform on consumer behavior. The findings showed that objective positive and subjective positive online reviews posted on a customer-generated website will be rated

higher in terms of attitudes toward the reviewed product than those same reviews posted on a marketer-generated website. On the other hand, objective negative and subjective negative online reviews posted on a customer-generated website will be rated lower than those same reviews posted on a marketer-generated website.

6.4 Intention to Purchase

Intention to purchase is defined as the probability or willingness to buy a product (Dodds et al. 1991; Lin et al. 2013). Several studies discover statistically significant relationships between intention to buy and actual buying behaviour (Lin et al. 2013). Researchers find that eWOM has an impact on purchase intention (Akyuz 2013; Bartikowski and Walsh 2014; Beneke et al. 2015; Cheung et al. 2009b). For example, Baber et al. (2016), employing heuristic-systematic model of information processing and using data collected from 251 Internet users during the survey, found that eWOM affects receiver's purchase intentions. Using different data collection techniques, such as interviews, classroom observations of young consumers O'Reilly and Marx (2011) showed that credibility of eWOM affects purchase intention and choice.

Hsu et al. (2013) investigated the effect of eWOM on consumers' intention to buy in the context of blogger recommendations. Using data from online survey of 327 blog users in Taiwan the result showed that the informant and recommender roles positively affect consumer's purchase intention. The findings also demonstrated that blogger's reputation can influence consumer attitude and purchase intention. When users perceived a blogger to have high reputation, trust affects their attitude and intention to shop online. In the case of perceived low-reputation bloggers, trust has no effect on intention, while perceived usefulness of recommendation dominates bloggers attitude. Perceived usefulness of recommendation does not affect purchase intention in both types of blogs. Hu et al. (2012) studied microblogging marketing eWOM of the small- and medium-size enterprise on consumer purchase intention. The results showed that in the context of microblogging marketing, eWOM, which has more comments and forwarding, has greater influence on consumer buying intention. Also, when eWOM has objective and factual comments it has greater influence on consumer buying intention. Also, in microblogging marketing, eWOM with negative comments has greater influence on consumer purchase decision.

Jalilvand and Samiei (2012a) examined the effect of eWOM in the automobile industry. The findings showed that eWOM affects brand image and intention to purchase. Jalilvand and Samiei (2012b) considered eWOM communication and its impact on tourist destination choice. Using information collected from 296 tourists who visited Isfahan (Iran) the findings show that eWOM communication significantly affects attitude towards visiting places and intention to travel.

Lee and Pee (2013) proposed that the effect of eWOM should be studied together with the consumer's expectations before he/she reads online reviews. Expectations can be formed by basic product information, such as popularity, price, and seller-provided description. Usually expectations about products are mostly positive,

otherwise individuals would not read reviews about this product. As a result, consumers read reviews not only to find out new product information but also to confirm that their expectations can be fulfilled. This study empirically confirmed positive relationship between expectations and confirmation. For consumers with high expectations, positive and favourable reviews about product can be perceived more favourable while critical review might look less critical. As a result, this study found that a stronger confirmation leads to a stronger purchase intention. This study helped to explain why consumers have different responses to the same reviews. Two consumers reading exactly the same review can have a different reaction on it because they had different expectations (Lee and Pee 2013).

Lin et al. (2012) examined the effect of visual information on consumers' product interest and purchase intention. The results showed that when subjects read eWOM information of search products with pictures they would have greater product interest and purchase intention. These findings are applicable to both for experience and hedonic products.

Some studies investigate the impact of valence of eWOM on consumer's purchase intention. For instance, Floh et al. (2013) showed that purchase intention is affected by the valence intensity of online reviews. The results show an asymmetric effect: a significant increase in purchase intention between medium and strong reviews is found for positive reviews only. Using smartphones as an experimental stimuli and sample of 480 participants, Jeong and Koo (2015) found that positive reviews affect attitude towards and intention to buy the reviews product. Using Facebook network, the study by Ladhari and Michaud (2015) found that valence of comments can affect booking intentions. The more positive comments about hotel are provided, the higher the booking intentions of the hotel will be. The findings of study conducted by Mauri and Minazzi (2013) showed that purchasing intention in hospitality industry is influenced by valence of online reviews. Tsao et al. (2015), and Sparks and Browning (2011) found that review valence has an impact on booking intention. Cheung and Lee (2008) examined how negative online reviews affect consumer online purchase decision using an experiment with a UK watch-selling website. The results showed that eWOM has significant impact on consumer's decision to shop online. Negative reviews can significantly affect emotional trust of consumers and intention to shop from the online vendor. Cheung et al. (2009b) showed that positive eWOM strengthen the connection between consumers' emotional trust and their intention to shop online. Park and Lee (2009b) found that the negativity effect is stronger for eWOM for experience goods rather than for search goods. Empirical results of this study demonstrate that experience goods sustain higher damage from eWOM due to negativity of eWOM information.

Other studies investigated the impact of volume of eWOM on consumer's purchase intention. Lopez and Sicilia (2014) found that the impact of eWOM on decision-making is influenced by the volume of information. The higher number of messages the consumer can access about product, the more influence eWOM has on his/her decision-making. Similar, Liu and Zhou (2012) found that purchase intention increases with the growth volume of consumer reviews. Also, a study conducted by Park et al. (2007) showed that consumers' buying intention goes up together with

the volume of reviews. The high volume of reviews indicates that the product is popular, and it increases intention to buy. Park and Kim (2008) found that type and number of online consumer reviews has a strong effect on the purchase intention of consumers with high expertise in comparison with consumers with low expertise.

Some studies observed that personal characteristics of eWOM receiver can influence impact of eWOM communications on purchase intention (Chen 2011; Christodoulides et al. 2012; Park and Lee 2009a). For example, Chen (2011) investigated how consumers' personality can affect the effect of eWOM. The study found that the extroverted consumers are more willing to communicate with other people during the buying process, thus more possibility of being influenced by the external information. The introverted consumers are more tranquil. They do not like to have much communication with others, thus more cautious in the buying process, less possibility of being influenced by the external information such as comments and advertisements. In other words, the extroverted consumers are more susceptible to the external information, while the introverted consumers attach more importance to the natural quality of the commodity and not likely to be influenced by the external environment. The extroverted consumers are less likely to be influenced by the following aspects: the comments on service influencing the trust in the websites' ability, the comments on the product and price influencing the trust in the websites' honesty and the self-display influencing the trust in the websites' benevolence. The introverted consumers are cautious in their buying decision, so they would attach adequate importance to certain information of the products and comments, such as the feasibility and price of the products.

Christodoulides et al. (2012) investigated the effect of eWOM on consumers of different national cultures (Chinese versus UK consumers) by investigating buying intention after exposure to user comments from product review sites. The results showed that exposure to positively and negatively valenced eWOM affects purchase decision for both UK and Chinese consumers. The study demonstrated that negativity bias affects search and experience products, and it is more relevant for UK respondents rather than for Chinese respondents. Also, the study shows that for experience products Chinese consumers are more affected to recent eWOM comments regardless of their valence, while UK consumers are affected by negative information regardless of the order in which it appears (Christodoulides et al. 2012). The empirical results from study performed by Park and Lee (2009a) revealed that the review usefulness affects purchase intention stronger for Korean customers than for US customers.

The Fig. 6.4 below summarizes factors from previous studies on eWOM communications, which influence consumer intention to purchase.

6.5 Sales

Studies on eWOM agree that eWOM communications have an impact on sales (Baek et al. 2014; Blal and Sturman 2014; Cadario 2014; Zhou and Duan 2015). For example, using datasets from GooglePlay, a study by Hyrynsalmi et al. (2015)

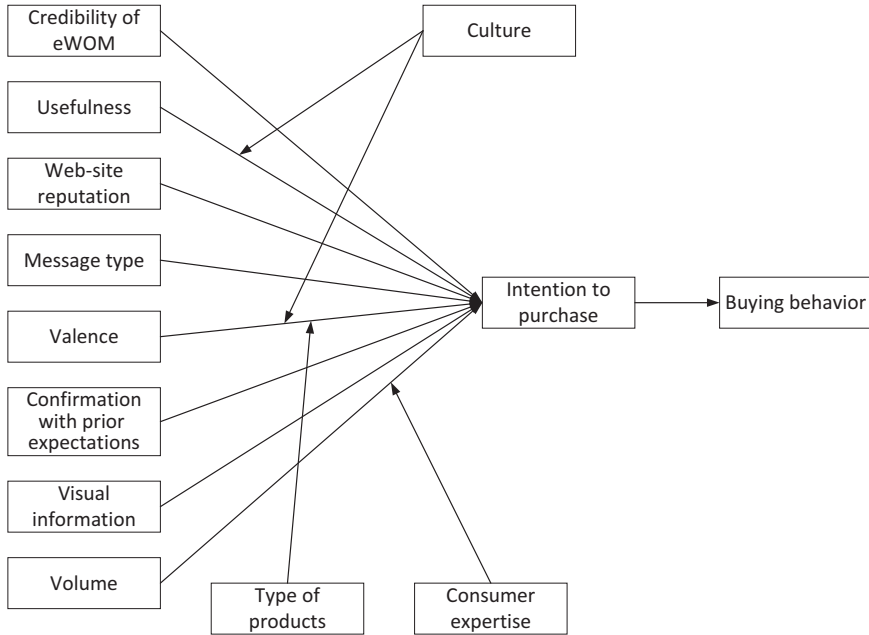


Fig. 6.4 Impact of eWOM on intention to purchase (Sources: Cheung and Lee (2008a, b), Cheung et al. (2009b), Christodoulides et al. (2012), Floh et al. (2013), Hsu et al. (2013), Hu et al. (2012), Jeong and Koo (2015), Ladhari and Michaud (2015), Lee and Pee (2013), Lin et al. (2012), Liu and Zhou (2012), Lopez and Sicilia (2014), Mauri and Minazzi (2013), Park and Kim (2008), Park and Lee (2009a, b), Park et al. (2007), Sparks and Browning (2011), Tsao et al. (2015))

found that eWOM communications influence sales on the mobile application marketplace in the long run. As a result, eWOM can act as a predictor of future sales. Sharma et al. (2011) investigated the effect of eWOM on sales and revenue for digital products such as music albums. The results also showed that eWOM is a reliable predictor of market success. A study by Amblee and Bui (2007a) examined the impact of expert and user reviews on demand for digital goods. After conducting an empirical study of 143 freeware users, the results revealed that digital goods reviewed by experts are likely to be consumed in greater numbers compared to the ones not reviewed by experts; the same applies for digital goods reviewed by users. Furthermore, digital goods with both types of reviews had more total consumption in comparison to those digital goods without both types of reviews. In another study Amblee and Bui (2007b) measured the longitudinal impact of eWOM on the micro-products buying decision. After performing time series analysis of the sale of 121 Amazon Shorts over a period of 5 months the results show that not all reviews affect sales. Shorts with high (low) brand and complementary goods with high (low) reputations are more (less) likely to be reviewed in the future. Also, when a digital microproduct has a high brand and complementary goods reputations it is probable that the addition of a review will have an impact on sales; sales of microproducts

with low brand and complementary goods reputation are unlikely to be affected by the addition of a review.

Some studies have found that the effect of eWOM depends on the cycle stage of product life (Cadario 2014; Wang et al. 2005). Cadario (2014) observed that eWOM is influential in the first phase of a television show's life. However, the impact decreases during the latter part of the show's life. Similarly, after analyzing Taiwan's cellular phone discussion board (www.eprice.com.tw), Wang et al. (2005) found that eWOM influences product sales when in the early stages of product life cycle than later.

While most studies focused on low-involvement products (e.g. books and CD) (Amblee and Bui 2007b; Lis and Horst 2013); some studies concentrated on high-involvement products (e.g. digital cameras, smartphones, laptops) (Bae and Lee 2011; Bartikowski and Walsh 2014; Gu et al. 2012). For example, a study by Gu et al. (2012) investigated the impact of internal and external eWOM on retail sales of cameras from Amazon, which were considered a high-involvement product. The results suggested that external sources of eWOM have a significant impact on sales compared to internal sources.

eWOM leads to more product sales which in turn produces more eWOM and then more product sales. Thus, the positive feedback mechanism shows that eWOM is not only a driving force of consumer purchase but also an outcome of sales. Most studies ignore the dual role of eWOM as a precursor and outcome. The purpose of the study conducted by Duan et al. (2008) was to identify the dynamic interrelationship between eWOM and retail sales. The study found a dual causal relationship and showed that there is a positive feedback mechanism among eWOM and product sales.

A number of previous studies have only considered eWOM from one single website (Amblee and Bui 2007a; Hyrynsalmi et al. 2015; Sharma et al. 2011). Zhou and Duan (2014) found that less evenly distributed eWOM leads to more sales, conditional on the total number of eWOM conversations across websites. Also, more consistent consumers' evaluation between websites promotes online purchase decision. It was found that 100 reviews of 5-star average rating on Amazon affected sales almost six times greater compared to reviewing 50 reviews of five star average rating on Amazon and another 50 reviews of five star average rating on download.com

The review of the literature showed that there are mixed findings regarding which eWOM metrics influence the volume of sales. Generally, researchers use volume and valence when measuring the effect of eWOM on sales. Some studies consider that volume not valence of eWOM affects sales (Amblee and Bui 2007b; Baek et al. 2014; Davis and Khazanchi 2007; Kim et al. 2013). For example, Amblee and Bui's (2007b) aforementioned study showed that the number of customer reviews from Amazon shorts and the author rating for the shorts were connected with sales of Amazon shorts. Another study by Baek et al. (2014) examined the relationship between Tweets and box office revenue and found that box office revenue is proportional to the total volume of Tweets. Davis and Khazanchi (2007) found that the mere existence of eWOM will result in an increase in awareness and a positive or negative attitude towards a product which will result in a change of sales. The findings showed that there is a significant increase in the number of products sold

following the addition of eWOM. Also, products with a greater number of customer review comments had a higher number of sales. Nevertheless, higher average customer review rating was not connected with more product sales. Kim et al.'s (2013) investigation found that volume of eWOM but not the valence rating affects box office revenue in the US domestic market and international markets. The reason for this might be that Internet users' movie consumption behaviour does not need serious decision-making. Also, Duan et al. (2008) examined that eWOM valence does not directly affect revenue. They showed that higher eWOM valence indirectly results in increasing box office revenue by generating higher volumes of eWOM. In the case of movies, the results of the study conducted by Liu et al. (2010) revealed that valence of eWOM does not correlate with product sales. Wu (2012) using data from Tweets, Amazon, and Google blog search found that volume of Tweets has a significant positive effect on book sales.

However other studies state that volume has no impact on sales, but valence does (Blal and Sturman 2014; Floyd et al. 2014; Lu et al. 2013; Rui et al. 2013; Zhu and Zhang 2006). Blal and Sturman (2014) investigated how eWOM can affect a hotel's revenue per available room. Using data from 39 hotels in London over a 26 week period, the results showed that eWOM valence is positively associated with sales performance. While all hotels benefit from positive reviews, the importance of high scores is greater for higher graded hotels. Floyd et al. (2014) used meta-analysis and found that review valence has more influence on sales elasticity than volume of reviews. Rui et al.'s (2013) study found that valence of eWOM influences sales. The empirical results suggest that positive eWOM makes product sales go up and negative eWOM decreases sales. Zhu and Zhang (2006) found that the average rating of reviews significantly affect sales of video games. They found that one point increase in the valence leads to a four point increase in sales. Lu et al. (2013) showed that valence of online reviews significantly affects online hotel bookings.

Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) investigated that positive consumer reviews can increase sales while negative reviews can decrease sales. Nevertheless, Berger et al. (2010) stated that negative reviews can in fact increase sales; they reasoned that reviewed products have a greater chance to be considered by consumers compared to products which have not been reviewed.

The purpose of the study conducted by Bae and Lee (2011) was to investigate the gender difference on the effect of online consumer reviews on consumers' purchase intention. After using an experiment with 40 people involved, the results demonstrated that the effect of online consumer reviews on purchase intention is stronger for females than males. Also, this study found that purchase intention of consumers is more influenced by a negative review than by a positive review and this negativity effect is stronger for females than for males. The reason for this is that female consumers perceive negative reviews as more diagnostic and useful than positive ones. Also, negative reviews have a stronger effect on a decrease of purchase intention for females than males (Bae and Lee 2011). A study performed by Zhang et al. (2014) found that inconsistent online reviews can strengthen the link between emotional trust and purchase intention. Also, it was concluded that female consumers are more responsive to a mix of positive and negative reviews. These findings can help online

sellers to effectively use online consumer reviews to engage females in online shopping (Bae and Lee 2011).

Studies show inconsistent relationship between eWOM valence and consumer's purchase intention or product sales. Some studies show positive relationship between eWOM and valence (Charlett et al. 1995), which means that the impact of positive eWOM influences sales more than negative eWOM. In contrast, other studies find negative relationships (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006), which means that negative eWOM influences sales more than positive eWOM. However, there are other studies (Duan et al. 2008; Liu 2006), which state that there is no significant relationship between valence and sales. Other studies have mixed findings, which depend on type of products (Hao et al. 2010). For example, a study by Hao et al. (2010), using an experiment, found that the effect of positive review is greater in the context of search goods comparing to experience goods. The effect of negative reviews has no significant difference between these two types of goods. Also, the impact difference between negative reviews and positive reviews is greater for experience products and for search products.

Other studies found that both volume and valence affect sales (Cui and Guo 2009; Park et al. 2012). The study by Cui and Guo (2009) using data collected from amazon.com in order to examine the effect of online consumer reviews on the sales of new products. The results demonstrated that negative consumer reviews affect new product sales more than positive review. Volume of consumer reviews affects new product sales in the later stage of product life cycle. Etzion and Awad (2007) found that volume positively affect sales of products which valence is positive, while volume has a negative effects on sales of products with negative valence. Also, the results show that consumers substitute the use of volume and valence when evaluating online review data. For example, if the valence metrics do not provide sufficient information to differentiate competing products, consumer will take into consideration volume metric. Park et al. (2012) examined how eWOM valence and volume at retailer and third-party review website influence sales. Using data collected from Amazon, the results illustrated that third-party hosted volume and valence affect sales on retailer's website significant while retailer-hosted eWOM valence does not affect it. Also, the results showed that eWOM valence at both kinds of website interacts with its own volume in as positive way, which suggest complementary connection between them.

Even though these studies improved understanding of the effect of eWOM on sales, they lead to the question why is there a difference in the reported studies of the two key metrics used to measure eWOM, volume and valence? You et al. (2015) tried to answer this question by conducting a meta-analysis of 51 studies. The study showed that mixed findings from previous studies can be caused by different factors such as product characteristics (product durability, product trialability, product observability), industry characteristics (industry growth, competition), and platform characteristics (platform expertise and platform trustworthiness). The findings indicated that volume and valence elasticities are higher for privately consumed, low-trialability goods which operate in less competitive industries and whose reviews are presented in independent review website. Also, volume elasticities are higher for

lasting goods and for reviews on specialized reviews site, while valence elasticities are greater for community-based sites. This study addressed conflict results, which appeared in previous research. This study identified differences between drivers of volume and valence elasticities that should be considered by researchers and marketers. As a result, managers need to account for product and industry related factors in order to understand the impact of eWOM volume and valence on sales.

The box below provides a real-life example of how eWOM communications can boost sales:

A three wolf moon T-shirt became one of the most popular items sold by online retailer Amazon in 2009. Sales of these T-shirts went up by 2300% after a spate of ironic reviews went viral. The first reviewer gave the T-shirt five stars, writing a funny comment. That message provoked hundreds of others consumers to post frivolous reviews, turning the page into an Internet phenomenon. Amazon's senior manager of community content, Russell Dicker, reported that the T-shirt was the top selling item in their clothing store (Emery 2009).

Another example illustrates how eWOM communications can lead to the dramatic drop in sales:

Two Domino's Pizza employees filmed themselves preparing food for delivery while putting cheese up their noses, nasal mucus on the sandwiches, and violating other health-code standards and posted the video on YouTube. Two days later, the video had more than one million views which led to a high number of negative comments about the company all over Internet platforms (Clifford 2009). It took several days for Dominos to respond to this video. As a result of the video sales dropped by \$14.5 million and did not recover until the end of the next quarter (Dumond 2011).

Figure 6.5 summarizes the role of eWOM factors from previous studies on influencing sales.

Findings regarding the effect of eWOM on information adoption, attitude, purchase intention, information overload, and sales are summarized in Table 6.1.

6.6 Discussion and Concluding Points

eWOM communications significantly influence consumer behaviour. The impact of eWOM communications on consumers and companies received much attention from scholars. Studies found that impact of eWOM communications on consumers

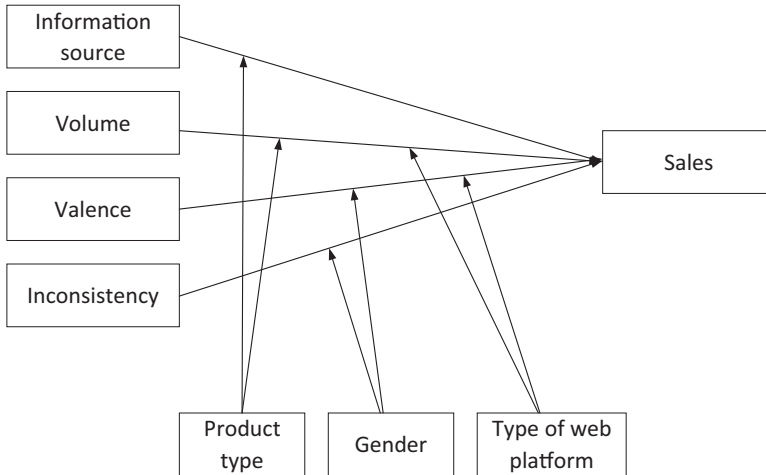


Fig. 6.5. eWOM factors affecting sales (Sources: Amblee and Bui (2007b), Bae and Lee (2011), Baek et al. (2014), Berger et al. (2010), Blal and Sturman (2014), Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006), Cui and Guo (2009), Davis and Khazanchi (2007), Etzion and Awad (2007), Floyd et al. (2014), Hao et al. (2010), Kim et al. (2013), Lu et al. (2013), Park et al. (2012), Rui et al. (2013), Wu (2012), Zhang et al. (2014), Zhu and Zhang (2006))

are: information adoption (Aghakhani and Karimi 2013; Cheung et al. 2008), information overload (Park and Lee 2008; Luo et al. 2013), change in attitude (Bartikowski and Walsh 2014; Chih et al. 2013), and purchase intention (Akyuz 2013; Bartikowski and Walsh 2014). The findings from previous studies show that useful and credible information affect adoption of eWOM. However, high number of eWOM messages and its content can lead to information overload. Information adoption can lead to change in attitude. Researchers found that eWOM communications can affect changing in attitude towards a product and services (Chih et al. 2013; Huang and Korfiatis 2015; Ladhari and Michaud 2015; Park 2008a, b), brand (Lee et al. 2009; Sandes and Urdan 2013; Wu and Wang 2011) and website (Lee et al. 2009; Chih et al. 2013). Negative eWOM has stronger impact on attitude in comparison to positive eWOM. Change in attitude can result in purchase intention (Cheung and Thadani 2012).

The impact of eWOM communications on companies results in sales. It is found that valence and volume of eWOM communications can influence sales (Duan et al. 2008; Flanagan et al. 2014). Empirical assessments of eWOM consider its impact on television viewership (Cadario 2014), sales of products (Wu 2012; Hao et al. 2010), hotel bookings (Blal and Sturman 2014; Lu et al. 2013), and box office revenue (Baek et al. 2014; Kim et al. 2013).

Studies found that the impact of eWOM can be moderated by the level of involvement (Lee et al. 2008; Cheung and Thadani 2012; Wu and Wang 2011), expertise (Park and Kim 2008), culture (Christodoulides et al. 2012; Park and Lee 2009a), gender (Pfeffer et al. 2014; Bae and Lee 2011), brand commitment (Chang and Wu

Table 6.1 Effect of eWOM

Effect of eWOM	Citations	Key findings	Relevance	Limitations/future research
Adoption of information	Aghakhani and Karimi (2013), Cheung et al. (2008, 2009), Lee and Yi (2010), Lis (2013), Luo et al. (2014a, b), Qiu and Li (2010), Rabjohn et al. (2008), Shuang (2013), Teng et al. (2014), Wang and Wei (2006), Wang et al. (2015), Yu and Natalia (2013)	Usefulness and credibility of eWOM affect eWOM adoption.	Marketers should encourage and help individuals to provide useful and credible information.	Most of the studies conducted in Hong-Kong, China, Germany and South Korea, which can limit the generalizability of these results for other countries (e.g. UK).
Attitude	Bartikowski and Walsh (2014), Chih et al. (2013), Henke (2013), Hsu et al. (2013), Huang and Korfiatis (2015), Jeong and Koo (2015), Kim et al. (2015), Ladhari and Michaud (2015), Lee et al. (2008, 2009), Meuter et al. (2013), Park (2008a, b), Sandes and Urdan (2013), Wu and Wang (2011)	eWOM can shape consumer's attitude towards product, brand, and website. Negative eWOM has stronger impact on attitude in comparison to positive eWOM.	Marketers should direct their efforts toward preventing consumers from spreading negative reviews about their products and brands and encouraging them to spread positive reviews.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One product or service is only considered in most of the studies. 2. Students are used as a sample. 3. Lack of the research in the UK. 4. Future research examining why negative or extreme reviews about a brand carry more weight than positive or moderate reviews will contribute to the eWOM literature.

(continued)

Table 6.1 (continued)

Effect of eWOM	Citations	Key findings	Relevance	Limitations/future research
Intention to purchase	<p>Akyuz (2013), Bartikowski and Walsh (2014), Baber et al. (2016), Beneke et al. (2015), Chen (2011), Cheung et al. (2009b), Cheung (2014), Chih et al. (2013), Christodoulides et al. (2012), Floh et al. (2013), Hsu et al. (2013), Hu et al. (2012), Huang et al. (2013), Jalilvand and Samiei (2012a, b), Jalilvand et al. (2013), Jeong and Koo (2015), Kareklas et al. (2015), Kawakami et al. (2013), Ladhari and Michaud (2015), Lee and Pee (2013), Lee et al. (2013a, b), Lee (2011), Lerrthairakul and Panjakajornsak (2014), Li et al. (2014), Liao and Yang (2012), Lin et al. (2012), Litvin et al. (2008), Liu and Zhou (2012), Lopez and Sicilia (2014), Mauri and Minazzi (2013), Meuter et al. (2013), Nakajima et al. (2011), Okada and Yamamoto (2009), Okada (2011), O'Reilly and Marx (2011), Park et al. (2007, 2011), Park and Lee (2009a, b), See-To and Ho (2014), Sha and Xie (2010), Sotiriadis and van Zyl (2013), Sparks and Browning (2011), Tsao and Hsieh (2015), Tsao et al. (2015), Wu et al. (2014), Xiaofen and Yiling (2009), Xie et al. (2011), Xu et al. (2010), Xue and Zhou (2011), Yang et al. (2015), Yu and Natalia (2013), Zhang et al. (2014), Ziegele and Weber (2015)</p>	<p>eWOM has an impact on consumer's intention to purchase, particularly eWOM volume and valence.</p>	<p>Marketers should constantly manage customer opinions, no matter whether they are positive or negative. Findings suggest that firms should encourage higher poster rates when positive reviews prevail, but discourage postings when the comments are negative.</p>	<p>1. Future research should explore the impact of negative eWOM on consumer purchase decision-making online and identify effective strategies for companies to defend themselves.</p> <p>2. Future research should investigate how valence and valence intensity is mediated by personal differences (e.g. susceptibility to interpersonal influence and self-esteem).</p> <p>3. Lack of studies conducted in the UK. Future research should tend to this.</p>

<p>Sales</p>	<p>Amblee and Bui (2007a, b), Baek et al. (2014), Blal and Sturman (2014), Cadario (2014), Cui and Guo (2009), Davis and Khazanchi (2007), Dhar and Chang (2009), Duan et al. (2008), Flanagan et al. (2014), Floyd et al. (2014), Gu et al. (2012), Ho and PHC (2010), Hu et al. (2007), Hyrynsalmi et al. (2015), Jabr and Zheng (2014), Junggho and Byung-Do (2013), Kim et al. (2013), Liu et al. (2010), Lu et al. (2013), Meng et al. (2011), Morales-Arroyo and Pandey (2009, 2010), Park et al. (2012), Rui et al. (2010, 2013), Sharma et al. (2011), Wang et al. (2005), Wu (2012), Ye et al. (2009), You et al. (2015), Zhou and Duan (2014, 2015), Zhu and Zhang (2006)</p>	<p>eWOM (volume and valence) has an effect on sales. eWOM is salient at the early stage of a product's life cycle.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Company's online marketing strategies should depend on the product's life cycle. As a result, marketers will benefit from allocating resources to managing eWOM in the early stage of product's life cycle. 2. Due to the fact that potential consumers rely on great number of positive online eWOM as support for their purchase decision, retailers should encourage and assist consumers to provide positive eWOM. 3. Using eWOM as a predictor of future sales can help marketers to forecast sales more accurately. It allows the retailer to manage operations better and, as a result, to improve profit margin 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Most studies consider only one online platform (e.g. Twitter, Amazon). 2. Most researchers study just certain types of products and service. 3. Studies consider the impact of only positive or negative eWOM on sales. Future research can consider neutral eWOM. 4. Future research should try to understand how product characteristics can influence the effect of eWOM on sales. 5. Future research can compare the effect of different sources of eWOM and how they interact.
<p>Information overload</p>	<p>Furner and Zinko (2016), Luo et al. (2013), Park et al. (2006), Park and Lee (2008)</p>	<p>Information overload depends on the amount of information, type of information and format of information. It can result in less satisfaction, less confidence, and more confusion about product choice.</p>	<p>To reduce information overload companies can:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Show a summary of information that provides the number of reviews and how good the overall evaluation is; 2. Show only the first line of the reviews and hide the remaining lines of each review. 	<p>Studies investigated information overload only in context of written eWOM. Future research should study information overload in the context of visual eWOM.</p>

2014), personality characteristics (Chen 2011), and website attributes (Jeong and Koo 2015; Luo et al. 2014a, b). Knowing moderators of the impact of eWOM can help marketers to advance their understanding how eWOM might influence consumer's behaviour.

It is essential to know the impact of eWOM communications on consumers and companies. By identifying responses to eWOM communications, it will help researchers to advance the knowledge and understanding of consumer behaviour. Also, it can help marketers to develop strategies to control consumer behaviour and influence consumers purchase decisions, which will result in sales. Also, studies found that eWOM can be a predictor of sales (Sharma et al. 2011; Hyrynsalmi et al. 2015), which can help the marketers to forecast sales more accurately and which allows the retailer to manage operations better and as a result improve profit margin (Gu et al. 2012).

Summary of Key Points

- eWOM communications can lead to information adoption, which affects change in attitude and purchase intention.
- The findings show that useful and credible information can affect adoption of eWOM information.
- eWOM communications can influence consumer attitude towards a product/service, brand, and website.
- Large numbers of eWOM messages and their content can lead to information overload, which would negatively influence information adoption.
- Characteristics of eWOM communications such as volume and valence influence level of sales.
- The impact of eWOM communications can be moderated by the level of involvement, expertise, culture, gender, brand commitment, personality characteristics, and website attributes.

Studying the effect of eWOM can be beneficial for companies. The findings show that useful and credible communications affect adoption of eWOM information (Aghakhani and Karimi 2013; Chang and Wu 2014). As a result, marketers should encourage and help individuals to provide information, which will be perceived as useful and credible (please see Sect. 5.4 for more details). Due to the fact that consumers accept eWOM and use it in their decision-making process it is important for the companies to understand the mechanism for dealing with negative eWOM (Davis and Khazanchi 2007). Based on the results of the previous studies it can be advised that managers' efforts should be directed toward preventing consumers from spreading negative reviews about their products and brands and encouraging them to spread positive reviews (Lee et al. 2009). Companies should encourage consumers to share their dissatisfaction with products and services directly to

themselves through various communication channels and respond quickly to those complaints (Chiou and Cheng 2003; Lee et al. 2009). The results of the studies show that this kind of web care will positively influence the brand evaluation of consumers who have been exposed to negative eWOM (Van Noort and Willemsen 2011). Also, if a company can get someone who wrote a negative review to update it with a positive review after the issues has been solved, it can be very beneficial for the business. It gives a company the opportunity to show to its future customers how the company can handle a bad situation. Thus, it can lead to the increase in sales. Unresolved complaints motivate dissatisfied consumers to post negative eWOM which can stop potential consumers from purchase.

Due to the fact that potential consumers rely on great number of positive online eWOM as support for their purchase decision, companies should encourage individuals who have pleasant product experience to recommend the product to other consumers on the seller's website and other third-party website (e.g. [yelp.com](http://www.yelp.com)). Companies can offer some economic incentives such as money off on their future purchase, free delivery or web points. Also, companies could send an email after a consumer has purchased an item to ask for a review (for more information on how to motivate consumers to engage in eWOM communications please see Sect. 4.4) Nevertheless, it is crucial that retailers encourage positive eWOM without engaging in unethical and deceptive practices, such as eWOM manipulation. Such unethical behaviour can lead to reduction in consumers trust and is likely to prompt a negative reaction in the marketplace (Floyd et al. 2014).

Company's online marketing strategies should depend on the products' life cycle. Studies found that eWOM is salient at the beginning of a product's life cycle. As a result, marketers will benefit from allocating resources to managing eWOM in an early stage of product's life cycle (Cadario 2014).

In order to help consumer to avoid information overload, online businesses can use some tools. For example, they can show a summary of information that provides the number of reviews and how good the overall evaluation is. Another method is used to reduce information overload is to show only the first line of the reviews and hide the remaining lines of each review (Park and Lee 2008).

Points for Practitioners

- Marketers should encourage and help individuals to provide information perceived as useful and credible.
- Managers' efforts should be directed toward preventing consumers from spreading negative reviews about their products and brands and encouraging them to spread positive reviews.
- Companies should encourage consumers to share their dissatisfaction about products and services with them directly through various communication channels and respond quickly to those complaints.

- If the company can handle negative eWOM correctly, it can lead to an increase in sales.
- Unresolved complaints motivate dissatisfied consumers to post negative eWOM which can stop potential consumers from purchase.
- Companies should encourage positive eWOM without engaging in unethical and deceptive practices.
- Allocating resources to managing eWOM should depend on products' life cycle stage.

Studies have mixed results about the impact of volume and valence on sales (Baek et al. 2014; Blal and Sturman 2014; Cui and Guo 2009; Davis and Khazanchi 2007; Duan et al. 2008; Etzion and Awad 2007). Future research should identify under which conditions eWOM volume can predict sales better and under which conditions eWOM valence can be used as a sales predictor (Lang 2013). Even though studies try to investigate the relationship between sales and eWOM they still remain unclear. Future research should identify under which circumstances positive and negative eWOM impact sales more. It will help marketers to forecast sales more precisely and allocate resources accordingly. Moreover, further studies should continue to explore the impact of negative eWOM on consumer purchase decision-making online and identify effective strategies which companies can use in order to response to negative eWOM (Van Noort and Willemsen 2011). Also, research considered an impact of only positive or negative eWOM on buying behaviour (Blal and Sturman 2014; Cui and Guo 2009; Davis and Khazanchi 2007). Future research can consider the impact of neutral eWOM. It can help marketers to understand the influence of eWOM on attitude and sales in more details. Additionally, studies did not consider how effect of valence and valence intensity is moderated by personal differences. Future research should consider susceptibility to interpersonal influence and self-esteem (Floh et al. 2013).

Studies consider the influence of eWOM volume and valence from one online platform (Amblee and Biu 2007a; Baek et al. 2014; Cui and Guo 2009; Etzion and Awad 2007; Floyd et al. 2014). Nevertheless, consumers can be influenced by other eWOM sources or media. Future research can compare the effect of different sources of eWOM and how the effect of one source can be moderated by another (Wu 2012). Nowadays products are interconnected online, as a result, their lifecycles are more intertwined. These cycles are influenced not only by corresponding eWOM but also by the search and recommendation tools provided. So, future research could study mutual progression of competing products during their life cycles under the influence of searchers and recommendations (Jabr and Zheng 2014). Also, the dynamic nature of eWOM and the availability of some untraceable channels (e.g. messaging service, emails) present a major challenge in estimating the collective impact of all eWOM sources on sales (Morales-Arroyo and Pandey 2009). Future research should investigate this issue.

Studies focused on similar sets of products, such as books and electronics (Amblee and Bui 2007a; Bae and Lee 2011; Floh et al. 2013; Gu et al. 2012). Future research can study the influence of eWOM using a range of products and services that vary in terms of price and perceived risk (Lee et al. 2009).

Most of studies considered the impact of eWOM only on information receivers (Baber et al. 2016; Bae and Lee 2011; Cheung 2014; Flanagan et al. 2014; Floh et al. 2013; Henke 2013; Ho and PHC 2010; Hsu et al. 2013). Future research should study the impact of eWOM on sender, which will allow the companies to develop new proactive strategies to enhance online communications about the services or products.

Studies on the impact of eWOM communications were conducted in Australia (Cheung 2014; Sparks and Browning 2011), Hong Kong (Cheung et al. 2009b; Rabjohn et al. 2008), South Korea (Jeong and Koo 2015; Lee and Pee 2013), China (Christodoulides et al. 2012; Hu et al. 2012), Taiwan (Chih et al. 2013; Hsu et al. 2013), France (Bartikowski and Walsh 2014; Henke 2013), USA (Kareklas et al. 2015; Kim et al. 2015), Canada (Ladhari and Michaud 2015), Brazil (Sandes and Urdan 2013), South Africa (Beneke et al. 2015), Iran (Jalilvand and Samiei 2012a, b; Jalilvand et al. 2013), Spain (Lopez and Sicilia 2014), Italy (Mauri and Minazzi 2013), Japan (Nakajima et al. 2011; Okada 2011), Thailand (Lerrthairakul and Panjakajornsak 2014), and Greece (Sotiriadis and van Zyl 2013). It can limit the application of the results for consumer from other countries due to social and cultural differences.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Identify under which conditions eWOM volume can predict sales better and under which conditions eWOM valence can be used as a sales predictor.
- Identify under which circumstances positive and negative eWOM impact sales more.
- Further studies should continue to explore the impact of negative eWOM on consumer purchase decision-making online and identify effective strategies which companies can use in order to respond to negative eWOM.
- Consider the impact of neutral eWOM on buying behaviour.
- Investigate how the effect of valence and valence intensity is moderated by consumers personal differences (consider susceptibility to interpersonal influence and self-esteem).
- Compare the effect of different sources of eWOM and how the effect of one source can be moderated by another.
- Study the influence of eWOM using a range of products and services that vary in terms of price and perceived risk.
- Studying the impact of eWOM communications on eWOM senders will be beneficial for future research.

This chapter presented the impact of eWOM communications on consumers and companies. Knowing the impact of eWOM communications will help researchers to advance knowledge and understanding of consumer behaviour. Chapter 7 discusses the importance and ways companies can manage eWOM communications.

Chapter 7

Managing eWOM

The shift of traditional WOM to the Internet environment introduced new opportunities for companies to reach raw data in colossal quantities. eWOM communications (e.g. tweets, online reviews, and blogs) became a source of “Big Data” of real consumer sharing behaviour (Berger 2014; Dirsehan 2015). Users embrace online platforms and eWOM to make their message heard and to influence outcomes (Kietzmann et al. 2011). As eWOM communications are ranked the most important information source during consumers’ purchase decisions, it is crucial for companies to manage them. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the techniques available to manage eWOM communications.

This chapter starts by explaining why it is important to pay attention to eWOM communications, and then considers the proposed ways to respond to eWOM. After this, techniques for capturing and analyzing eWOM communications are outlined. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of key points, recommendations for future research, and implications for marketing practitioners.

7.1 Paying Attention to eWOM

eWOM communications, which are used by consumers as an opportunity to share their experiences with others, can contain very valuable information for companies. For example, eWOM can be used by companies to improve and develop their products and services (Plume et al. 2016; van Noort et al. 2014; Wei and Ke 2011; Willemsen et al. 2013). Also, by paying attention to eWOM companies can prioritize their resources. For instance, using a volume perspective of eWOM messages, firms could collect information from people who have expressed negative eWOM about their products/services and people who have expressed positive eWOM, and then categorize their complaints to see the type and level of problems. The issues with the highest number complaining proportion are then considered the most urgent to solve (Wei and Ke 2011).

The box below provides a real-life example of paying attention to eWOM communications and its consequences:

High street retailer Gap introduced a new logo in 2010. The original Gap logo, showing the word Gap in capital letters inside a dark blue square, was replaced with a white square encasing a small blue square over the letter “p” in “Gap”. This change generated a public protest, which resulted in more than 2000 comments on Facebook, criticizing the decision to change the well-known logo. Additionally, a twitter account set up in protest of the new logo reached 5000 followers. Taking the comments into account the company decided to scrap the expensive new logo and go back to the old one (Halliday 2010). In a statement posted on the Gap website, president of Gap Brand Marka Hansen stated that the company’s customers always come first: “We’ve been listening to and watching all of the comments this past week. We heard them say over and over again they are passionate about our blue box logo, and they want it back. So we’ve made the decision to do just that—we will bring it back across all channels” (BBC 2010).

It is essential for companies to pay attention to eWOM communications both on their own website and on other communication platforms (Kietzmann and Canhoto 2013). It has been found that most eWOM communications take place outside a company’s website (Fisher 2009). The choice of communication channel is influenced by people’s perceived ease of access to a competent contact person, the company’s expected ability to deal with feedback proficiently, and the degree of experience and comfort with a platform (Gelbrich and Roschk 2010; Johnston 2001; Kietzmann and Canhoto 2013; Stauss 2002). The way companies respond to eWOM communications is critical because the degree of satisfaction with the firm’s response influences intention to repeat the purchases and share positive eWOM (Gelbrich and Roschk 2010; Stauss 2002).

7.2 eWOM Response Strategies

The Internet has enabled consumers to express their complaints and negative experiences to a multitude of people with reduced time and cost. Negative eWOM can lead to a negative perception of the brand or company (van Noort and Willemsen 2011). As a result, it requires immediate detection and intervention (Malthouse 2007). Due to the fact that companies have limited control over eWOM, and because of their fear of the power of negative eWOM, many companies respond to eWOM communications to influence impact. Responding to eWOM is also known as webcare (Willemsen 2013).

Webcare is defined as “the act of engaging in online interactions with (complaining) consumers, by actively searching the web to address consumer feedback (e.g., questions, concerns and complaints)” (van Noort and Willemsen 2011, p 133). The aim of webcare is to the company’s evaluation of complaining customers and all those individuals who have been exposed to the message (van Noort and Willemsen 2011; van Noort et al. 2014; Willemsen 2013). Evidence from previous studies suggests that webcare can stimulate positive responses in consumers after they have been faced with negative eWOM (Lee and Song 2010; Kerkhof et al. 2010; van Noort and Willemsen 2011).

Companies have to devise a webcare strategy. Researchers distinguish between reactive and proactive webcare strategies (Kohler et al. 2011; van Noort and Willemsen 2011; van Noort et al. 2014). In the case of a proactive webcare strategy the company responds unsolicited to eWOM communications. In contrast, when adopting a reactive webcare approach a company provides a response only if it is requested in the eWOM message (van Noort and Willemsen 2011). A study conducted by Kohler et al. (2011) compared these two types of webcare in the service context and concluded that online agents should not just react to questions, rather they should proactively initiate and maintain interactions with customers.

When companies respond to consumers’ online requests to solve issues in a timely manner it can show that the company is concerned about customers and pays attention to problems with their product/service (Hong and Lee 2005; van Laer and de Ruyter 2010; van Noort and Willemsen 2011). A number of studies have shown that webcare is an effective marketing tool which can positively influence potential consumers exposed to negative eWOM communications posted by others (Lee and Cranage 2012; van Noort and Willemsen 2011; van Noort et al. 2013, 2014). For example, a study conducted by van Noort and Willemsen (2011) demonstrated that consumers who encountered negative eWOM communication about a car brand on an online forum evaluated the company more positively when the company responded to this negative eWOM message.

The type of webcare the company should choose can depend on the online platform. Companies should carefully use proactive webcare on consumer-generated platforms (Chiou and Cheng 2003; Deighton and Kornfeld 2009). When intervening in conversations taking place on consumer-generated platforms the company can be considered intrusive which can result in negative evaluation of the company by consumers. However, consumers who post eWOM messages on company-generated platforms accept that the platform is being monitored by the company and that there is a high probability the company will respond to concerns and complaints. As a result, consumers will not consider the company’s replies as intrusive, instead they will consider it a sign that the company cares about its customers and takes their issues and problems seriously. In the case of reactive webcare, it is likely that consumers will consider it as appropriate irrespective of the platform types (van Noort and Willemsen 2011).

A company can deal with negative eWOM in a number of ways: no action, proactive actions and defensive actions (Smith 2002; Lee and Song 2010). When a company

does not offer substantive comments or takes no overt action it can be said to be taking a no action strategy (Smith 2002). By using a no action strategy companies remain silent on the online sites in order to separate themselves from the negative events (Lee 2004). Using a no action strategy can be useful when there is no overt blame, when a company feels less responsible, or when there is a high probability that an inappropriate response could cause severe offense (McLaughlin et al. 1983). However, it is argued that this kind of strategy can let negative information about the company stand unchallenged, which can damage a company's reputation (Lee and Song 2010; Smith 2002). Also, it has been found that almost 60% of people complaining online expect a company's response (TNS NIPO 2011).

The box below provides an example of how a company's failure to deal with negative eWOM on time can damage its reputation:

On 20th April 2010, a gas blowout caused the eruption of the BP lease operated Macondo well in the Gulf of Mexico, resulting in the largest oil spill in US history. This incident damaged the reputation of a successful oil conglomerate and created a high number of negative online responses. Within a few days the company's corporate image was the lowest in its history and the brand was synonymous with shame and disaster. Utilizing social media after realizing that the incident had already affected their reputation, BP's attempts to apologize and mitigate the situation were not successful (Muralidharan et al. 2011; Lindenblatt 2014).

Accommodative strategies include any type of apology, compensation, and corrective action (Lee and Song 2010). Thus, by using this strategy, companies admit their responsibility for the problems and take actions to resolve them. It has been found that people expect accommodative response from a company, when they believe that the company was responsible for the problem (Coombs 1999). By admitting responsibility for the cause of negative events a company can improve consumers' trust and affect their future purchase intentions (Lee 2005). Even partial compensation from a company can be enough to return a consumer's positive attitude (Conlon and Murray 1996). Figure 7.1 provides an example of an accommodative strategy to a negative online review from a UK company:

Defensive strategies encompass any form of denying responsibility for the negative event, putting blame on others, or attacking the accuser. Researchers have suggested that a defensive strategy might work when the source of the problem is hard to find (Coombs 1999). However, a defensive strategy is often likely to worsen the issue and harm a company's reputation. A study conducted by Lee (2005) found that when a company denies its responsibility for a negative event it leads to a negative perception of the company by consumers. Another study found that when consumers observe defensive responses from a company they are more likely to conclude that the company was responsible for the problem (Lee and Song 2010).

A real-life example of a defensive strategy and its consequences is provided in the box below:

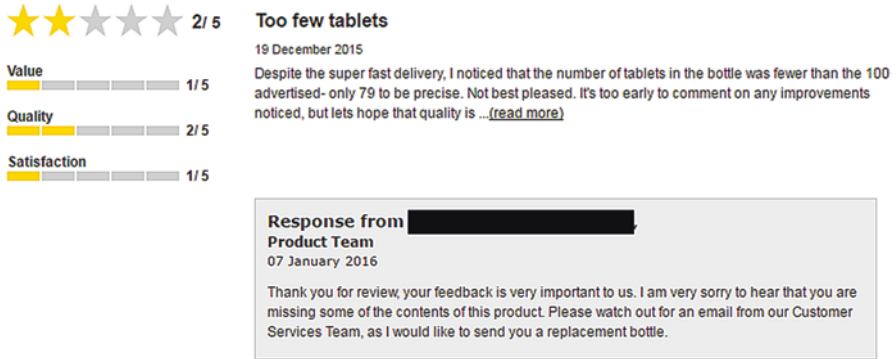


Fig. 7.1 An example of an accommodative response

A pastor who visited Applebee’s restaurant was unhappy with an automatic 18% tip charged for parties of more than eight people. So, on the bill, he crossed out the 18% charge and wrote “I give God 10% why do you get 18” near his signature. A waitress who was working at this restaurant took a photo of it and posted it on Reddit. As a result of her actions, she was fired for violating customer policy, which might have been understandable if Applebee’s had not posted a similar receipt just 2 weeks before.

News of this incident spread very fast and infuriated people across different social media platforms. The restaurant responded with a short defending post on their Facebook page. This post generated 10,000 mostly negative comments, to which the restaurant started responding by providing the same comments over and over again. Also, Applebee’s were accused of deleting negative comments and even blocking some users. The situation continued as the restaurant persisted to defend their actions and argue with Facebook users who posted negative comments. By the next day, when the original post received more than 19,000 comments, the restaurant decided to hide the post which only generated more anger (Thompson 2016). Applebee’s case demonstrates how a defensive and even argumentative strategy only made things worse.

Studies have found that it is important that a company’s replies to eWOM have a conversational human voice (Kelleher and Miller 2006; Yang et al. 2010; van Noort and Willemsen 2011), defined as “an engaging and natural style of organizational communication” (Kelleher 2009, p 177). In a study conducted by Yang et al. (2010) it was found that conversational human voice using a corporate blog to communicate with consumers was a key factor in enhancing positive attitudes towards a firm. Researchers propose various tactics to achieve this, including message

personalization, informal speech, and invitational rhetoric (van Noort et al. 2014; van Noort and Willemsen 2011).

Message personalization is the degree to which a message can be made to address a specific person (Walther 2011). Ways to personalize the message include the use of second-person pronouns (e.g. you, your) or direct address (e.g. Hi John). Also, a human representative should be identified by name and/or photo. By personalizing messages, consumers feel that they are interacting with real people rather than a faceless company (Park and Lee 2013).

Informal speech is defined as a casual and expressive language that is used in everyday conversation and is different from the declarative and neutralized language that is usually used in formal business communications (Kelleher and Miller 2006; van Noort et al. 2014). Written language used in informal communications in a computer-mediated environment usually contains linguistic features which are used to make writing more effective and compensate for what written communications on a computer screen cannot express (e.g. emotion, body language, facial expressions). So contraction, abbreviations (yr instead of your) and non-verbal emoticons (e.g. :-)) can be used. Also adverbs (e.g. really, so) and interjection (e.g. oh, wow) can be used. Using informal speech during interactions with customers will create the illusion of more personable face-to-face communications with the company, which will result in feelings of familiarity, empathy, and equality (Kwon and Sung 2011; van Noort et al. 2014; Park 2008a, b).

Invitational rhetoric is a “style of communication that is oriented to a negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions with stakeholders” (van Noort et al. 2014, p 92). The aim of using invitational rhetoric is to create an open atmosphere where people can engage in strategic constituents in direct communications with company. Firms can do this by inviting consumers to share their experiences and thoughts about products/services without publishing any mandates on their Internet platform which state that the company has the right to edit all comments and remove those that might contain objectionable information (van Noort et al. 2014; Harrison and Barthel 2009). As an alternative, the company should express a concern and willingness to listen to all consumers. For example, companies can put statements on their page such as “let us know what you think; we value your opinion” (Dekay 2012; Yang et al. 2010).

In order to choose an appropriate strategy to deal with eWOM communications it is necessary for companies to monitor eWOM communications across different online platforms, which can be achieved through use of special tools to capture and analyze eWOM.

7.3 Capturing and Analyzing eWOM

Technological advances have presented opportunities for companies to capture and analyze all the good and bad reviews, opinions, and comments that are posted on the Internet (Dirsehan 2015; van Noort et al. 2014). Capturing and analyzing eWOM communications offers precious information for business (Dirsehan 2015) so it is no

surprise that monitoring eWOM became a priority for almost 50% of all companies in 2013 (Altimeter Group 2013). Using this data, companies can get answers to questions such as (Rathore et al. 2016; Ravaglia et al. 2015a, b):

- Which of the company's products or services are more discussed?
- What do people think about particular products, brands, or services?
- What are the popular product/service features?
- How positive or negative are individuals about a company's products, brands, or services?
- What would people prefer a company's products, services, brands to be like?

The vast quantity of eWOM data can create a challenge for companies to capture, analyze and use it to inform their marketing strategies. However, there are technological solutions which can be used in order to improve the efficiency of gathering online data. One of the popular methods is data harvesting. Web harvesting (web scraping) is an automated way of scanning many online pages on the Internet and copying relevant content (Liu 2007; Johnson et al. 2012). Web harvesting is often performed by using an automated robot (spider), which extracts data from fields on a website (Berry and Linoff 2001; Johnson et al. 2012; Liu 2007). Another technique which is used to collect data is Application Programming Interface (APIs). Even though APIs assist in the automatic extraction of content, they have some limitations when assessing some specific data because APIs only facilitate the information decided by the API provider (Olmedilla et al. 2016).

Studies have outlined three types of eWOM data analysis methods: content analysis, sentiment analysis, and network text analysis (Dirsehan 2015; Go et al. 2009; Pang and Lee 2008; Ravaglia et al. 2015a, b; Read 2005; Yang et al. 2007). Content analysis is defined as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson 1952, p 18). Content analysis is usually conducted in the following steps (McMillan 2000; Ravaglia et al. 2015a, b; Riff et al. 2014):

1. Development of the research questions and hypotheses;
2. Selection of a representative sample for the research;
3. Defining categories for coding;
4. Training of coders followed by the coding of the content and assessing reliability;
5. Analysis and interpretation of the coded data.

Even though content analysis is used by many studies for big data analysis (Bruno 2011; Bruns 2012; Herrera and Requejo 2012; Newman 2011; Waters and Jamal 2011), some scholars disagree regarding the appropriateness of using this approach (McMillan 2000; Ravaglia et al. 2015a, b; Weare and Lin 2000). Challenges for using content analysis in the Internet environment include difficulties in obtaining a representative sample because of the limitlessness of the web, defining the unit of analysis, consumers' privacy, and ethical issues with using personal information.

Sentiment analysis (also called opinion mining) analyzes individuals' opinions, sentiments, evaluations, appraisals, attitudes, and emotions towards products,

services, companies, individuals, topics, and events. Some studies have used sentiment analysis to capture and understand opinions from other people (Go et al. 2009; Pang and Lee 2008; Read 2005; Yang et al. 2007). For example, Read (2005) used emoticons such as “:-)” and “:-)” to create a dataset for the sentiment analysis by collecting emoticons from UseNet newsgroups. The dataset was divided by negative and positive samples. As a result, emoticons-trained classifiers could obtain up to 70% accuracy on the test set. Go et al. (2009) used a similar approach as Read (2005) on Twitter, with classifiers obtaining up to 81% accuracy on the test set.

Network text analysis is based on the content and the quality of the data, considering the relationships between words in the dimensions of time, space, and conditions of the communicational exchange simultaneously. Network text analysis provides deeper understanding of arguments in a speech, the strengths and weaknesses of a message, and centrality of arguments in virtual conversations about the same topic. Network text analysis can help to analyze conversations about products, services, and events in an online context (Ravaglia et al. 2015a, b). Ravaglia et al. (2015a, b) used network text analysis in the case of Pink Beer. By using network text analysis of an online blog, they were able to find out what consumers thought about new types of beer. For example, Lambic pink beer did not meet with positive sentiment of individuals involved in product discussions.

7.4 Discussion and Concluding Points

The Internet has enabled consumers’ thoughts and conversations about products, services, brands, and companies to be observed not only by a close network as before but also by a multitude of people all over the world quickly and inexpensively. These eWOM communications can influence consumers’ attitudes towards a product, service, brand, or company and their purchase intentions. Thus, managing eWOM has become an important topic in marketing research, particularly the way companies monitor and deal with these communications (Dirsehan 2015; Lee and Song 2010; Van Noort and Willemsen 2011; Ravaglia et al. 2015a, b).

Previous studies have distinguished the following response strategies: no action, accommodative, and defensive. Researchers have found that a company’s response strategy has a strong influence on consumers’ perceptions and evaluations of the company (Lee and Song 2010). Appropriate response strategies can lead to an individual’s positive attitude towards negative events (Lee and Song 2010; Lee 2005). It has been found that an accommodative strategy can have a stronger influence on consumers’ evaluations of the company in comparison with other response strategies, but a defensive strategy can lay a greater perception of the company being at fault than a no action response strategy (Lee and Song 2010).

In terms of analyzing eWOM communications in the digital marketplace, studies have utilized a number of tools including content analysis, sentiment analysis, and network analysis (Dirsehan 2015; Ravaglia et al. 2015a, b; Read 2005; Go et al. 2009). All three types of analysis can be used to analyze dialogs, conversations, and

commentaries in an online context. Researchers suggest using a combination of the three types of analysis in order to have a deeper understanding of the arguments, sentiment, and structures that characterize consumers' conversations about a product, service, brand, or company (Ravaglia et al. 2015a, b).

It is important for companies to manage eWOM communications. Barnes and Jacobsen (2014) argue that managing eWOM can move a company "from one that can be vulnerable and disengaged to a position of strength, ready to react, mitigate problems and maximize opportunities" (Barnes and Jacobsen 2014, p 157).

Summary of Key Points

- Monitoring eWOM communications can help to develop and improve a company's products and services.
- The aim of webcare is to improve the company's evaluation of complaining customers and all those individuals who have been exposed to their messages.
- Evidence from previous studies suggests that webcare can stimulate positive responses in consumers after they have been faced with negative eWOM.
- Studies distinguish between reactive and proactive webcare strategies; the most appropriate strategy can depend on the online platform.
- Strategies to deal with negative eWOM include: no action, proactive actions, and defensive actions.
- Researchers have considered three overarching methods to analyze eWOM: content analysis, sentiment analysis, and network text analysis.

As a result of eWOM, consumers' complaints and companies' responses can be observed by many people. Consequently, it is important for companies to determine how to respond and when to respond (Lee and Song 2010; van Noort and Willemsen 2011). When answering eWOM communications companies should take into account the context in which complaints are posted. Researchers indicate that proactive webcare communications on consumer-generated platforms are less effective than on marketer-generated platforms (van Noort and Willemsen 2011). As a result, instead of attempting to respond to all eWOM communications, firms should save their efforts and reply only when it is likely to produce positive effects considering the context.

In addition to deciding whether to engage in proactive or reactive communications, companies should focus on conversational human voice in their webcare responses in order to develop effective online communication strategies (van Noort and Willemsen 2011). Researchers propose various tactics which include message personalization, informal speech, and invitational rhetoric (van Noort et al. 2014; van Noort and Willemsen 2011).

Due to the fact that the consumers are using multiple online platforms to share their thoughts and opinions, companies should use sophisticated software to monitor

and analyze all eWOM conversations about products, services, and brands. Examples of such software include Voyant Tools, TAPoRware, Orange Text Mining, Clear Forest Text Analytics, Quosa, RefVis, and STN AnaVist (Yang et al. 2008; Dirsehan 2015). Of course, there are other text-mining programs which are offered by well-known vendors (e.g. SAS and IBM). These solutions vary in terms of cost, license, usability, and import and export formats. Thus, organizations need to ensure they utilize software that is most aligned to their needs (Dirsehan 2015).

Experience plays a role in the platform preferences people have for expressing their opinions about products or services (Kietzmann and Canhoto 2013). Thus, collecting data about consumers' platform preferences will help managers to understand where eWOM conversations are more likely to take place and hence which online channels they should monitor more stringently. For example, Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) found that Facebook is a platform used more often to highlight positive experiences, while Twitter should be monitored to find signs of negative eWOM communications. Although small- and medium-sized enterprises tend to use Facebook and Twitter as their main social media platforms (Abed et al. 2015), platform choice should relate more to the context of the business. For instance, restaurants are likely to be subject to more eWOM conversations shared on Yelp and TripAdvisor (Kietzmann and Canhoto 2013).

The speed of response to eWOM communications plays an important role on consumer satisfaction. It has been found that customers have different expectations of acceptable response times depending on the type of online platform (Baer 2013, 2016). For social media platforms consumers tend to expect companies to respond within 60 min, although in reality the average response time is 5 h. On reviews websites, consumers are happy if they receive a reply within 24 h (Baer 2016). Thus, while best practice would be to respond as quickly as possible on all channels, companies should focus resources on responding most quickly to comments on social media platforms.

Points for Practitioners

- Companies should adjust their response strategies in accordance to the valence of eWOM communications and platform types where these communications occur.
- When replying to eWOM conversations, companies should use conversational human voice, which can be achieved by message personalization, informal speech, and invitational rhetoric.
- Specialized software should be used to monitor and analyze eWOM across all communication channels.
- Companies should answer eWOM communications quickly but adjust their response priorities according to type of platform.

“Good View, Good Food, Best Place for Family”

○○○○○ Reviewed 4 March 2016

Bale Udang, especially in Ubud Area, is the best place to spend time with family. The view of green paddy field is beautiful, and also the ambience of Bale Udang with saung on the full-of-fishes pool is very unforgettable for me and my family.

The staffs are excellent, very helpful, they bring umbrella when it's raining when we came there. And also the food, is very gooooood! My family can't stop to say that it was the delicious and fresh seafood that that ever eat.

Will come back if we visit Ubud and Bali soon! Recommended for family!



manager_ubud, Manager at Bale Udang Mang Engking, responded to this review, 6 March 2016

Dear Mr/s,

**Thank you for your visiting at Bale Udang Mang Engking Ubud
It will be nice if you would review us on TripAdvisor to help other people know more about our food and service. And we're always eager to hear what you liked and how we can improve.
Don't forget to follow our social media accounts for more information about our activity and promotion. We will be pleased to welcoming you back to Bale Udang Mang Engking Ubud.**

Fig. 7.2 An example of the company’s response to positive eWOM on TripAdvisor

As most studies have focused on the way companies should respond to negative eWOM, the impact of answering positive eWOM communications is an under-researched issue. It is evident that some companies also answer positive eWOM (see example in Fig. 7.2), usually saying thanks to customers and trying to find out what else they can do to improve their services or products even more. Therefore, future research can investigate how replying to positive eWOM influences existing and potential consumers’ attitudes and loyalty towards a company.

When investigating webcare strategies, previous studies exposed consumers to only one negative eWOM message to assess reactions to the webcare response (van Noort and Willemsen 2011; Willemsen 2013). Future research is needed to investigate the effects of webcare strategies in response to clusters of negative eWOM communications (van Noort and Willemsen 2011).

It has been found that eWOM conversations offer a number of useful elements in managing brand image, brand online presence, and product implementation.

As a result, it is suggested that the relationship between online and offline communication and behaviour should be investigated. Thus, future research is needed to investigate the match between insights hidden in online eWOM communications and consumers' offline behaviour (Ravaglia et al. 2015a, b).

Some studies have investigated the use of conversational human voice in webcare strategies. However, future research is needed to identify linguistic tools that contribute to the perceived conversational human voice in companies' responses within the context of consumer-generated platforms, where unsolicited webcare is considered low in conversational human voice.

Given the importance of response time, future research should investigate the platform features that affect what a consumer feels is an acceptable time to wait for a reply. Additionally, future research can investigate whether the type of product or service (e.g. low-price vs. high price) influences the expected response time.

Finally, even though some studies have proposed some course of actions for companies to answer eWOM communications (Willemsen et al. 2013; van Noort et al. 2014; Willemsen 2013; Lee and Song 2010), more detailed guidelines are needed, which will depend on valence of eWOM communications (e.g. positive or negative), platform type, (e.g. consumer generated or marketer-generated), sender characteristics (e.g. motives, loyalty), and product and service attributes (e.g. price of the product).

Recommendations for Future Research

- Investigate how answering positive eWOM influences attitudes and loyalty towards a company.
- Explore the effects of different webcare strategies when responding to clusters of negative eWOM communications.
- Examine the match between insights hidden in online eWOM communications and offline behaviour of consumers.
- Identify possible strategies that could contribute to the perceived conversational human voice in companies' responses to negative and positive eWOM within the context of consumer-generated platforms.
- Study how expectations of speed of response to eWOM communications vary for different types of platforms and products/services.
- Delve deeper into the details of how valence of eWOM communications, platform type, sender characteristics, and product/service traits influence the effectiveness of a webcare strategy.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

This book was written to provide a comprehensive overview on the subject of eWOM communications from a marketing perspective. eWOM communications have developed from traditional WOM communications. Even though eWOM is mostly anonymous and happens between people with weak ties, in comparison with traditional WOM, it is more powerful because it has a significant reach and it is publicly available. The key areas of the literature were examined, including motivations to engage in eWOM, its persuasiveness, its impact, and how to manage it. Most of the studies examined these areas separately; however, it is necessary to take into account all eWOM communication facets in order to use them successfully in business. For example, persuasiveness of eWOM communications depends on consumer motivations to use them, which in turn influences information adoption, affecting purchase intention, and hence sales.

People engaging in eWOM communications have different motivations which would influence their behaviour and perception of eWOM. It was found that motivations can even influence frequency of providing or seeking information. Companies should pay attention to consumers' motivations to engage in eWOM while developing their marketing strategies. Also it is important to identify "social influencers" and "market mavens" to encourage them to spread positive eWOM communications and discourage them from spreading negative eWOM communications about company's products and services. Additionally, it would be beneficial for marketers to know how personal characteristics can influence engaging in eWOM as well as factors preventing people from seeking and sharing eWOM. Thus, future research is necessary.

Depending on individuals' motivations they can consider persuasiveness of eWOM communications in different ways. For example, consumers with prevention goals will rely on negative eWOM communications more than on positive ones. For eWOM communications to be persuasive they should be perceived as helpful and credible by consumers. Numerous studies have investigated factors influencing persuasiveness of eWOM communications such as consumer characteristics, platform type, and product type. These findings can be used by platform operators

to provide guidelines for users on how to write persuasive product and service reviews. Previous studies mostly focused on how platform type, such as marketer-generated and consumer-generated, can influence persuasiveness of eWOM. However, current studies have not yet considered how social media platforms can influence persuasiveness of eWOM communications. Because of the difference in technology base, communications methods, and conduct of members on different platforms, helpfulness, and credibility of eWOM can vary.

It was found that the effect of eWOM communications on information adoption, attitude change, purchase intention, and sales depends on consumer characteristics (e.g. involvement), type of platforms (e.g. consumer-generated and marketer generated), and type of product (e.g. search, experience, or credence). Previous studies did not consider all these factors while studying the effect of eWOM communications; instead they just focused on a limited number of them. This book offered a review of the existing studies to summarize these factors and the effect of eWOM communications. To be able to use eWOM communications successfully in their marketing strategies companies need to take a variety of important factors into account, not just focus on one or two. eWOM is a very powerful business tool which introduces a variety of opportunities for companies to attract more attention of their product, brand, or service and increase sales. However, it can also introduce new challenges for business—if used incorrectly it can lead to damage in reputation, decrease in sales, and even ruin the business. Still, many companies ignore the power of eWOM communications, or use them inappropriately. Thus, this book aimed to explain the importance of eWOM communications and provide directions for practitioners which can be used in their marketing strategies.

The Internet has enabled individuals to share their product and service experiences with an array of people without geographical limitations. As a result, lots of people will be able to use this information in their purchase decision which can affect companies' sales. Thus, companies should monitor and manage eWOM communications. This book provided an overview of the techniques which can be employed by companies to capture eWOM communications with different online platforms. Also, this book tried to provide practitioners with eWOM response strategies. However, a detailed guide outlining actions for companies to answer eWOM depending on its valence, style, platform type, senders' characteristics, and product characteristics is now needed.

Even though this book offers a comprehensive overview of eWOM communications in the marketing context, it has some limitations. First, eWOM communications are considered only from the marketing perspective, and as a result several elements of the literature have not been considered in this book. Second, this book only focused on eWOM communications but did not consider related areas such as buzz marketing, which is a viral marketing technique that focuses on maximizing eWOM potential of a certain campaign or product. Thus future studies can provide more detailed directions for researchers and practitioners on viral marketing techniques.

In conclusion, this book attempted to cover various aspects of eWOM communications and will be useful as a ready reference for students, academics, and marketing practitioners to understand the notion of eWOM communications in the marketing context.

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Acronyms

APIs	Application Programming Interface
ELM	Elaboration Likelihood Model
eWOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
ICT	Internet and Information and Communication Technology
SNS	Social Networking Site
WOM	Word of Mouth

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