Research Report

Information dissemination via electronic word-of-mouth: Good news travels fast, bad news travels faster!

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate negativity bias in secondary electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Two experiments, one laboratory and one field, were conducted to study actual dissemination behavior. The results demonstrate a strong tendency toward the negative in the dissemination of secondary commercial information. In line with Dynamic Social Impact Theory, our findings show that consumers disseminate online negative content to more recipients, for a longer period of time and in more elaborated and assimilated manner than they do positive information. The research is important from both a theoretical and managerial perspective. In the former, it enriches existing literature on eWOM by providing insight into theoretical dimensions of the negativity theory not examined before (duration, role of valence, elaboration, and assimilation). Findings provide managerial insights into designing more effective WOM and publicity campaigns.

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1. Introduction

Online word-of-mouth (WOM) has become a common topic of research in the area of computer-mediated communication, particularly in the context of consumer-to-consumer interactions. Powered by tools such as email, weblogs, bulletin boards, chat rooms, and instant messenger clients, online WOM communication has helped give rise to different types of online communications as reflected by a leading consultancy firm, Booz & Co. (2012) which has advised, “Make your customer an advocate: shift marketing efforts from sending messages to facilitating conversations with and between consumers.”

Consumers share commercial experiences and product evaluations on a wide assortment of commercial issues through product review websites, discussion forums, electronic newsgroups, instant messaging, Personal Digital Assistants, blogs and virtual communities (Fang, 2014; Lovett, Peres, and Shachar, 2013; Punj, 2013). The information that is being exchanged online is of unprecedented scale and detail (Libai, Muller, & Peres, 2013; Lovett et al., 2013), containing both primary and secondary WOM (SWOM). While primary information is first-hand material originating from consumers’ direct experiences, secondary information is transmitted by consumers’ experiences they have heard about from others. The origin of secondary WOM can be traced back to advertisements, commercial editorials or former WOM episodes, either primary or secondary.

Understanding secondary WOM and the biases related to it is crucial since it is estimated to comprise more than 70% of commercial electronic WOM (eWOM) (Meiners, Schwarting, & Seeberger, 2010) for products, brands and other marketing events. The predominant research focus has been on the transmission and dissemination of primary information, leaving a gap of research on secondary WOM (De Angelis, Bonazzi, Rucker, Peluso, & Costabile, 2012; Yang, Hu, Winer, Assael, and Chen, 2012). The current paper represents a first step in filling this void. Its overall goal is to provide a better understanding of the dynamics of commercial messages online, or, how consumers transmit electronic WOM (eWOM) about products and companies.

One of the core dimensions of WOM is its valence: WOM communication can be either positive or negative (e.g. Vázquez-Casielles, Suárez-Álvarez, & Del Río-Lanza, 2013). While positive WOM (PWOM) is thought to originate from satisfactory experiences, negative WOM (NWOM) is thought to be a result of many motives and needs commonly identified as ‘negativity bias’
(e.g. De Angelis et al., 2012). Studying actual positive versus negative secondary commercial WOM transmissions in a computer mediated environment, a phenomenon hardly addressed in the literature, allows a better understanding of the consumers’ role in the dissemination of commercial information. Furthermore, it can assist companies in deciding how to encourage the dissemination of positive commercial information and to improve their understanding and actions regarding management of negative commercial information.

From a theoretical perspective, our research aims at extending knowledge about electronic WOM, and it is consistent with the call by marketing researchers (e.g. Chen, Wang, & Xie, 2011; East, Hammond, & Lomax, 2008; Godes et al., 2005; Goldenberg, Libai, & Muller, 2001) for a broader look at its dynamics, measures, and valence. To this end, we contend that the dissemination of SWOM very closely simulates what is known as rumor (Kimmel, 2013). Just as rumors include negative and positive valences and biases, in both content and effects, so does SWOM. Therefore, in this research we use Dynamic Social Impact Theory (DSIT) and the associated rumor diffusion model as the conceptual framework. This framework provides an opportunity to study several dimensions of SWOM, not previously investigated, to uncover the patterns of SWOM transmission, specifically, number, length of transmitted messages, number of recipients, dissemination duration, and patterns of reaction and information believability.

2. Conceptual background

Despite the large amount of research on WOM and social contagion in marketing and other disciplines, little is known about the dynamics of WOM transmission behaviors. Indeed, De Matos and Rossi (2008) in their meta-analyses of 127 studies of WOM in marketing show that most WOM studies investigated: (1) WOM outcomes in terms of satisfaction and loyalty; (2) WOM valence (whether the information is “good” or “bad”); (3) WOM and product types; (4) Customer experience from WOM; (5) Customer commitment effect on WOM. Very few attempts were made to study the dynamics of WOM which have obvious significant theoretical and practical implications.

2.1. The evolution of word-of-mouth communication: from traditional WOM to eWOM

The significance of WOM in marketing theory and practice is undisputed. Today’s digitally driven, easily accessible, interconnected virtual and technological world is giving it new significances. Others’ opinions and recommendations still constitute one of the most effective, persuasive and convincing means of shaping consumer preferences and purchasing behaviors, yet the characteristics (in terms of accessibility, popularity, growth and influence) and pervasiveness of the online medium exponentially multiply the power of WOM (Riegner, 2007). Traditional WOM has therefore been joined by electronic WOM (eWOM), also known as Internet WOM (iWOM) or online WOM (oWOM). There is no doubt: WOM, in its new diffusion in the digital context, is experiencing a renaissance (Meiners et al., 2010).

2.2. Negativity bias

Although there is contrasting evidence, it appears that both academia and managers seem to believe that negative WOM is more potent and impacting than positive WOM (East et al., 2008). Already back in 1967, Arndt found out that NWOM had twice the impact of PWOM (Arndt, 1967). More recently, Assael (2004) stated, “Negative word of mouth is more influential than positive word of mouth” (p. 211). Previous research on the topic has discovered that negative information is more surprising and therefore might draw more attention (Xia & Bechwati, 2008), might spread faster (Libai et al., 2013), is more influential and trusted (Chen et al., 2011) and might have much greater impact compared to positive information (Donavan, Mowen, & Chakraborty, 1999; Taylor, 1991). Moreover, it is thought provoking (Ahluwalia & Shiv, 1997) and, as social psychology research has suggested, is perceived as more diagnostic and impacting judgment formation (Reeder & Coover, 1986; Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Ybarra, 2002). All of the above create valence asymmetries synthesized as “negativity bias” meaning consumers’ propensity to disseminate bad more than good commercial information. In primary WOM consumers show a clear tendency to transmit positive information about their own experiences (e.g., Keller, 2007). They do so primarily because of their desire to associate themselves with positive aspects (Wojnicki & Godes, 2008), for self-presentation and self-enhancement (e.g., Schau & Gilly, 2003; Ceema & Kaikati, 2010; Zhang, Feick, & Mittal, 2014). Contrary to the dominance of a positivity bias in primary WOM, we show evidence for the dominance of a negativity bias in SWOM.

2.3. Rumors and Dynamic Social Impact Theory

Previous research has associated the concept of WOM communication about products, brands and services to that of rumors (Westbrook, 1987). A rumor can be defined as “unverified information statements in circulation arising in contexts of ambiguity, which function primarily to help people make sense and manage risk” (DiFonzo et al., 2013, p. 379). Rumors can therefore be assimilated with WOM transmissions since both involve multiple actors and target, have multi-directional flows of influence and follow an iterative and assimilative process that develops over time.

To study information and rumor diffusion and frame the phenomena, researchers have applied Dynamic Social Impact Theory (DSIT). DSIT (Latané & Bourgeois, 2001) is a formal theory of social influence that uses a dynamical systems approach to explain the motives, emotions, beliefs, and behaviors that emerge among individuals trying to influence each other. In their recent review of DSIT, DiFonzo et al. (2013) show that in social sciences, rumor diffusion is a close cousin to several other social cognitive and influence phenomena, including social contagion and product information dissemination. In this paper we extend DSIT to understand the dynamics of SWOM.

2.4. Rumor diffusion and the propensity towards the negative

Research in communication during the last several decades using DSIT shows that news stories are passed on to secondary audiences by a process of rumor diffusion. In passing such information along, people seem to believe more negative than positive information. Stories with high negative news value spread quickly and to many people. Along the chain of transmission the quality of the information might also be changing (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Therefore, in the retelling process consumers tend to exaggerate bad information in a way that might lead to distortions (DiFonzo et al., 2013). In other words, rumors might snowball: after receiving especially negative information, people may tend to “persevere, mull it over, talk about it endlessly and explore in fantasy all possible consequences” (Allport & Postman, 1947, p. 154) adopting negative reactions to negative information.

Finally, three distinctive patterns of dynamic change almost always take place in rumor diffusion. They are embodied in the well-established DSIT concepts of leveling, sharpening, and assimilation (Allport & Postman, 1947; DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007). Leveling refers to the fact that the message grows shorter and more concise...
as it gets transmitted; details are lost and fewer words are used in following versions. Just like the “broken phone syndrome” (Breck & Cardie, 2004), message narrative for positive information becomes much shorter and less distorted whereas it becomes much longer and corrupted for negative information. Sharperning is a qualitative change in which prominent details remain in the story becoming the dominant theme. Assimilation can be roughly equated to distortion, but it refers to the incorporation of ideas, stereotypes, or other modifications that result from attitudes, cultural expectations of the subjects and subconscious conditions of each individual.

2.5. Underlying conditions to the negativity bias

The literature on the negativity bias has suggested different possible theoretical explanations that bring consumers to diffuse negative more than positive information. Rosnow (2001) proposed a theory in which rumor mongering is viewed as an attempt to deal with anxieties and uncertainties by generating and passing stories and suppositions that can explain things, address anxieties, and provide a rationale for behavior. Drawing from extant literature, the basic motives can be summarized briefly as:

- Tendency to undermine the “top dogs” (Tybout, Calder, & Sternthal, 1981); indeed, whatever their reason, some people want to harm a company by holding an “anti-big business attitude” (Kwong, Yau, Lee, Sin, & Tse, 2003);
- “Malicious joy”: The pleasure and social hostility derived from another’s misfortune or failure of a relevant group or company (Leach, Spears, Branscombe, & Doosje, 2003);
- “Jealousy”: Feeling of resentment towards someone who possesses something desirable (Angier, 2009);
- “Draw attention”: Individuals who wish to draw others’ attention to themselves will concentrate more on negative than positive information (De Angelis et al., 2012);
- “Dissatisfaction”: Discontent consumers engage in more WOM than satisfied consumers, spreading NWOM as a complaining behavior (Anderson, 1998);
- “There is no smoke without fire”: Even a minor negative rumor will find consumers’ justification without clear evidence (Feather & Sherman, 2002).

As a consequence, the above motives and thoughts may be activated and are likely to favor information that makes consumers feel good about themselves. In such situations, they are less likely to be concerned about the accuracy of the information and more about their self-enhancing value. “The person who spreads the rumor generally does not try to stick to the precise message he has heard, but rather to persuade others he is willing to correct, improve and even distort the message in order to do so” (Lindgreen, Dobele, & Vanhamme, 2013, p. 11).

In sum, adopting DSIT and the related rumor diffusion and negativity concepts to online commercial WOM, we suggest that consumers are assumed to be selective transmitters of WOM: compared to positive information they disseminate negative information faster and to more recipients. Also, as research is psychology suggests, negative information is pondered upon for longer time spans that positive or neutral information (Taylor, 1991), persists longer than positive information, and is subject to more distortion along the diffusion process.

3. Research hypotheses

Our study aims at addressing the empirical and theoretical gap by studying actual dissemination behaviors of secondary commer-

cial electronic WOM through two experiments. Based on the theoretical framework, the following hypotheses are suggested.

In terms of SWOM diffusion we formulate:

H1: People disseminate online more negative secondary commercial information than positive secondary commercial information.
H2: People disseminate online negative secondary commercial information to more recipients than positive secondary commercial information.
H3: People disseminate online negative secondary commercial information for a longer period of time than positive secondary commercial information.
H4: Negative online secondary commercial information is more elaborated and detailed than positive secondary commercial information.

In terms of reactions to SWOM we formulate:

H5: The reactions to negative online secondary commercial information are greater in number than the reactions to positive secondary commercial information.
H6: There are more negative reactions to negative online secondary commercial information than positive reactions to positive secondary commercial information.
H7: There are more negative reactions to positive online secondary commercial information than positive reactions to negative secondary commercial information.

Finally, in terms of belief of SWOM we formulate:

H8: People believe negative secondary commercial information more than positive secondary commercial information.

4. Methodology

We performed two online experiments, one laboratory and one field, in order to study actual (rather than stated) SWOM dissemination behavior in a computer-mediated environment, as represented in Fig. 1. The two procedures were drawn from previously validated procedures and measures (Chen et al., 2011; Godes & Mayzlin, 2009).

For the laboratory experiment, 81 M.A. students were randomly assigned to one of three experimental days, and each day 27 participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups (first, second or third). Also, in each group participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions with regard to the type of recipient: “work parties,” “family and friends” or “strangers.” The 27 participants in the first group (9 each day) were given 18 short commercial editorial headlines of different valence (positive, neutral and negative) and extremity (moderate versus extreme). In order to classify the positive and negative valance of the chosen commercial headlines, we employed three independent raters, unaware of the research objectives, following Godes and Mayzlin’s (2009) procedure. The commercial headlines were sent randomly to each participant via e-mail (to the computer assigned to her/him in the laboratory). Each participant had to choose whether to disseminate the information to others and to how many others, or not to disseminate it at all. Participants were also given the opportunity to add commentary reactions to the information they decided to disseminate. Each participant was given seven (fictitious) email addresses of recipients to which the information could be disseminated—the emails of the participants assigned to the second group in the study. Participants in the second and third groups were given the same instructions regarding the information they received. Emails disseminated by the participants in the third
group ended the process. At the end, each participant completed a questionnaire in which s/he rated the perceived valence of each editorial (1 being very negative and 5 being very positive). A graphic timeline for the entire laboratory experiment (one of three identical days) is given in Fig. 2.

To further demonstrate the bias towards the negative in actual dissemination behavior, we performed a field experiment in order to identify the patterns of dissemination of secondary commercial information of different valence. As in Godes and Mayzlin (2009), 60 participants, mostly M.A. students, were recruited to participate in a study concerning important commercial topics in the news at the time the experiment took place. Whereas Godes and Mayzlin investigated information received, our procedure examined information transmitted. The 60 participants were randomly assigned to two experimental conditions: positive or negative. The study had four phases. In the first phase, each participant filled out a short online questionnaire concerning his/her current attitudes towards the companies/products that were the topics of the research. In the second phase, each participant was asked to name five people s/he knows in order of the relationship between them. This provided us with 60 groups of 6 people each (one “ disseminator” and 5 recipients) at different degrees of closeness. Next, in the third phase, the 30 participants in the positive condition group received via email four positive short commercial editorials, and the 30 participants in the negative condition group received via e-mail four negative short commercial editorials. Participants were instructed to share the information with the people in their group according to their understanding. They were also told they could add reactions to the editorials they chose to disseminate to the other participants in the group (the recipients). In the fourth phase,
a week after the dissemination of the original information, participants repeated the exact online questionnaire regarding their attitudes towards the topics of the research.

Following Stemler (2001), we performed a content analysis and employed two independent raters to evaluate the valence of the reactions added. The reliability of the coding process was evaluated using Cohen’s Kappa. For reaching kappa, two trained coders independently coded the first 10 responses in each study and then compared notes. In all cases data saturation was reached quite quickly, as most respondents made very similar points, and after just 10 responses there was strong agreement on the key motives that emerged. After discussion, descriptive codes were allocated to these, and the remaining responses were read and the descriptive coding was applied. In the interpretive analysis, both coders went through the qualitative responses again, this time highlighting links between the categories. Where causal links were not explicitly stated, the two coders conferred to agree on whether they could be inferred from surrounding comments. Kappa provided us a measure of the degree to which two or more raters concur in their respective sortings of the N items into k mutually exclusive categories. Values of kappa can range from −1.0 to 1.0, with −1.0 indicating perfect disagreement below chance, 0.0 indicating agreement equal to chance, and 1.0 indicating perfect agreement above chance. A rule of thumb is that a kappa of .70 or above indicates adequate interrater agreement.

In the laboratory experiment the kappa measurement equaled 0.8514, while in the field experiment it equaled 0.8224, demonstrating a very high strength of agreement (see classification matrices in Tables 1 and 2). For a more fully comparative design we also included neutral headlines in the analyses.

In both experiments we then employed content analysis (De Angelis et al., 2012) in order to examine trends and patterns, using editorials, paragraph sentences and words as coding units. The following data was recorded for each participant and headline: whether the editorial was disseminated on, to how many recipients, whether the participant chose to add text to the message (a reaction), what was the valence of the added text (the reaction) and how long the added text (the reaction) in words was. In the case of the laboratory experiment, we also recorded data on the perceived valence of the editorial. The valence of each reaction was recorded by two independent raters, who also carefully examined each reaction qualitatively, in order to check the existence of an assimilation process when negative secondary commercial information is concerned, as we hypothesized. The reliability of the content analysis was calculated by using, as before, Cohens’ Kappa.

5. Results

To test our hypotheses, we first performed matched-pairs t-tests in both experiments. Summary statistics are provided in Table 3. As depicted, all hypotheses were confirmed.

5.1. Dissemination

Specifically, H1 was supported in both experiments: there was a significant difference between the propensity to disseminate negative versus positive information, with a higher percentage of negative WOM being disseminated. H2 was also supported: in both experiments, the number of recipients of negative headlines was significantly greater than the number of recipients of positive headlines. In order to test H3, in the laboratory experiment we outlined the routes of dissemination of commercial information of different valence (see Fig. 3). It is evident that the highest rate of dissemination in time was in the case of negative commercial information: it lasted more in the three stages of dissemination (67.6% of the original number of disseminations) compared to the positive commercial information (17.1% of the original number of disseminations). This provides support for H3: people disseminated negative secondary commercial information for a longer period of time than positive secondary commercial information.

H4 was supported in both studies: given a significant difference in length of reactions (number of words) to positive versus negative editorials, the elaboration and details added to the negative information was much greater than the elaboration added to the positive information. With respect to the extremity of the information, people disseminated extreme negative headlines (n = 331) more frequently and to more recipients (M = 5.91) than moderate negative headlines (n = 135 and M = 4.25 respectively), and moderate positive headlines (n = 111) more frequently and to slightly more recipients (M = 3.78) than extreme positive headlines (n = 87 and M = 3.51 respectively).

5.2. Reaction

H5 was confirmed: in both experiments, people tended to add significantly more reactions and information to negative information than to positive information.

Both H6 and H7 were supported: in both laboratory and field experiments, the percentage of negative reactions to negative headlines (lab: 91.43%; field: 93.75%) was higher than the percentage of positive reactions to positive headlines (lab: 22.22%; field: 65.52%) and the percentage of negative reactions to positive headlines (lab: 60.49%; field: 34.48%) was much higher than the percentage of positive reactions to negative headlines (lab: 1.91%; field: 6.25%). For the extremity of the information, people added more reactions to extreme negative (n = 168) than to moderate negative (n = 45) headlines (a 273.3% difference). However, the number of reactions added to extreme positive (n = 39) headlines did not differ much from the number of reactions added to moderate positive headlines (n = 36) only a 8.33% difference).

5.3. Belief

Finally, H8 was also supported: there is a significant difference in the degree of people’s belief in negative versus positive secondary commercial information disseminated via the Internet. People believe the negative more than the positive. An interesting finding appeared regarding the attitudes of the disseminators. Results show 88.3% of the participants changed their attitude towards the topics of the experiment: in 55% of the cases, we found a

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rater 1</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Marginal totals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rater 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0.6505(0.4676)</td>
<td>0.0583(0.169)</td>
<td>0.0065(0.0788)</td>
<td>0.7153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0.0012(0.1164)</td>
<td>0.1748(0.0421)</td>
<td>0(0.0196)</td>
<td>0.178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>0(0.07)</td>
<td>0.0032(0.0252)</td>
<td>0.1036(0.0118)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.6537</td>
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downward change, while only 33.33% demonstrated an upward change, and 11.67% of attitudes remained unchanged.

6. Discussion and implications

This paper’s aim was to better understand how consumers transmit SWOM. Despite the prevalence of eWOM, its dynamics is overlooked in the literature. The pattern of findings supports the predictions made by DSIT and its related concepts.

Our study demonstrates a clear negativity bias in the online dissemination of secondary commercial information. We demonstrated that people react differently to positive versus negative secondary commercial WOM: they are more sensitive to negative information and disseminate it more often to a larger number of recipients, for a longer period of time and in a more elaborated and assimilated manner. Moreover, this negative effect appears, as expected, when the original information is negative, and also, surprisingly, when it is positive. Additionally, people tend to believe negative more than positive secondary commercial information disseminated via the internet.

In accordance with rigorous procedures, this article expands the existing research with a novel perspective on why negativity dominates online SWOM. To account for this phenomenon, we provide a theoretical framework and empirical evidence based on DSIT and related concepts from rumor literature. We found clear
asymmetries and biases emerge between negative and positive commercial information in online SWOM dissemination. We replicated the findings for three fundamental reaction domains: namely, the cognitive, affective, and intentional consequences of NWOM dissemination. A byproduct of this research was the opportunity it provided us to study WOM measures that are seldom investigated in the extant literature. These findings are of both theoretical and practical significance.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

From a theoretical perspective, our research contributes to the existing literature on WOM in several ways. First, while previous research has concentrated on primary WOM, our research adds a new distinction to the literature as it concentrates on SWOM. Second, while previous research has focused on interpersonal interactions, our research has focused on commercial information about companies, products, and brands. Third, we have addressed the ongoing debate about whether people tend to share positive or negative content and have shown that, consistent with our theorizing, negative news is, by far, more viral. Fourth, previous literature has focused on what information people encounter (reviews, comments, opinions, ideas), whereas our research examines actual dissemination behavior in a computer-mediated environment. Most researchers also base their findings on stated intentions, while we have examined dissemination behavior in a real time laboratory and natural field settings; furthermore we have experimentally manipulated commercial WOM dissemination behavior as a function of its valence. Also, our measures provide extended theoretical dimensions to the negativity theory, namely differences in terms of time (duration), negative versus positive elaboration and assimilation. Finally, we have provided insight into a unique and disturbing phenomenon, in which relatively many people react negatively to positive commercial information. This negative assimilation should be further examined and managed since it corrupts and twists good news about companies, products and brands.

6.2. Managerial contributions

In facing the business environment in the new electronic era, companies must actively and continuously elevate their information quality and dissemination practices. From a managerial point of view, our results provide marketing practitioners with practical implications: a better understanding of the flow of customer-to-customer WOM communication will help companies effectively act and react to negative secondary commercial information circulating about their conduct. As stated by DiFonzo et al. (2013, p. 388) “The damage of negative information in social media strongly outweigh positive contributions”. Indeed, leading companies are setting up dedicated capabilities to monitor and actively manage social-media conversations. To be effective means understanding which social-media activities to respond to from the multi-million activities out there and, developing triage capabilities to determine the relevant responses, like: information rebuttal/refutation; information deflection; positive advertising; no-response (ignore the negative information); information pre-emption; paid reviews; legal actions.

6.3. Study limitations

As with all research, our studies have some limitations which must be considered when interpreting the results. First, our samples included mostly students, potentially limiting the external validity of each study. Second, the findings in the laboratory experiment may not be fully applicable to “real life” situations. The fact, for example, that the respondents disseminated the information to fictitious email addresses they were given might have influenced the results. Finally, the source of commercial information for our studies was commercial editorials and headlines published in leading economic newspapers. Restricting the information tested to this source only may have limited our findings.

6.4. Future research

In addition to the further research suggested in the limitations section, there are a number of interesting areas on which future research projects could focus. First, one may replicate our results to account for gender differences or in other countries to account for cultural influences. Second, our research concentrates on (private) customer to (private) customer WOM: one could replicate these results in a B2B context. Third, further investigation is recommended into the unique phenomenon of negative reactions to positive commercial information. Fourth, it would be interesting to examine how the dissemination influences actual behavior, for example, the purchasing of the products which are the subject of the disseminated commercial information.

6.5. Conclusion

The key take away is that the dissemination of negative secondary commercial information follows a filtered information pattern through multiple sources and multiple points of view in a way that garbles the original message much like in the well-known “broken telephone syndrome”. Results demonstrate how easily online commercial information can become corrupted by indirect communication. People do not reproduce the information given to them exactly the way it was given, they may not understand it correctly, or they might even choose to deliberately change it for their own purpose. Our findings provide managers with more knowledge about this ubiquitous and fascinating behavior.

References


