

Impact of Word of Mouth Communication on Consumer Purchase Decision

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Abstract

Corporate executives are searching for new ways to make consumers aware of a product or service as the market is highly competitive. They adopt different methods to achieve this goal. Consumers make decisions using a variety of methods, including word of mouth. Therefore, this study was done to investigate the effect of WOM communication (word of mouth) on the outcome of a brand or the brand image effect on the decisions of consumers to purchase a television. The study focuses on television brands mainly. A sample of 552 was collected from Karaikal, Puducherry State, using the questionnaire method. The data thus generated was analysed with the help of PLS-SEM. The findings reveal that offline WOM, online WOM, E-WOM quality, and information consumption all have a significant impact on the brand image, whereas the brand image has a direct influence on the consumer purchase decision of television. The impact of prior purchase satisfaction and expertise of the sender was found to be not significant.

Keywords: Brand Image, E-WOM Quality, Purchase Decision, Word of Mouth Communication, WOM, Television

JEL classifications: D12, M30, M31, M37, P23

1. Introduction

People used to share their views personally a few years back when there was no technology available. Earlier, recommendations were the main reason for an advertisement for a business, but now technology has changed many things. Today, people are using technology to interact with their friends, family, and other people through social media and share their experiences there. Nail (2005)¹ explored how loyalty and trust create word of mouth and the impact of later on the buying behaviour of consumers. Information created by a consumer is much more credible than information created by a seller. It is because information credibility is positively related to trustworthiness². Chevalier and Mayzlin (2003)³ found

that book sales are significantly affected by online book reviews. Also, it was stated that positive book reviews help in increasing sales and the impact of positive reviews is less than negative reviews⁴. Either it is positive WOM or negative WOM, it helps in increasing performance with respect to box office revenue⁵. Rather than the print advertisements, word of mouth has an impact on consumers' switching brands⁶. The author⁷ explored how user comments, reviews, suggestions, and advertisements affect the perception of a consumer in a distinct way.

Consumers found WOM the most informative and reliable. Companies' brand image is extremely important for their success, stock price, future profit, acquisition decisions, company alliances, and market competitive

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advantage⁸. People share their opinions with others for a variety of reasons, including spreading knowledge, recognising societal needs, wanting to do good for others, and sharing their experiences with others. WOM is a powerful source for customers and marketers. With the increasing usage of the internet, WOM is used to share knowledge and promote products. WOM helps in reducing expenses and saving time. Experts share their views and ideas using WOM, and it provides true reviews of a product⁹. A company does not pay for consumers' views about a product, and it is a less costly tool for advertisement. Companies spend more money on promotion through TV, print, etc., but they don't need to pay for reference. Traditionally, word of mouth was the main source of publicity. It was a powerful and important component for a long time. But with the passage of time and the arrival of digital media, the business has changed. In this digital era, digital media and mobile phones are the mediums for word of mouth acceleration¹⁰.

2. Statement of Problem

Different marketing programmes such as TV advertising, promotions, words-of-mouth, ethical policies towards their society and employees collectively build a consumer mindset towards a brand or purchasing decision. These are all the variables that affect and contribute to building the viewpoint of a consumer. Word-of-mouth, among the most important strategies, has a broader impact on industries and the economy. So, it is essential for organisations and companies to understand and evaluate the reaction of word-of-mouth, which will enhance their sales and allow them to estimate a good return on their investment. There are many methods through which companies can benefit from word-of-mouth. For example, E-WOM has made it easier for companies to keep a check on performance and market demand. Consumer behaviour is desirable and undesirable and is mostly dependent on the effective utilisation of the above circumstances by the organization. Moreover, this study signifies how word-of-mouth in comparison to other marketing tools has had an impression on consumers, marketers, and companies in the overall market. This study also intends to develop the marketing implications for marketers of how WOM is best used to manipulate consumer behaviour and build it positively.

The purpose of this study is to look into the association between online and offline Word-Of-Mouth (WOM) and Consumer Purchase Decisions (CPD) regarding television purchases in the Karaikal district of Puducherry. How remarks about anything can influence the choice of purchasers in their purchasing behaviour is fascinating. Furthermore, it is to analyse the impact of an independent variable (WOM) on the dependent variable (consumer purchasing behaviour) in the context of Karaikal district.

3. Research Objective

To determine the impact of the Words of Mouth (WOM) on Consumer Purchasing Decision (CPD)

4. Literature Review

4.1 Purchase Intention/Decision

WOM helps the consumers to purchase long-term and everyday goods. It has been observed that consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by friends and family members¹¹. Comments and reviews are helpful in purchase decision of the consumer and it also makes them more confident¹². WOM helps in increasing the organization sale, so the firm should focus on WOM communication to encourage the sales¹³. After identifying influencing factors for purchase intention of the consumer, marketing strategies can be developed for business growth and to attract consumers¹⁴. As per the findings, a positive relationship exists between E-WOM communication with the buying intent and brand image¹⁵. Consumers' intention for travelers booking directly influenced by perceived value, brand image, trust and perceived price with mediating effects, whereas leisure travelers consider time, cost and convenience when they book online hotel¹⁶. The conscious plan of the consumer is intention to purchase that creates an attempt to buy the product¹⁷ and purchase intention is one of the key factors for the success of online advertisement¹⁸. Many studies have found that customer's attitude about a brand/product has an impact on purchase intent^{5,19}. Consumer E-WOM messages can improve a service of product quality²⁰ and these kinds of messages minimize the uncertainty and risk related to a product or service. E-WOM messages influence

consumers' product purchase decisions²¹, and impactful reviews also effects positively on the intent of purchasin²².

4.2 Online and Offline WOM

To share the information about a service or product, WOM communication is the very important channel and it is necessary to see the technical savvy impact on word of mouth consumption²³. With passage of time, WOM communication is changing. Due to change in technology or change in communication techniques, E-WOM communication is becoming more popular, and it has a positive and noticeable control on the brand image, brand attitude of the consumers, and purchase intentions²⁴. The way of communication with each other has changed due to technology, and through this technology consumers can share advice online related to consumption^{13,25}. Also it can be seen that bad experience about a product or place can arise difficulties for a firm as it spread negative WOM²⁶. Before purchasing anything today consumer search for the information about the product and use the sources like; reviews of the customer, sites, blogs and forum. Consumers choose E-WOM most of the time to get the information²⁷ and through internet E-WOM is spreading widely⁴³. Some studies show that to get reliable information, consumers prefer WOM communication and their decisions are affected by suggestions and comments of the consumers²⁹. Sharing

views online on internet is a good opportunity to share their consumption experiences with other consumers and sharing their advice related to brand, products on social networking and review sites of consumer²⁵. From the above background following hypothesizes are framed:
H₁: There is significant relationship between Online Word-of-Mouth communication and Brand Image.
H₂: There is significant relationship between Offline Word-of-Mouth communications Brand Image.

4.3 E-WOM Quality

Information about a service and product quality can be gained by E-WOM messages³⁰ and these messages are helpful in minimizing uncertainty and risk related to service or product²¹. E-WOM quality means comment's convincing strength drive in message which is informational³¹, which shows that both the quality and quantity of E-WOM has positive effecton intent of customers to purchase¹². It is very important to assess the potential purchase decision through perception of the consumer about quality information. Quality of information perceived by the consumers helps in determining their buying decision³². The following hypothesis has been established based on E-WOM quality reviews.

H₃: There is significant relationship between E-quality and Brand Image.

Table 1. Summary of Hypothesis

| Hyp | Statement | Source |
|----------------|---|--|
| H ₁ | There is significant relationship between Online Word of Mouth communication and Brand Image. | Lin <i>et al.</i> , 2013, Samiei and Jalilvand, 2012; Torlak <i>et al.</i> , 2014, Mayzlin and Godes, 2004, Brown <i>et al.</i> , 2007 ^{5,20,15,13} |
| H ₂ | There is significant relationship between Offline Word of Mouth communications Brand Image. | Lin <i>et al.</i> , 2013, Samiei and Jalilvand, 2012; Torlak <i>et al.</i> , 2014, Mayzlin and Godes, 2004, Brown <i>et al.</i> , 2007 ^{5,20,15,13} |
| H ₃ | There is significant relationship between E-quality and Brand Image. | Lin <i>et al.</i> , 2013, Samiei and Jalilvand, 2012; Torlak <i>et al.</i> , 2014, Mayzlin and Godes, 2004, Brown <i>et al.</i> , 2007, Cheung, 2008 ^{5,20,15,13} |
| H ₄ | There is significant relationship between Information Consumption and Brand Image. | Lin <i>et al.</i> , 2013, Samiei and Jalilvand, 2012; Torlak <i>et al.</i> , 2014, Mayzlin and Godes, 2004, Brown <i>et al.</i> , 2007 ^{5,20,15,13} |
| H ₅ | There is significant relationship between Prior Purchase Satisfaction and Brand Image. | Chen-Yu and Hong, 2002, Shim <i>et al.</i> , 2001 ^{33,35} |
| H ₆ | There is significant relationship between Expertise of sender and Brand Image. | Alba & Hutchinson, 1987, Lin <i>et al.</i> , 2013 ^{36,3} |
| H ₇ | There is significant relationship between Brand image and Purchase decision. | Torlak <i>et al.</i> , 2014, Lien <i>et al.</i> , 2015, Chao and Liao, 2016, Mira <i>et al.</i> , 2014 ^{41,15,12,40,41} |

4.4 Information Consumption and Prior Purchase Satisfaction

Researcher found that information from colleagues; co-workers and friends are related to tech savvy level. Information creation and consumption from social media and friends are correlated with tech savvy²³. Consumers pre purchase satisfaction influence the purchase decision related to the product. If the consumer is satisfied with the food product prior to purchase, then product label information equals consumer satisfaction on a point of purchase³³. Study defined that in comparison of offline purchase, online purchases are seems risky as there are few factors missing like real contact with consumers³⁴. It was also seen that consumers who purchased some product online before are less feared and want to purchase online again because they get confidence. Past satisfactory expectations lead to intentions of repurchase about online purchase³⁵. As a result, the following hypotheses are established:

H₄: There is significant relationship between Information Consumption and Brand Image.

H₅: There is significant relationship between Prior Purchase Satisfaction and Brand Image.

4.5 Expertise of Sender

Researcher defined that consumer consider expert advice more than any other individual who possess professional knowledge³⁶ and their expertise place a positive impact on purchase intention of the consumer¹². Experts' knowledge helps the consumers to select a particular product or brand as the experts plays the role of opinion leader³⁷. The individual who is an expert in a specific product or other product line should share product-related information, as this information will be pursued by people more than any other information³⁸. As a result, reviews conducted to study sender's expertise aid in the formulation of the following hypothesis:

H₆: There is significant relationship between Expertise of sender and Brand Image.

4.6 Brand Image

Brand image is an opinion on the service of product and expressed by associations of brand in the consumers' mind. Brand association involves emotional dimension/ attitude for a brand³⁹. Researchers conducted their study on Taiwanese outlet malls, identifying the effect

of discounted prices and brand image on consumers' purchase intentions. This survey report found that consumers' purchase intention influenced by brand image⁴⁰. Brand image creation in consumers mind is a tough competition among various outlet malls and rather than size of shopping malls, their image influence the consumer's more⁴¹. Moderating impacts of product involvement and brand image in the E-WOM and purchase intention is another crucial factor¹². Without expenditure, advertisement can be done through WOM communication. It was seen that motivation and brand image place an impact on WOM and brand image affected by motivation⁴¹. Wants and needs can be identified with the help of brand image and it also helps in making differences between other brands which are in competition⁴². The researchers discovered a strong influence of brand image on consumer attitudes toward a brand²⁴ and positive connection among E-WOM, intention to purchase and brand image¹⁵. Following hypothesis have been setup based on reviews of brand image:

H₇: There is significant relationship between Brand image and Purchase decision.

5. Research Gap

There are numerous factors that influence a consumer's purchasing decision. Today consumer search on internet to confirm their decisions and they go for experts, WOM, blogs, sites etc. People use online and offline WOM related to a product and they consult with their friends, relatives and family members etc. Al-Sanad (2016)⁴⁴ revealed that television purchase decision of youth is influenced by celebrities, family, work colleagues and friends. Also positive and negative WOM influence the buying decision of consumer. As a result, the impact of WOM on consumer purchase decisions was also analyzed in this paper.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Sampling Procedures

The sampling procedure used in this study is simple random sampling. Respondents were usually selected randomly in the district of Karaikal. In simple random sampling, every element in the population has a known and equal chance of being selected as a subject. Simple

random sampling has the least bias and offers the most generalizability.

6.2 Development of Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed to achieve the research objectives and for data collection. The weightage was given to the measurement scale, type, wording, number, and relevance of the questions.

6.3 Population Size and Sample Size

The survey was conducted among the people who use WOM communication. The universe of the study was Puducherry state in India. Data was collected from 5 communes, and 600 questionnaires were distributed to collect the data.

6.4 A Description of the Data

The questionnaire's first part included information related to demographics like income, age, gender, sex, etc. The survey was conducted, and data was collected from people of various ages, genders, educational qualifications, income, marital status, and occupation who watch television.

6.5 Procedure for the Collection of Data

A questionnaire was created for conducting this survey, and a multistage sampling method was followed for

collecting data. Data was collected from the individuals who were willing to answer. From 600 questionnaires only 552 questionnaires were found valid for further analysis.

7. Data Analysis

Statistical techniques like confirmatory factor analysis, Partial least square structural equation modeling were applied for analyzing the collected data.

8. Results

The below mentioned Table 2 is showing the demographic characteristics of the sample. Sample consists of 58.2% of male and 41.8% female. Majority of the respondents were single (60%). Most of the consumers were post graduated (37%) followed by graduate (36.2%). Around 54.2% of the respondents had less than 20,000 incomes per month followed by above 50,000 (23.6 %).

8.1 CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis)

Based on the findings of indicator variables' modification index (Jöreskog & Sorbom, 1986) and confirmatory factor analysis, one item of E-WOM quality, three items of online WOM, one item from offline WOM and one item from information consumption was eliminated due to less reliability of the statements as shown in Figure 1. Table 3 reveals that value of AVE is higher than 50 percent

Table 2. Respondent Demographic Profile

| Particulars | Variables | Freq. | Percentage |
|----------------|----------------|-------|------------|
| Gender | Female | 231 | 41.8 |
| | Male | 321 | 58.2 |
| Age | <20 | 142 | 25.7 |
| | 20-30 | 311 | 56.3 |
| | 30-40 | 77 | 13.9 |
| | > 40 | 22 | 4.0 |
| Marital Status | Single | 331 | 60.0 |
| | Married | 216 | 39.1 |
| | Widow/divorced | 5 | .9 |
| Qualification | Upto 12th | 84 | 15.2 |
| | Graduate | 200 | 36.2 |
| | Post graduate | 204 | 37.0 |
| | M.Phil./Ph.D | 54 | 9.8 |
| | Diploma | 10 | 1.8 |

| | | | |
|------------|--|-----|------|
| Occupation | Government employee | 110 | 19.9 |
| | Private sector | 49 | 8.9 |
| | Student | 378 | 68.5 |
| | Other (Self- employed/Housewife/Retired) | 15 | 2.7 |
| Income | <20,000 | 299 | 54.2 |
| | 20,000-30,000 | 80 | 14.5 |
| | 30,000-40,000 | 24 | 4.3 |
| | 40,000-50,000 | 19 | 3.4 |
| | >50,000 | 130 | 23.6 |

Source: Authors' compilation

Table 3. CFA Results using PLS-SEM 3.0

| Construct | CCR | AVE | Cronbach's Alpha |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|------------------|
| E-WOM Quality (EQUA) | 0.862 | 0.61 | 0.861 |
| Online Word of Mouth (EWOM) | 0.865 | 0.682 | 0.864 |
| Offline Word of Mouth (WOM) | 0.895 | 0.682 | 0.897 |
| Prior Purchase Satisfaction (PPSAT) | 0.82 | 0.537 | 0.816 |
| Information Consumption (INFOCONS) | 0.774 | 0.534 | 0.772 |
| Expertise of Sender (SENEXPP) | 0.85 | 0.66 | 0.85 |
| Brand Image (BI) | 0.835 | 0.629 | 0.833 |
| Purchase Decision (PDEC) | 0.888 | 0.725 | 0.888 |

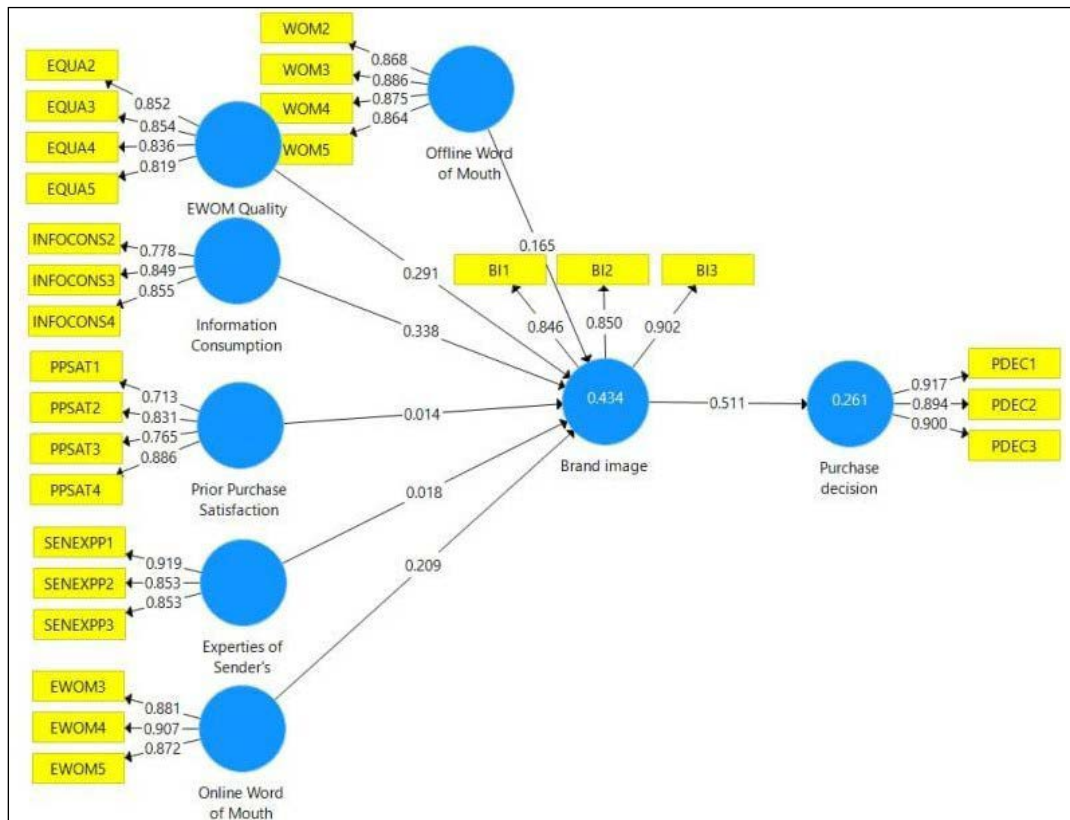
Note: CCR - composite construct reliability; AVE - extracted average variance.

Table 4. Results of CFA

| Construct | Standardized Loadings | t-value | Item-to-total Correlation |
|--|-----------------------|---------|---------------------------|
| E-WOM Quality (EQUA) | | | |
| EQUA2 | 0.808 | 15.954 | 0.808 |
| EQUA3 | 0.807 | 18.178 | 0.807 |
| EQUA4 | 0.798 | 17.277 | 0.798 |
| EQUA5 | 0.708 | 16.197 | 0.708 |
| Online Word of Mouth (EWOM) | | | |
| EWOM3 | 0.865 | 27.034 | 0.865 |
| EWOM4 | 0.862 | 28.496 | 0.862 |
| EWOM5 | 0.745 | 25.169 | 0.745 |
| Offline Word of Mouth (WOM) | | | |
| WOM2 | 0.889 | 18.339 | 0.889 |
| WOM3 | 0.747 | 13.691 | 0.747 |
| WOM4 | 0.757 | 18.32 | 0.757 |
| WOM5 | 0.897 | 17.946 | 0.897 |
| Satisfaction from Prior Purchase (PPSAT) | | | |
| SAT1 | 0.624 | 9.916 | 0.624 |
| SAT2 | 0.807 | 10.542 | 0.807 |
| SAT3 | 0.637 | 10.538 | 0.637 |

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| SAT4 | 0.839 | 19.345 | 0.839 |
| Information Consumption (INFOCONS) | | | |
| INFOCONS2 | 0.643 | 17.022 | 0.643 |
| INFOCONS3 | 0.775 | 21.138 | 0.775 |
| INFOCONS4 | 0.767 | 20.833 | 0.767 |
| Expertise of Sender (SENEXPP) | | | |
| SENEXPP 1 | 0.881 | 17.628 | 0.881 |
| SENEXPP 2 | 0.776 | 12.814 | 0.776 |
| SENEXPP 3 | 0.776 | 8.203 | 0.776 |
| Brand Image (BI) | | | |
| BI1 | 0.78 | 28.843 | 0.78 |
| BI2 | 0.738 | 29.535 | 0.738 |
| BI3 | 0.856 | 36.091 | 0.856 |
| Purchase Decision (PDEC) | | | |
| PDEC1 | 0.845 | 15.954 | 0.845 |
| PDEC2 | 0.865 | 18.178 | 0.865 |
| PDEC3 | 0.845 | 17.277 | 0.845 |

Note: NFI - 0.897 (Normed fit index); SRMR = 0.034; ***p < 0.001. (Standardized RMS residual)



Source: Authors' compilation by using PLS-SEM 3.0

Figure 1. Diagram of constructs by using PLS-SEM 3.0.

Table 5. Hypothesis Result

| | Hyp. | Standardized Coefficients | t-value | Results |
|----|---|---------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| H1 | Online Word of Mouth → Brand Image | 0.209*** | 4.829*** | Supported |
| H2 | Offline Word of Mouth → Brand Image | 0.165*** | 4.888*** | Supported |
| H3 | Ewomquality → Brand Image | 0.291*** | 6.995*** | Supported |
| H4 | Information Consumption → Brand Image | 0.338*** | 9.242*** | Supported |
| H5 | Prior Purchase Satisfaction → Brand Image | 0.014 | 0.446 | Not Supported |
| H6 | Expertise of Sender → Brand Image | 0.018 | 0.497 | Not Supported |
| H7 | Brand Image → Purchase Decision | 0.511*** | 16.117*** | Supported |

Source: Authors' compilation using PLS-SEM 3.0.

Note: NFI - 0.835; (Normed fit index); SRMR - 0.047; *p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001. (Standardized RMS residual)

(0.5) indicating thereby that all the constructs explaining indicators variance more than half⁴⁵. Value for Cronbach's alpha for all the constructs were more than 0.7 and value of composite reliability were more than 0.7 (threshold value) which indicated that internal consistency and reliability was good⁴⁶.

9. Discussion

People used to share their experiences with others via WOM communication, and these experiences helped them make purchasing decisions. The study examined WOM communication's impact on brand image and the effect of brand image on the buying decision of television. With the help of PLS-SEM, a total of 7 hypotheses were formulated to get the result. H₁, H₂, H₃ and H₄ were found to be related or accepted. Results revealed that E-WOM quality¹², online WOM^{15,28} information consumption, and offline WOM have significant effects on brand image. According to the findings, the sender's expertise (H6) and prior purchase satisfaction (H5) had no significant influence on the television brand image. Lien et al. discovered support for H7 (2015). It was determined that brand image has a significant effect on consumer buying decisions^{2,16,40}.

10. Conclusion

WOM communication is crucial in consumer decision making. The findings show that E-WOM quality, offline WOM, online WOM, and data consumption all affect the brand image of televisions. Sender expertise and prior purchase satisfaction have no significant impact on television brand image, but the brand image has a

significant influence on buying behaviour. People collect online reviews when they want to purchase a television, and if they don't read them; they feel worried about their decision. Therefore, online communication channels must be the focus point for marketers and firms to influence consumers' intentions for brands⁴⁷. This study only examined the WOM communication impact on brand image and the effect of brand image on buying decisions; additional research on mediation and moderation impact can be conducted. The study can also be carried out on the other variables and the impact of demographic variables as a moderator.

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