Investigating Electronic Word-of-Mouth Effects on Online Discussion Forums: The Role of Perceived Positive Electronic Word-of-Mouth Review Credibility

Wen-Hai Chih, PhD,1 Kai-Yu Wang, PhD,2 Li-Chun Hsu, PhD,3 and Su-Chen Huang, MBA1

Abstract

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has been an important factor influencing consumer purchase decisions. Using the ABC model of attitude, this study proposes a model to explain how eWOM affects online discussion forums. Specifically, we propose that platform (Web site reputation and source credibility) and customer (obtaining buying-related information and social orientation through information) factors influence purchase intentions via perceived positive eWOM review credibility, as well as product and Web site attitudes in an online community context. A total of 353 online discussion forum users in an online community (Fashion Guide) in Taiwan were recruited, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the research hypotheses. The results indicate that Web site reputation, source credibility, obtaining buying-related information, and social orientation through information positively influence perceived positive eWOM review credibility. In turn, perceived positive eWOM review credibility directly influences purchase intentions and also indirectly influences purchase intentions via product and Web site attitudes. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and managerial implications of the findings.

Introduction

The impact of word of mouth (WOM) on a consumer’s decision-making process has grown with the development of the Internet.1,2 The characteristics of the Internet, such as immediacy and interaction, facilitate consumers’ information searches and communications with others.3 WOM communication in virtual communities is much more influential in terms of speed and scope than ever. Due to an increase in user popularity, social networking sites (SNS) have become resources and new platforms for marketers to disseminate and exchange information with their targeted population. Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has become one of the important routes for consumers to obtain product information. Recent research shows that 80% of consumers trust online recommendations. This percentage is far beyond that of consumers who trust traditional advertisements.4 Investigating the factors that influence eWOM credibility will be of great interest to scholars and practitioners.

Consumer motives relevant to traditional WOM can also be expected to be of relevance for eWOM.5 Prior research has identified speakers’ motives for positive WOM,5,6 as well as characteristics of WOM speakers and listeners of positive eWOM usage.7 Few studies have identified the factors that influence listeners’ perceived positive eWOM review credibility (PPERC) given its practical and academic interests and importance. The WOM literature has also called for research in understanding whether and how WOM influences listeners’ behaviors.8,9 In order to fill these research gaps, based on the C-A-B hierarchy of the ABC model of attitude, we propose a model that identifies the factors that influence PPERC (cognition) and how it impacts purchase intentions (behavior) via product and Web site attitudes (affect). Specifically, we propose that platform-based (Web site reputation, WR, and source credibility, SC) and customer-based (obtaining buying-related information, OBRI, and social orientation through information, SOTI) motivations influence PPERC. In addition, product and Web site attitudes (PAs and WAs) mediate the effects of PPERC on purchase intentions (PIs).

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

eWOM refers to user-generated content on the Internet.10 It differs from traditional WOM in several aspects, such as information amount and format.11 The development of the Internet has provided eWOM listeners with great sources of
product information for purchase considerations\textsuperscript{3}, such as product review Web sites.\textsuperscript{12}

Research in WOM has focused on investigating the WOM speakers’ motives for spreading positive WOM reviews, such as product involvement, self-involvement, and other involvement.\textsuperscript{5,6,13} Researchers have identified the characteristics of WOM listeners and WOM speakers that influence WOM usage.\textsuperscript{7} From an eWOM listener’s perspective, this research investigates the factors that lead to PPERC and its impact on PIs. Based on the ABC model of attitude, being formed by affect, behavior, and cognition,\textsuperscript{14,15} we propose a model that integrates the antecedents and consequences of PPERC. In regard to cognition, this research proposes platform- and customer-based motivations as the antecedents of PPERC. The platform-based motivations include WR and SC, as purchase decisions have been deeply influenced by the Internet. WR and SC are likely to influence PPERC.\textsuperscript{16} Consumers seek to minimize their time spent and efforts used to search for product information.\textsuperscript{17,18} They also look for opportunities to socialize with others via the Internet.\textsuperscript{4} Thus, customer-based motivations include OBRI and SOTI as antecedents to PPERC. Following the ABC model of attitude, consumers’ cognitive processing of information influences their affect and then behavior. This research proposes that PPERC will influence PIs via PAs and WAs.

The proposed model is presented in Figure 1. Previous research has indicated that listeners respond to positive and negative WOM reviews differently.\textsuperscript{19,20} eWOM is a double-edged sword, as it can make or break a product.\textsuperscript{21} Although some studies have shown that the effects of negative eWOM reviews are stronger than positive ones,\textsuperscript{22} other studies have found the opposite.\textsuperscript{23–25} Some researchers have found that the effect of the review valence on persuasiveness depends on individual consumption goals\textsuperscript{26} and product category.\textsuperscript{27} Nevertheless, both positive and negative eWOM reviews are important to product or service marketing. This research focuses only on listeners’ responses to positive eWOM reviews for the several reasons. First, researchers have indicated that positive eWOM reviews are more likely to occur than negative ones.\textsuperscript{22,28} Second, studies have shown that the motive of self-enhancement leads consumers to generate positive WOM,\textsuperscript{29} and moderately positive WOM reviews are positively related to review value.\textsuperscript{30} Third, positive eWOM reviews are likely to increase customers’ PIs\textsuperscript{31} because they reduce the risks involved in the purchase.\textsuperscript{5} Fourth, positive WOM reviews can help create favorable company and brand images, which eventually reduce promotional expenditures.\textsuperscript{32,33} Therefore, it is essential to examine the effects of positive eWOM reviews.

The impact of WR and SC on PPERC

A good reputation is a powerful means for persuasion.\textsuperscript{34} Consumers usually use reputations to infer the credibility of information received.\textsuperscript{15,34–36} A good WR will, in turn, usually have high trust from its consumers.\textsuperscript{37} Consumers can infer the quality of the contents of a Web site based on its reputation. Therefore, a reputable Web site is more readily accepted by consumers than a lesser known Web site.\textsuperscript{38} Similarly, the eWOM effect is higher for Web sites with established reputations than for those without established reputations (i.e., consumers are more likely to trust eWOM reviews posted on reputable Web sites).\textsuperscript{20} Thus, when consumers perceive that a Web site has a high reputation, then they will consider the positive eWOM reviews on the Web site as more credible.

Given the substantial amount of information on the Internet, consumers rely on source credibility to distinguish between Web sites with and without reputable content.\textsuperscript{39}
WOM speakers with positive characteristics are more persuasive than those with fewer positive characteristics.\textsuperscript{40} The credibility of the WOM speakers themselves is an important antecedent to the credibility of WOM review.\textsuperscript{41} For instance, expert recommendations are more helpful and readily accepted in making decisions due to their high level of credibility.\textsuperscript{42} The same SC effect could be applied to online contexts.\textsuperscript{43} When eWOM speakers are more credible, consumers are more likely to trust them.\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, when the source of the eWOM review is more credible, consumers perceive the positive eWOM review as more credible. \textsuperscript{45}

H1: WR has a positive effect on the PPERC.

H2: SC has a positive effect on the PPERC.

The impact of OBRI and SOTI on PPERC

The purpose of OBRI is to reduce purchase risk and information search time.\textsuperscript{45} Prior research has shown that more than 80% of the individuals who provide product reviews in online discussion forums intend to help others make decisions.\textsuperscript{46} Competent reviewers provide consumers with useful information, which increases the PPERC.\textsuperscript{47} Thus, consumers’ motivations for reading eWOM reviews influence their perceptions of the review credibility. When consumers are motivated to search for information on a SNS, they tend to perceive the site as being more credible,\textsuperscript{48} and such a motivation influences eWOM review credibility.\textsuperscript{49-51} Researchers have also found that information seekers perceive online reviews as being more credible than noninformation seekers.\textsuperscript{52} It is expected that when consumers have a higher level of motivation to OBRI, they have a higher PPERC.

Prior research has indicated that interpersonal influence is associated with eWOM effects on SNSs.\textsuperscript{53} Research shows that tie strength positively influences the effect of WOM reviews on consumer decisions.\textsuperscript{49} Consumers trust WOM reviews more if the WOM reviews are from their family or close friends.\textsuperscript{54,55} Thus, we propose that SOTI impacts PPERC. Interactions with and obtaining confirmation from other users can maintain an individual’s social status and reduce cognitive dissonance with regard to purchase decisions.\textsuperscript{56} Consumers perceive reviews from other users as more credible.\textsuperscript{57} Researchers also indicated that an information receiver’s social location in a virtual community influences his perception of the eWOM review credibility.\textsuperscript{39} When the goals of social status and dissonance reduction can be achieved through online eWOM review reading, consumers perceive the eWOM reviews as more credible. Therefore, SOTI should have a positive impact on PPERC.

H3: OBRI has a positive effect on the PPERC.

H4: SOTI has a positive effect on the PPERC.

The impact of PPERC on PIs—the mediating role of PA and WA

PA is defined as an eWOM review reader’s evaluation of a product and PIs as the likelihood that a consumer will make a purchase.\textsuperscript{58} WA is defined as an eWOM review reader’s evaluation of a Web site that provides a platform for posting eWOM reviews.\textsuperscript{38} Following the C-A-B hierarchy of the ABC model of attitude, PAs and WAs are proposed to mediate the effects of PPERC on PIs. That is, PPERC (cognition) will influence PIs (behavior) via both PAs and WAs (affect). After reading eWOM reviews, consumers make judgments on the eWOM reviews’ credibility.\textsuperscript{34,59} When consumers perceive positive WOM reviews as more credible, they form more positive PAs.\textsuperscript{60} Consumers’ attitudes toward reviews are transferred to the product. The same effect of traditional WOM occurs with positive eWOM reviews.\textsuperscript{20} Researchers indicated that accessing product reviews from online discussions influences consumers’ PAs.\textsuperscript{51,62} When positive eWOM reviews are perceived as being credible, then consumers are more likely to form favorable PAs. It is expected that PPERC has a positive effect on consumers’ PAs. Previous research has shown that product reviews from online discussions increase consumers’ interests in the product topics.\textsuperscript{51} After receiving product information, consumers develop positive PAs when they perceive it as having a high value and, therefore, will increase their PIs.\textsuperscript{63,64} Research showed that eWOM review readers’ PAs influenced their PIs and behaviors.\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, it is expected that consumers’ PAs will be positively associated with PIs.

H5: PPERC has a positive effect on PAs.

H6: PAs have a positive effect on PIs.

Similar to the effect of PPERC on PAs,\textsuperscript{2,50,65} consumers’ attitudes toward WOM reviews could be transferred to Web sites. When consumers perceive eWOM reviews on a Web site as being credible, they are more likely to trust and form favorable attitudes toward the sponsored Web site.\textsuperscript{66} Researchers have shown that eWOM review credibility influences consumers’ adoptions of eWOM reviews on a Web site.\textsuperscript{26,67} When consumers perceive eWOM reviews as being more credible, they are more likely to adopt the eWOM review recommendations. Researchers also indicated that eWOM review favorableness impacted consumers’ WAs.\textsuperscript{58} When consumers perceive positive eWOM reviews as being more credible, they are more likely to form positive WAs. Thus, it is expected that PPERC will have a positive effect on WAs. In addition, previous research has indicated that consumers’ WAs are highly associated with their PIs. For example, researchers have shown that interactions between consumers and firms in electronic commerce mainly take place through the company Web sites. When consumers are satisfied with a Web site’s design, product information, and services, they are more likely to make a purchase on that Web site.\textsuperscript{69} Some researchers have demonstrated that using technology to enhance interactions positively influenced consumers’ WAs and subsequently positively influenced their PIs.\textsuperscript{46} Similar findings of the positive effects of WAs on PIs were observed in other studies.\textsuperscript{20,27} Following the same logic, we expect that when consumers hold favorable WAs, they are more likely to make a purchase.

H7: PPERC has a positive effect on WAs.

H8: WAs have a positive effect on PIs.
Methodology

Sample and data collection

We selected users of a popular beauty and fashion Web site (Fashion Guide) as the study population (more than 2,360,000 users). Following the C-A-B hierarchy of the ABC model of attitude, this study focused on consumers who were highly involved in this discussion forum Web site. The sample consisted of users who had read online reviews on products or services on the Fashion Guide within the past 6 months and participated in the forum discussions at least twice a week. The Fashion Guide is one of the most visited Web sites in Taiwan in regard to online reviews on beauty and fashion products/services.42

Online surveys were distributed to potential respondents via MY3Q, an online survey distribution platform, between July and August 2010. A total of 462 surveys were returned, and 353 surveys were valid after eliminating the 109

Table 1. Analysis of Measurement Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Factor loading ($\lambda_{ik}$)</th>
<th>Measurement error ($\delta_{ik}$)</th>
<th>Squared multiple correlation (SMC)</th>
<th>Composite reliability</th>
<th>Average variance extracted (AVE)</th>
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<td>Web site reputation</td>
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<td>WR1</td>
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<td>0.525</td>
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<td>OBRI3</td>
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<td>OBRI4</td>
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<td>Social orientation through information</td>
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<td>0.371</td>
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<td>Perceived positive eWOM review credibility</td>
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<td>PPERC1</td>
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<td>PPERC3</td>
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<td>0.673***</td>
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<td>Web site attitude</td>
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<td>0.856</td>
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<td>0.499</td>
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<td>0.684***</td>
<td>0.533</td>
<td>0.467</td>
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<tr>
<td>WA2</td>
<td>0.737***</td>
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<td>0.543</td>
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<td>0.432</td>
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<td>WA5</td>
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<td>0.595</td>
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<td>WA6</td>
<td>0.719***</td>
<td>0.483</td>
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<td>Purchase intentions</td>
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<td>0.893</td>
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<td>PI4</td>
<td>0.831***</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.691</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Fit statistics ($N = 353$)

$\chi^2 = 727.066$
$df = 467$
$CFI = 0.956$
$GFI = 0.891$
$RMSEA = 0.040$

***All factor loadings are significant at the $p<0.001$ level.
CFI, comparative fit index; GFI, goodness-of-fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation.
Data Analysis and Results

The measurement model showed adequate fit: $\chi^2/df = 1.557$, goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.891, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.956, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.040. As shown in Table 1, the composite reliability for each construct was greater than 0.702, demonstrating a reasonable degree of internal consistency between the corresponding indicators. The squared multiple correlations were all greater than 0.2. Results showed support for convergent and discriminant validity. As evidence of convergent validity, each item loaded significantly on its respective construct. Evidence of discriminant validity exists when the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) in each construct exceeds the coefficients representing its correlation with other constructs. The AVE of each construct exceeded 0.50, except for OBRI, SOTI, and WA. As presented in Table 2, the results indicate acceptable discriminant validity.

Model fit

The fit of data to the proposed model was adequate: $\chi^2 = 1050.832$, $df = 481$, CFI = 0.916, GFI = 0.843, AGFI = 0.816, and RMSEA = 0.058. Consistent with H1–H4, the results showed that $\gamma_{11} = 0.511$, $p < 0.001$, SC $\gamma_{12} = 0.275$, $p < 0.001$, OBRI $\gamma_{13} = 0.173$, $p < 0.01$, and SOTI $\gamma_{14} = 0.169$, $p < 0.01$ had a significant and positive effect on PPERC. PPERC had a significant and positive effect on PAs ($\beta_{12} = 0.792$, $p < 0.001$) and WAs ($\beta_{13} = 0.760$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H5 and H7. PAs ($\beta_{12} = 0.487$, $p < 0.001$) and WAs ($\beta_{13} = 0.299$, $p < 0.001$) had a significant and positive effect on PIs, supporting H6 and H8. The results are shown in Table 3.

We further performed an analysis to test the over-identifying restrictions of the model. This analysis was done by freeing the path between PPERC and PIs that was constrained to zero. Surprisingly, this alternative model, shown in Figure 2, seemed to fit the data better than the proposed model ($\chi^2 = 1037.291$, $df = 480$, CFI = 0.918, GFI = 0.844, AGFI = 0.818, RMSEA = 0.057), and PPERC had a positive and significant effect on PIs ($\beta_{11} = 0.338$, $p < 0.001$). We take into consideration both model parsimony and fit in the selection of the best-fitting model. Table 4 provides the fit statistics for the hypothesized and the alternative models. The results of comparing the hypothesized model with the alternative model suggest that PAs and WAs partially mediate the effects of PPERC on PIs.

Post analysis: tests of mediation effects

In order to test the mediating effect of the PAs and WAs on the relationship between PPERC and PIs, this research conducted a series of regression analyses using PPERC as the

incomplete surveys. Of the respondents, 83.57% were female. In addition, 67.42% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 30 years. Of the respondents, 84.13% of the respondents had been using the Internet for more than 4 years. With regard to daily Internet usage, 34.28% of the respondents use the Internet for more than 4 hours, and 36.54% for between 2 and 4 hours. Moreover, 68.5% of the respondents spent more than 6 hours on the Fashion Guide Web site per week.

Measures

All of the constructs included in the proposed model were measured using multi-item scales drawn from previous studies that reported high statistical reliability and validity. The items used to measure each of constructs are presented in Appendix 1. The scale for measuring WR was adapted from Bart et al. The scale for SC was derived from Sussman and Siegal. The scale for measuring OBRI and SOTI were adapted from Cheung et al. The scale for measuring PA and PIs were adapted from Siegal. The items used to measure OBRI and SOTI were adapted from Bart et al. The scale for SC was derived from Sussman and Siegal. The scale for measuring WR was adapted from Henning-Thurau and Walsh. PPERC was adapted from Jiang and Benbasat, while WA was from Shamdasani. The items used to measure each of constructs are presented in Table 1.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix for Measurement Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>WR</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>OBRI</th>
<th>SOTI</th>
<th>PPERC</th>
<th>PA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>PI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WR</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.779</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.613</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>0.507</td>
<td>0.779</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.613</td>
<td>0.609</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBRI</td>
<td>0.496</td>
<td>0.243</td>
<td>0.613</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.800</td>
<td>0.758</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOTI</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>0.343</td>
<td>0.330</td>
<td>0.800</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.706</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPERC</td>
<td>0.570</td>
<td>0.509</td>
<td>0.285</td>
<td>0.470</td>
<td>0.414</td>
<td>0.541</td>
<td>0.663</td>
<td>0.823</td>
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<td>PA</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>0.630</td>
<td>0.407</td>
<td>0.546</td>
<td>0.546</td>
<td>0.453</td>
<td>0.663</td>
<td>0.618</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>0.693</td>
<td>0.473</td>
<td>0.472</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>0.453</td>
<td>0.663</td>
<td>0.618</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diagonal elements in bold face type are the square roots of the average variance extracted. WR, Web site reputation; SC, source credibility; OBRI, obtaining buying-related information; SOTI, social orientation through information; PPERC, perceived positive eWOM review credibility; PA, product attitude; WA, Web site attitude; PI, purchase intentions.
Table 3. Results of Proposed Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis relationships</th>
<th>Hypothesized model</th>
<th>Alternative model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Website reputation</td>
<td>Perceived positive eWOM review credibility</td>
<td>0.511***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source credibility</td>
<td>Perceived positive eWOM review credibility</td>
<td>0.275***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining buying-related information</td>
<td>Perceived positive eWOM review credibility</td>
<td>0.173**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social orientation through information</td>
<td>Perceived Positive eWOM review credibility</td>
<td>0.169**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Positive eWOM review credibility</td>
<td>Product attitude</td>
<td>0.792***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Positive eWOM review credibility</td>
<td>Web site attitude</td>
<td>0.760***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product attitude</td>
<td>Purchase intentions</td>
<td>0.487***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web site attitude</td>
<td>Purchase intentions</td>
<td>0.299***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived positive eWOM review credibility</td>
<td>Purchase intentions</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fit index:

- $\chi^2 (df)$: 1050.832 (481) vs. 1037.291 (480)
- p value: 0.000 vs. 0.000
- CFI: 0.916 vs. 0.918
- GFI: 0.843 vs. 0.844
- AGFI: 0.816 vs. 0.818
- RMSEA: 0.058 vs. 0.057

1. Hypothesized model: perceived positive eWOM review credibility $\rightarrow R^2 = 0.859$; product attitude $\rightarrow R^2 = 0.627$; Web site attitude $\rightarrow R^2 = 0.577$; purchase intentions $\rightarrow R^2 = 0.502$.
2. Alternative model: perceived positive eWOM review credibility $\rightarrow R^2 = 0.892$; product attitude $\rightarrow R^2 = 0.598$; Web site attitude $\rightarrow R^2 = 0.579$; purchase intentions $\rightarrow R^2 = 0.509$

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to propose and empirically test an integrated eWOM effect model, developed using the ABC model of attitude as its base. We investigated the antecedents and consequences of PPERC in an online community. Based on the research findings, a revised eWOM effect model was suggested.

The results show that a WR positively influences PPERC. When the WR is high, the PPERC increases. SC positively influenced the PPERC, which is consistent with the finding of Cheung et al.44 Our findings suggest that SC plays an important role in consumer trust in eWOM reviews. The Fashion Guide Web site provides information on the number of recommendations for posted reviews. This Web site feature might provide a good way to build PPERC. Our results also indicated that OBRI positively influences PPERC. When consumers read eWOM reviews in order to OBRI, they want to reduce their purchase risks and time spent searching.56 As such, they are more likely to give higher credibility to eWOM reviews.48 The results showed that SOTI positively influenced the PPERC. Online community members provided product/service reviews to others in order to make contributions to the community. By doing so, they not only help others make better decisions, but also obtain social identification. As such, they show their involvement in the community.50 eWOM Web sites consist of individuals with similar interests who share and exchange experiences. As such, these individuals are likely to trust each other.7

PAs and WAs partially mediate the effects of the PPERC on PI's. When consumers perceive the eWOM reviews as being credible, they form favorable PAs and WAs that, subsequently, impact PI's. PPERC also directly positively influences PI's. Although the direct effect of PPERC on PI's was not expected in our proposed model, previous research has shown that when consumers trust eWOM reviews, they are more likely to adopt the reviews and make a purchase decision.44,81 PI's are determined by consumers' perceived value of a product.82 When consumers perceive positive eWOM reviews as being more credible, they are more likely to rely on the eWOM reviews in order to make purchase decisions.81 The findings suggest that PPERC is an important predictor of PAs and WAs as well as PI's.
This research makes theoretical contributions to the WOM literature in several aspects. First, unlike previous research that has focused on external information sources, such as source expertise and review ratings, this research considered the impact of individual and social factors on eWOM effects. We identified the impact of platform- (WR and SC) and customer-based (OBRI and SOTI) motivations for PPERC. Second, based on the ABC model of attitude, this research demonstrated that platform- and customer-based motivations influence the PPERC and then subsequently PIs. Different from previous research that regarded the affect component as a single dimension, this research showed how PAs and WAs partially mediated the effects of PPERC on PIs. In addition, previous studies did not clearly differentiate between the elements of the eWOM effect, such as PPERC, PAs, and WAs. The underlying process of the eWOM effect is revealed.

Our findings provide managerial implications in online community management and marketing. Our findings suggest that consumer-opinion platform providers need to develop good WRs and a speaker rating system in order to show its objectiveness in regard to the reviews on the platform. The Fashion Guide Web site uses a rating system to evaluate the speakers’ influence. Such a system shows the SC of the eWOM reviews and helps consumers make purchase decisions. Our research also indicated that social interactions with others about products/service consumption experiences may influence consumers’ PIs via PPERC as well as PAs and WAs.

This research demonstrates that the success of eWOM should be determined by satisfying the consumers’ functional and social needs. Online community members usually seek useful product information (functional need) and build social relationships with others (social need). In order to meet these needs, consumer-opinion platform providers can offer customized features so that users can build their own discussion forums, which reduce their information search efforts. They may also host social activities that facilitate interactions between members. As such, eWOM review listeners are more likely to trust the eWOM reviews on the Web site.

Table 4. Fit Statistics for Hypothesized and Alternative Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$\Delta \chi^2$</th>
<th>$\Delta df$</th>
<th>GFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>AIC</th>
<th>CAIC</th>
<th>ECVI</th>
<th>PNFI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Null model (independence model)</td>
<td>7,299.077</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.191</td>
<td>7,365.077</td>
<td>7,525.670</td>
<td>20.924</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturated model</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,122.000</td>
<td>3,852.089</td>
<td>3.188</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesized model</td>
<td>1,050.832</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>6,248.245</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0.843</td>
<td>0.908</td>
<td>0.916</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>1,210.832</td>
<td>1,600.150</td>
<td>3.440</td>
<td>0.780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative model</td>
<td>1,037.291</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>13.541</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.844</td>
<td>0.909</td>
<td>0.918</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>1,199.291</td>
<td>1,593.475</td>
<td>3.407</td>
<td>0.780</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. We compare alternative models with the hypothesized model. df, degree of freedom; GFI, goodness of fit index; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index; CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; AIC, Akaike information criterion; CAIC, consistent AIC; ECVI, expected cross-validation index; PNFI, parsimonious normed fit index. For AIC, CAIC, and ECVI, lower value indicates a better fit and a more parsimonious model; for PNFI, greater value indicates a better fit and a more parsimonious model.
This research also suggests that PAs and WAs play an important role in consumer PI's and that PAs have a higher impact on PI's than WAs. When eWOM speakers have positive reviews toward a product, consumers are more likely to form positive PAs. Internet marketers should seek reviews from credible and influential eWOM speakers on a particular Web site by asking them to try products. Positively reviewed products should generate favorable attitudes and high PI's. On the other hand, platform service providers need to ensure that users are satisfied with the Web site services and that the Web site is easy to navigate so that they will desire to return to search for additional information.

Despite the progress made by this research, it has some limitations. First, we only considered a select number of platform- and customer-based factors as antecedents of PPERC. Many possible factors, such as browsing time and response frequency, might also influence PPERC. In addition, we did not control for the listeners’ involvement and expertise and review quantity. Future research may want to control for or manipulate some of these variables in order to see how they influence the observed effects in our research. Third, following previous research, we focused on the effects of positive eWOM reviews. We did not consider consumer revenge and dysfunctional behavior. Therefore, future research is encouraged to investigate effects of negative eWOM reviews.

Notes

a. A report by InsightXplorer indicated that 17% of the Fashion Guide users are below the age of 20, 50.42% are between the ages of 21 and 30, 23.51% are between the ages of 31 and 40, and 9.07% are above the age of 41. When comparing our research sample with this community profile, the chi-square test revealed no significant difference ($\chi^2 = 3.305, p = 0.347 > 0.05$). The selected sample should therefore be representative of the research population.

b. In addition to fit statistics, we use four parsimony measures (i.e., Akaike information criterion [AIC], consistent Akaike information criterion [CAIC], expected cross-validation index [ECVI], and parsimonious normed fit index [PNFI]). For the measures of AIC, CAIC, and ECVI, a lower value indicates a better fit and a more parsimonious model. For the measure of PNFI, a greater value indicates a better fit and a more parsimonious model. The alternative model indicates a relatively better fit in terms of the fit statistics and the measures of AIC, CAIC, ECVI, and PNFI. Specifically, for the parsimony measures, the alternative model indicates relatively lower values of AIC, CAIC, and ECVI than the same value of PNFI as those of the hypothesized model.

c. The results were confirmed using another mediation testing approach, which is able to test the effects of two mediators in a model, following the recommendation of Zhao et al. A bootstrapping mediation analysis at a 95% confidence interval (CI) with 5,000 bootstrapped samples revealed that PPERC impacted purchase intentions through product and Web site attitudes. Altogether, the results from both approaches showed that the product and Web site attitudes partially mediate the effect of PPERC.

Author Disclosure Statement

No competing financial interests exist.

References


Appendix

Appendix 1: Scale Items

Construct/item

Web site reputation (Bart et al.37):
WR1. This site appears to be more trustworthy than other sites I have visited.
WR2. The site represents a company or organization that will deliver on promises made.
WR3. My overall trust in this site is.
WR4. My overall believability of the information on this site is.
WR5. My overall confidence in the recommendations on this site is.

Source credibility (Sussman and Siegal72):
SC1. How knowledgeable is the person who wrote this message, on the topic of the message?
(Not knowledgeable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Knowledgeable)
SC2. To what extent is the person who wrote this message an expert on the message topic?
(Not expert 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Expert)
SC3. How trustworthy is the person who wrote this message, on the topic of the message?
(Not trustworthy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Trustworthy)
SC4. How reliable is the person who wrote this message, on the topic of the message?
(Not reliable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Reliable)

Obtaining buying-related information (Henning-Thurau and Walsh56):
OBRI1. Because contributions by other customers help me to make the right buying decisions.
OBRI2. To benefit from others’ experiences before I buy a good or use a service.
OBRI3. Because here I get information on the quality of products faster than elsewhere.
OBRI4. Because one saves a great deal of time during shopping when informing oneself on such sites before shopping.

Social orientation through information (Henning-Thurau and Walsh56):
SOTI1. Because I can see if I am the only one who thinks of a product in a certain way.
SOTI2. Because I like to compare my own evaluation with that of others.
SOTI3. Because through reading one can get the confirmation that one make the right buying decision.
SOTI4. Because one saves a great deal of time during shopping when informing oneself on such sites before shopping.

Perceived positive eWOM review credibility (Cheung et al.44):
PPERC1. I think review is factual.
PPERC2. I think review is accurate.
PPERC3. I think review is credible.

Product attitude (Jiang and Benbasat58):
AP1. The product that I’ve just examined is good.
AP2. I have formed a favorable impression toward the product that I’ve just examined.
AP3. I like the product that I’ve just examined.

Website attitude (Shamdasani et al.38):
AW1. It is easy to build a relationship with the Web site.
AW2. I would like to visit this Web site again in the future.
AW3. I am satisfied with the service provided by this Web site.
AW4. I feel comfortable in surfing this Web site.
AW5. I feel surfing this Web site is a good way for me to spend my time.
AW6. Compared to other Web sites, I would rate this one as one of the best.

Purchase intentions (Jiang and Benbasat58):
PI1. It is likely that I will buy a product that I read reviews on this Web site.
PI2. I will purchase the product the next time I need a product that I read reviews on this Web site.
PI3. Suppose that a friend calls me to get my advice in his/her search for a product that I read reviews on this Web site; I would recommend him/her to buy the product.
PI4. I will definitely try a product that I read reviews on this Web site.