

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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