

Consumer Engagement in Electronic Word of Mouth (Ewom): An Analysis of Social Networking Sites

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Abstract

Marketers incorporate social media as a promotional mix of 7 P,s of marketing therefore, thorough investigation of determinants of consumer engagement in behavior of electronic word of mouth (EWOM) through social networking sites(SNSs) has become more critical. Social networking sites (SNSs) like Facebook, Friendster, and MySpace relates with eWOM that is attached with factors of social relationship. Particularly, theoretical model which is identified as tie strength, trust, social capital, informational, and normative interpersonal influence as a significant antecedent to behavior of eWOM was developed. Data was collected from 205 respondents and analyzed through SPSS and result revealed that trust; tie strength, and normative as well as informational influence are positively associated with behavior of eWOM. Current study suggested the product that focused on eWOM hence; it has many social implications for academicians, policy makers, and practitioners.

Keywords: Electronic word of mouth (eWOM), Social networking analysis, Social capital, Trust, Interpersonal influence

1. Introduction

Word of mouth (WOM) and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is different in use of web designing and marketing communication strategy (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007). 21st century is the landmark for internet like web application 2.0 that brought effective facility in marketing that moved from buzz marketing to cyber marketing (Riegner, 2007). With the passage of time, people are spending more time on social networking sites and even in 2010; its percentage was 82% in as compared to previous year. On average, time spending on social networking sites SNSs like Facebook, linkedIn, Myspace, and twitter is five hours and thirteen minutes (Buzzetto-More, 2012). (Chu & Kim, 2011) explained that SNSs are significant in daily life of online users, hence; 99% of the participants have Facebook account of American college students. Customer's communication environment have enriched and changed because of internet growth and development of SNSs. Therefore, electronic communication like forum, email, and groups are the innovative way of communication instead of traditional communication source (Vilpponen, Winter, & Sundqvist, 2006).

Information of WOM flows among consumers in the type of behavior of individual which contribute to market operation (Frenzen & Nakamoto, 1993). Additionally, WOM is strong marketing tool form business point of view. (Bernard & Thomas, 1989) explained that social networking sites and online communication might have strong control over purchasing decisions and brand perception as the consumer need more insights, information, and opinions from trusted source once they go for choosing brands and products. Therefore, trend of social networking sites brings an opportunity to marketers in building relationship between WOM and eWOM (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009). Similarly, online marketing has provided a complete model for companies and marketers (Balmer, Mukherjee, Greyser, & Jenster, 2006).

Current study investigated the factors of social relationship that influence eWOM consumer behavior and the research framework is designed on three social factors; trust, social capital, and interpersonal influence. Similarly, the impact of social factors will also be eWOM behaviors. However, the sample of the current study is the college students as they spend much time and they build strong relationship on social networking sites. The outcome of current study would add to body of knowledge of existing literature and it also infer the insights for companies and marketers about marketing trends in catching up market.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Development of internet application like web 2.0 is giving consumers a control and influence over the products and services while going for purchase via WOM behavior (Riegner, 2007). Additionally, the advancement in internet provides a space for electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and subsequently, customers engage with behaviors of EWOM that is more credible regarding information of marketing. Internet communities are a social factor that comes under the ambit of virtual communication and its influence on EWPM is studied by authors. Similarly, (Hung & Li, 2007) explored the impact of EWOM on consumer's virtual communities, (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009) explored the EWOM effectiveness for new members purchasing by social networking sites, and (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006) stated an online book at EWOM. All of above researches highlighted that EWOM is a tendency of globalised customers that have more belief on traditional marketing is less effective as compared to online marketing due to purchasing habits of many consumers and hence WOM communication has attained the attention of academicians and practitioners (Brown et al., 2007). Therefore, this trend attained attention of marketers in making marketing model more sustainable and suitable. There are many determinants of EWOM behaviors however, the in current study trust, social capital, and interpersonal influence is taken as study variables.

2.1 Electronic Word-Of-Mouth on Social Networking Sites

EWOM focuses at positive as well negative attitudes from actual, potential, and trend setter customers about the brands and products through internet (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Word of mouth communication is very effective and takes place on daily basis and it expresses the motivation, satisfaction, sadness, pleasure with other elements of society (Neelamegham & Jain, 1999). On the contrary, before the technological era, WOM was a private communication and conversation among acquaintances with time and space limitation (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Therefore, at the time of traditional WOM that has major role in purchasing decisions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) and (Kotler, 2002) asked from 7,000 customers in central Europe and expressed that 60% of the people were affected by WOM in buying new products.

Hence, general public believe that word of mouth (WOM) marketing associates with new products success. At the moments, technological era allows public to give information to

overcome the constraints of traditional WOM while on other hand, EWOM may transfer comments or opinions from people who never met each other. Consequently, EWOM permits customers to look for information that is related with products and brands. (Hung & Li, 2007) stated that EWOM offered clear information, empathetic listening, and interactivity but on other hand communication with marketers and practitioners, information source, and distance among receivers is lower. Researchers like (Jansen et al., 2009) defined that EOWM is more trustworthiness, reliable, and credible than company initiated communication. Summing up of all the past studies, it was highlighted that buying decision of consumers was being affected by new trends of EWOM and hence after supporting with SNS or internet, its applicability has become a social phenomenon.

2.2 Social Capital

Social capital is internal part and process of relations among people. Similarly, it is expressed with interaction of information, resources, ideas, cooperation, norms, interpersonal trust, and emotional support (Coleman, 1988). It is illustrated as connection among people and tie factors that people us together in relation buildings. There are a number of studies which identified social capital main clusters. For instance, (Onyx & Bullen, 2000) highlighted main five themes that consist social capital like network, trust, reciprocity, social agency, and shared norms. Similarly, (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) highlighted the significance of social capital that comprise of three dimensions like relational, structural, and cognitive. In social networks, study of knowledge integration and information management can provide helpful implications (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In addition, (Baron, 2000) stated the social capital as “connections among individuals” social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p.19). Hence, according to Putnam, there are vibrant distinction of social capital like bridging and bonding. The bonding in social capital leads to inward-looking and its trend to reinforce homogenous group and exclusive identities with relevant background like country or ethnic groups. On the other hand, bridging is an outward looking that comprise of people across heterogeneous group and social division like civil right movements or youth group. Additionally, both bridging and bonding can persists in phenomena of social capital simultaneously.

Likewise, bridging social capital is attached with weak or loose ties across the societies and bonding capital is attached with strong ties or dense networks across bounded networks

(Onyx & Bullen, 2000). Furthermore, bridging social capital associate with different type of trust while; bonding social capital associate with thick or localized trust that stressed emotional charge (Pigg & Crank, 2004). Societies who are with bridging social capital with loose ties are to be in access with huge information as the novel information can be brought by loose ties. Similarly, sense of belonging and emotional support mainly aroused due to strong ties (Granovetter, 1973). (Choi, Kim, Sung, & Sohn, 2011) stated that strong connection is strengthened more by social networking websites as it can provide interaction channels in relation to strong ties and ultimately it increases social capital. If not then bridging social capital may be increased by loose ties that are found and combined in networks (Choi et al., 2011).

Usage of SNSs like Facebook can be associated with bridging and bonding social capital between college students (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), hence; during interaction with SNSs, people likewise to perceive interaction effect with loose and strong ties as a positive. Therefore, by applying the idea of social capital, outcome highlights online networking potential as strong social venue that can enhance connections among people. SNSs can provide many opportunities to consumers in maintaining prevailing personnel networks and in expanding outside bridging and bonding social capital (Chu & Kim, 2011). Likewise, consumers are being in interaction with loose and strong ties simultaneously. Therefore, current study hypothesizes that bonding and social capital can have good influence on EWOM consumer's behaviors positively.

H1: (a) Bonding and (b) bridging social capital have influenced on EWOM behaviors of consumers on SNSs.

2.3 Trust

(Onyx & Bullen, 2000) stated that trust is very significant part of social capital and it is directly affecting consumers which might interact through SNSs. Similarly, in past studies, its role as an information exchange had been studied. While communicating with others with confidence, trust comprises of willingness and responses of others in reciprocity way. Furthermore, (Onyx & Bullen, 2000) highlighted that trust level plays its role when it involves bridging with other networks by exchanging information. (Baron, 2000) sated that when people start to trust on others in their contact, then time and money spending no longer prevails more as in trust develops an environment of open information sharing. Furthermore, (Nahapiet &

Ghoshal, 1998) suggested that trust enhanced the information trustworthiness and use of information at highest level. Perceived trustworthiness is also crucial factor that might influence on sharing of knowledge without any formal information. Similarly, high degree of trust increases information exchange and low degree of trust decrease information exchange among communities (Andrews & Delahaye, 2000).

Instead of communication context, level of trust between among information sender and receiver is very important to knowledge transfer and it adds to effective interpersonal communication (Chu & Kim, 2011). In contrast, other studies such as (Blanchard & Horan, 1998) posited that as a meager amount of information comes through social networks regarding group members hence; more number of people identifies themselves with group and likewise they perceive similarity with other group members. Additionally, active customers of virtual communities could be comparatively more trusting with face to face communities (Blanchard & Horan, 1998).

When there is an interaction through internet without no limitations and boundaries, then it encourage weak ties to become strong ties and trust level between online consumers with diverse groups also increases. Trust of high level not only maintains and increases social capital but it also a perquisite of online investing and with connecting with new consumers via internet (Pénard & Poussing, 2010). Consequently, with increasing level of trust, there is more interaction through SNSs and (V. Shah, 2001) stated that people use internet with purpose of information exchange like giving and seeking information that might have positive impact on trust. On contrary, people who use SNSs just only for recreational activities have less level of trust on one another (V. Shah, 2001).

After critical evaluating of literature of on the influence of trust at exchange of information and EWOM, people with more trust level will engage EWOM behaviors more.

(H2): The higher of level trust leads to a greater engaging in EWOM behaviors.

2.4 Interpersonal Influence

(Bernard & Thomas, 1989) posited that there are two susceptibility determinants to interpersonal influence such as normative and informational interpersonal influences. Informational interpersonal influence associate with the position of reality credible evidence and it is more explained as inclination of people in having informed decisions through accepting

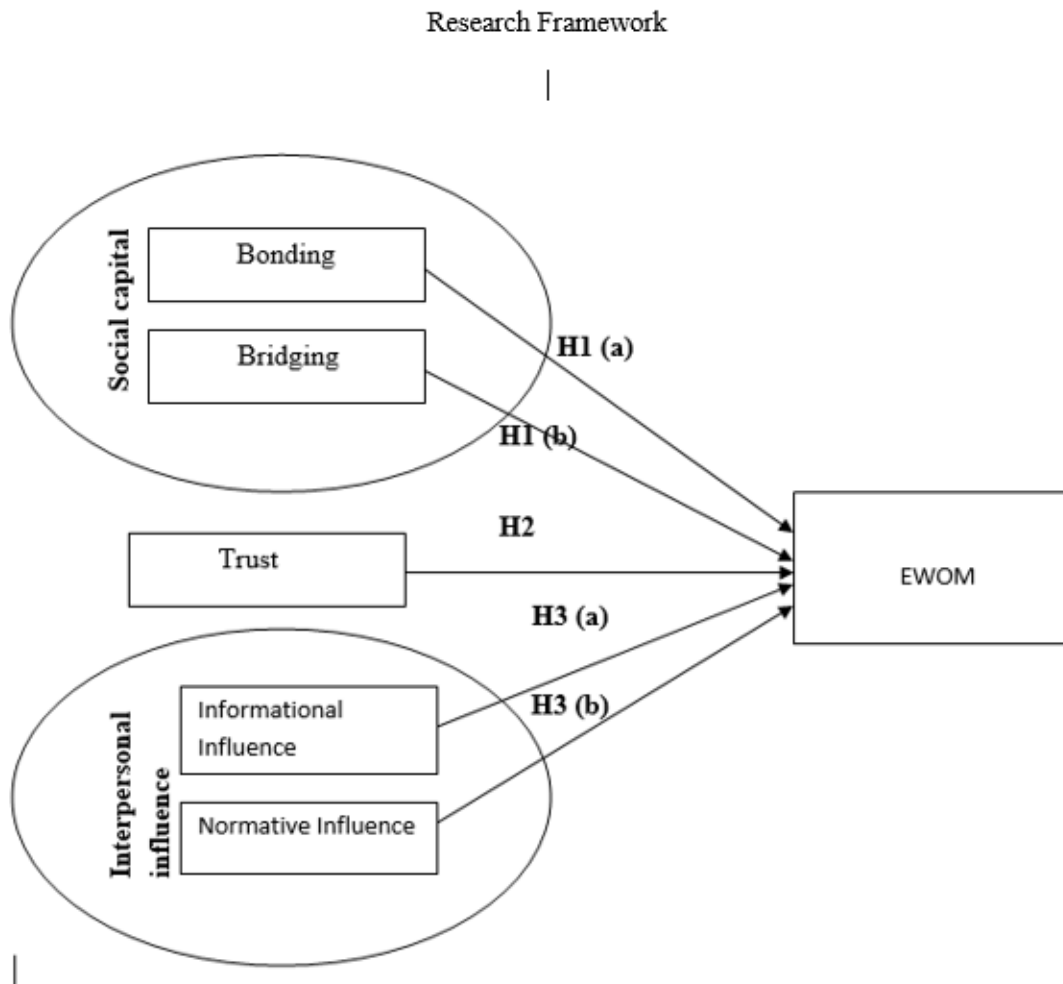
relevant information from its surrounding. Similarly, normative influences associates with conformity to achieve rewards, greeting, and to avoid from punishment and it also attaches with consumer tendency to follow the others expectations by purchasing decisions (Johnson, 2015). Plethora of researches is available that highlights impact of susceptibility to consumer's interpersonal influence in decision making process. Both informational and normative interpersonal influence might affect individual consumption and in a sequence it can change consumer behaviors (Kuan, Zhong, & Chau, 2014). For instance, susceptibility with interpersonal influence is associated with social relationship that can have impact on reliance on SNSs because it is a reliable source of product information (Chu & Kim, 2011).

Susceptibility to informational influence predicts trends that can accept information from peers as credible and reliable source of reality (Bernard & Thomas, 1989). Customers that are high in susceptibility to interpersonal informational normally observe friends and family behaviors in obtaining consumption related information. There is tendency of SII that it focuses on asking relatives and friends to ask regarding usage of brands and products (Hsu & Tran, 2013). Additionally, people who are susceptible to normative influence (SII) make decisions more effectively with message transmittal value. On the other hand, SNI people focus on relationship and transmission building process (Cleveland, Kalamas, & Laroche, 2005).

People who are highly susceptible to interpersonal influence are influence by other decision making style while purchasing and in the same way they are likewise to be influenced by WOM behaviors (Liao & Cheung, 2001). To guide in purchasing decisions, SNSs have more informational influence as predicted to express higher need in getting valuable information through informed contacts. On contrary, SNSs users that are more liable to normative influence are more likely to fulfill the close contact expectation and they search for social approval from group members at the time purchasing and buying brands and products (Chu & Kim, 2011). Therefore, after critical evaluating of interpersonal influence literature, it could be stated that informational and normative interpersonal influence has positive and significant impact on EWOM behaviors.

(H3): (a) Informational interpersonal influence and (b) normative interpersonal influence effect on EWOM behaviors positively.

Figure1



3. Research Methodology

3.1 Questionnaire design

Current study data was collected by using questionnaires and 7 point likert scale was used that ranges from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Likewise, behaviors of EWOM in social networking sites (SNS’s) were studied in Pakistan as 25 million of people in use Facebook with sharing of personal file, products, brands, while connecting with consumers. Hence, the sample size was very appropriate. The scale of EWOM behaviors was adopted by 18 items from (Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1996; Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006). Similarly, social capital scale was adopted by 20 items of bonding and bridging capital from (Norris, 2004) and trust scale was adopted by 7 items of perceived trust from (Chu & Kim, 2011; Lin & Bever,

2006). The scale of interpersonal influence was adopted by 12 items from (Bernard & Thomas, 1989) and (Chu & Choi, 2011).

3.2 Data collection

Current study targeted university students of Pakistan as they spend their maximum time in interacting of SNSs. Likewise, 125 students are under-graduates and 85 students are graduates with a valid percentage of 59.5% and 40.4% respectively. Similarly, 29.5% respondents are males and 70.5% respondents are females with age strata of 21-30 years. Sample effectiveness is to be enhanced by online, paper, and Google documents in delivering online questionnaires.

4. Results and discussions

4.1 Samples' demographic profile

A total of 205 participants took part in current study that comprise of undergraduates and graduates students. Among SNSs platforms, the most favorite one is Facebook with 20 million users and second number are Twitter and others. Similarly, 77.6% samples are with experience of more than two years of using SNSs, and 17.6% of respondents have 1 and 2 years of SNSs experience. Therefore, most of respondents use to spend maximum time on Facebook like two to five years on average. The activities they do on Facebook are reading, commenting the friend's shares, updating status, chatting, and SNSs application. Moreover, they are often in conversation with close friends, classmates, acquaintances, family, and colleagues and loose ties as well.

4.2 Factors analysis

Factor analysis was used to measure EWOM behavior through SNSs. Therefore, EWOM was a dependent variable while social capital, trust, and interpersonal influence was independent variables. The existence of relationship was studied through regression that how social capital affects EWOM behaviors. Table 1 shows the regression results and model is significant with $R^2 = 0.377$. However, the fitted model show the values as follow EWOM (1.9493), Trust (0.0312), Bonding social capital (0.1930), Bridging social capital (0.0227), Informational interpersonal influence (0.1503), and Normative interpersonal influence (0.0991).

Similarly, Table 2 shows the results of trust, social capital, and interpersonal influence on behavior of EWOM. The results showed that bonding social capital, and both variables of interpersonal influence have significant and positive relationship with EWOM behaviors.

Therefore, hypothesis (H1) (a), (H3) (a) (b) were accepted and (H1) (a) and (H2) were not supported.

Table 1: Regression output

Model Summary						
Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Standard Error of Estimate		
1	0.614095	0.377113	0,361846	0.394548		
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Square	Df	Mean square	F	Sig value
1	Regression	19.22607	4	3.845214	24.70140385	.002
	Residual	31.75632	204	0.155668		
	Total	50.9823	209			
Coefficients						
Model	Regression Summary for dependent variables EWOM					
			B	Standard Error		
1	(Constant)		1.9493	0.000		
	Trust		0.0312	0.032870		
	Bonding social capital		0.1930	0.055463		
	Bridging social capital		0.0227	0.040304		
	Informational interpersonal influence		0.1503	0.033856		
	Normative interpersonal influence		0.0991	0.034068		

Table 2: Hypotheses testing

Hypotheses		P value	Results
H1: (a) Bonding and (b) bridging social capital have positive influence on EWOM customer's behaviors.	Bonding social capital	0.0006	H1 (a): Supported
	Bridging social capital	0.572	H1 (b): Rejected
H2: The higher of trust leads to greater engagement in EWOM behavior.		0.322	(H2): Rejected
H3: (a) Informational interpersonal influence and (b) normative influence effect behavior of EWOM positively	Informational interpersonal influence	.001	(H3) (a): Supported
	Normative interpersonal influence	.0004	(H3) (b): Supported

5. Conclusion and Implications

The current study attempts to scrutinize that how trust, social capital, and interpersonal influence can affect EWOM behavior in university students. The findings suggest that bonding social capital, and both interpersonal influence affect positively on EWOM behaviors while bridging social capital and trust have no positive impact on EWOM behaviors. On contrary, past studies proved a positive relationship between bonding as well as bridging social capital with EWOM behaviors whereas, in current study only bonding social capital have positive relationship with EWOM behaviors. Similarly, the outcome of current study is better explained by bonding social capital which is emphasized by procedures achieved by dense networks which is attached with group oriented cultures (Chu & Choi, 2011). Therefore, Pakistan has much bonding social capital and trust factor due to its collectivism culture as it leads to strong EWOM engagement and outcome are in line with findings of past studies (Chu & Choi, 2011). There are numerous studies that highlighted importance of trust in identifying individual decision making to find or pass along information, and to bridge other social networks. While on contrary, this

study found that bridging social capital have positive impact on EWOM behaviors whereas trust is not a positive predictor of EWOM behavior.

Likewise, characteristics of bonding social capital, trust, and normative interpersonal influence differ from country to country as highlighted by (Hofstede, 1991) of five traits of culture. He stated that in Pakistan, there is a culture of collectivism. Similarly, collectivism culture supports emotional and shared norms that are achieved via dense networks in bonding social capital (Chu & Choi, 2011) and hence; it supported the past studies of regarding culture and social capital. In addition, those who follow collectivistic culture are tended to follow normative interpersonal influence (Laroche, Mourali, & Pons, 2005). With perspective of management, it is crucial to get consideration in social capital factor relationship that can influence EWOM behavior. Therefore, the managers need to understand the consumer's behavior in different culture and countries.

5.1 Practical and social implication

The findings of current study is very useful at it provide insights for academicians and practitioners to implement in organizations. Managers should make viable strategies to engage consumers via WOM by creating good image among communities. Managers could also build new effective marketing channels to make messages more viral. Likewise, academicians should explore out new avenues by adding literature to existing body of knowledge. Social networking sites are good debate forum if it was properly planned by marketers.

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