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FROM TRADITIONAL TO ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH

Haneen Ragheb Attaallah

PhD candidate,

University of Pécs, Faculty of Business and Economics, International PhD Programme in Business Administration

ORCID: 0000-0002-4255-025X

Address: Hungary, Pécs, Petöfi Sándor utca 35.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present the concept of one of the most effective marketing tools: Traditional Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM). First, the paper mentioned the different definitions for both of them and their elements and features. Why have they become one of the essential marketing tools? Then the similarities and differences between WOM and eWOM have been explained. After that, the paper summarized the factors that led to the transfer and the digitized of Word-of-Mouth. In addition, the paper mentioned the impact of both Traditional Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM).

KEYWORDS: marketing, traditional word of mouth, electronic word of mouth,

INTRODUCTION

For several years, marketing has been known as “the management process responsible for profitably identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements.” However, the marketing concept has become outdated due to the appearance of websites and technology. As a result, companies can no longer depend on the concept of “managing the consumer” (Zhang et al., 2010). Furthermore, due to the availability and accessibility of a considerable amount of information, consumers have become in a strong position. Therefore, the “Push Marketing” policy, where the producers aim to convince the customers with the pre-designed and pre-produced products, is replaced with “Pull Marketing.” Pull Marketing is where the companies communicate and engage with the consumers and, understand their desires and needs, then deliver to them what they asked for at the time and the place they prefer through the most effective channels (Maxham, 2001).

They have previously accustomed the communication characterized as “one-way communications,” where the organizations send and disseminate the information to the consumers through, for example, surveys, information sessions, or focus groups. While these days, communications have become more interactive. Customers can generate either negative or positive content about the companies and their



products and share it through several platforms like Facebook, blogs, Twitter, and other platforms (East et al., 2007).

In general, consumers trust their peer consumers, friends, and family members more than trust advertising companies and promoters, which makes Word of Mouth (WOM) one of the most potent sources of market information for customers (East et al., 2007).

Word-of-Mouth has gotten significant- scale concerns from researchers and practitioners for several years, as it has a broader influence in shaping the customer's behaviors than printed materials, TV, and personal selling in specific situations. Nevertheless, due to the revolution in information and connection technology, customer communications conditions and ecosystems have been reshaped and reinforced (Katz & Shapiro, 1994).

Word-of-Mouth has two shapes: offline and online. The offline shape is called "Traditional Word-of-Mouth," which refers to face-to-face verbal and non-commercial dialogues and discussions between two parties. However, the appearance of the internet, advanced technology, and the digital environment led to digitizing the WOM and the emergence of online or "Electronic Word-of-Mouth" (Dellarocas, 2003).

2. Traditional and Electronic Word-Of-Mouth (WOM & E-WIM)

Buttner & Goritz (2008) introduced Word-of-Mouth (WOM) as in-person and eye-to-eye communications and dialogues between customers or clients with each other about their opinions on a particular good or service. This communication commonly happens privately and among two parties: the information generator and the recipient, who mostly knows each other as family members, neighbors, or friends.

Independence is the main pivotal feature of the person who produces the Word-of-Mouth. While the source of information is the customers, it is more trusted than the company-created content. Finally, Word-of-Mouth inherently lasts for a short time; mainly, its characterized as "fleeting" as it disappears once uttered. Word-of-Mouth (WOM) is a type of informal communication between customers about the features, pros, and cons of particular products and services and their sellers. Many authors argue that Word of Mouth significantly impacts customers' behaviors when buying a good or choosing a service provider. Mostly, consumers consider Word-of-Mouth a trustful way to mitigate the related riskiness with buying decisions. Consumers depend on Word-of-Mouth to collect enough information before making a decision. In this case, they depend on their and others' previous experiences. Partners, friends, or relatives usually create traditional Word-of-Mouth, who face the same situations and consider credible sources of information (You et al., 2015). Word-of-Mouth plays an important role



in re-shape the customers' thoughts about the products or services by encouraging the information exchange between them (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1966).

The traditional-Word-of-Mouth has two main features: vividness and pallidness. There is no doubt that vividly and timely communication at the same time and in the same place, the vividly displayed information is more catchy, exciting, and intriguing (Herr et al., 1991). Moreover, numerous platforms allow customers to create and publish their thoughts and reviews, like social media pages and goods/services review websites. These shared ideas via the internet are a special kind of Word-of-Mouth called electric Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM). Usually, customers have more confidence in each other and believe in friends, relatives, or strangers' suggestions and feedback than in firms' or marketers' developed content (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011).

Although it is hard to control electronic Word-of-Mouth, it could encourage potential customers to try the products or services. Many researchers, such as Park & Lee (2009), argue that companies must take into consideration the e-WOM influence to design an efficient digital marketing strategy. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) described it as positive or negative thoughts created by existing or potential consumers about the firm and its goods and services. Many people can access these thoughts online through the internet on different platforms. Usually, the creation of the content and the exchange of it take place on websites, weblogs, or social media channels. On the other hand, Breazeale (2009) mentioned that electronic Word-Of-Mouth is an electric version of communications, interactions, and sharing information between customers about their opinions, reviews, and feedback about products or services.

In the Word-of-Mouth process, usually, there are two parties involved. The first part is the sender, who generates the information and messages, while the other party is the receiver of the communicated message. What distinguishes this process is that the consumers independently generate these messages without the company's involvement (Sen & Lerman, 2007).

Based on their functions and the used platforms, Lee & Youn (2009) classified electronic Word-of-Mouth: (1) Specialized electronic Word-of-Mouth: where the consumers share their ratings and opinions on particular websites. These websites do not take place in selling the goods, but they are engines that buyers use to filter and compare products based on price, features, reviews, and other criteria. Examples of these websites are Google Shopping, Pricegrabber, and Shopping.com. (2) Affiliated electronic Word-of-Mouth refers to consumer reviews on retail webs such as Amazon. (3) Social electric Word-of-Mouth: this is the shared opinion among social media users. (4) Miscellaneous electronic Word-of-Mouth: includes all other communicated thoughts and ideas on online social media such as weblogs, debates, and emails.



While traditional Word-of-Mouth is restricted to verbal communications from friends, family members, or neighbors, many other unknown persons can involve in electronic Word-of-Mouth. Consequently, electronic Word-of-Mouth can be anonymous as it usually occurs between persons with few or no previous relationships. This makes it difficult for the customer to decide the quality and credibility of the provided information.

Additionally, due to the usage of the internet, electronic Word-of-Mouth can move and disseminate fast, which leads to the consumer spending more time searching and finding the needed and accurate information (Filiari & McLeay, 2014). The massive spread of information at a large scale with little needed effort through the internet facilitates the finding of great details about different products or services, compared to available content through traditional Word-of-Mouth. As a result, the consumers who approach electronic Word-of-Mouth need to consume additional hours and effort in searching to process the large volume of available information (Lee & Youn, 2009).

Electronic Word-of-Mouth could take place in three different channels: (1) One-to-One channels where a single person disseminates a message to another person, sending an email or phone message are an excellent example of this type of channel. (2) One-to-Many channels occur when a single individual communicates a message with a group of persons, this can be when a person posts a comment related to goods on the web or product review websites. (3) Many-to-Many refers to a message delivered from a group of persons to another group, as in blogs and online newsgroups (Litvin et al., 2008).

Lin et al., (2013) demonstrated that electronic Word-of-Mouth has three dimensions: (1) the quality of the disseminated information by electronic Word-of-Mouth, which is the messages' ability to impact future buying decisions, (2) the quantity of electronic Word-of-Mouth refers to the amount of shared online information and reviews, as the more shared positive opinions about the goods or services, more the customers believe in the quality of the good and (3) the information sender's experience.

3. The different characteristics of Traditional Word-of-Mouth and Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Electronic and traditional Word-of-Mouth have mutual and different characteristics. One of these differences is the communication channels. eWOM and traditional WOM utilize different platforms to exchange information and thoughts between the involved parties. While traditional Word-of-Mouth happens at the same time, in two-way form, and face-to-face communications and dialogue, electronic Word-of-Mouth communications can happen at the same time or not. The information providers can save their reviews online, so the information seeker can review them at any time and decide. As a result, the amount of communicated information through eWOM is more than through traditional



Word-of-Mouth (Steffes Hansen & Kyun Lee, 2013).

In other words, in traditional Word-of-Mouth, the communicators meet face-to-face and exchange information. At the same time, in electronic Word-of-Mouth, communication happens behind the scenes, where the communicators access the information through their PCs or engage in typing messages. Also, while traditional Word-of-Mouth happens in private and out of the public eye, electronic Word-of-Mouth happens in public. Besides that, in contrast with the fact that traditional Word-of-Mouth is volatile, electronic Word-of-Mouth can be archived and re-used (Novak & Hoffman, 2003). Godes & Mayzlin (2004) confirmed the same point, the communication and the discussions in traditional Word-of-Mouth happen privately, making it challenging to document. On the other hand, electronic Word-of-Mouth provided a simple and cost-effective chance to evaluate and observe the needed information because of the online reviews and thoughts. Another characteristic that differentiates eWOM from Traditional WOM is the “speed and ease” in the reach of the information. In this case, once the customers seek formation, they turn on the internet (Electronic Word-of-Mouth).

Consequently, consumers can reach the information at any time without waiting for anybody, a family member or a friend, to share reviews and thoughts about what they are willing to purchase. Also, they can double-check and confirm the information they got through traditional Word-of-Mouth by using the internet and online platforms (Yang, 2017). Dellarocas (2003) considered the most crucial distinction between electronic and traditional Word-of-Mouth that eWOM allows finding worldwide reviews and thoughts about products, services, or companies from a large group of persons. While Traditional WOM, consumers could find the information and disseminate it only through a small group of persons.

The solidity of the relationship between the sender and recipient is one of the most divergent between traditional and electronic Word-of-Mouth. A sender with a solid relationship with the recipient is somebody who has a previous relationship with the recipient as a family member or a friend. The sender with a fragile connection with the recipient, who has a small or no previous relationship with the recipient, as persons, not familiars with, or a fellow customer (Chatterjee, 2001). Schindler & Bickart (2005) argued that the relationship in electronic Word-of-Mouth between the communicated parties is usually weak because any random person can publish their reviews online.

Cho & Huh (2008) see that the main challenge for electronic Word-of-Mouth, unlike Traditional Word-of-Mouth, is the “credibility” of the content. Sometimes electronic Word-of-Mouth could be misleading because it could contain more contradictory reviews than traditional Word-of-Mouth. Hussain et al. (2017) argued that although some people consider traditional Word-of-Mouth more



credible and reliable as relatives and friends generate it, others trust more in electronic Word-of-Mouth. Because in the case of traditional Word-of-Mouth, several parties of senders and recipients could engage, resulting in the initial messages being changed, leading to decreased WOM credibility as a source of information. These grant greater power to the documented and recorded communications and shared information in Electronic Word-of-Mouth.

4. Factors led to the transfer from Traditional Word-of-Mouth to Electronic W-of-Mouth.

Several factors led Traditional Word-of-Mouth to take another shape under "Electronic Word-of-Mouth."

4.1 Digital environment

Technology and the Internet have become fundamental in the daily lives of individuals and communities. Connecting billions of persons worldwide, the Internet is a fundamental pillar of the present-day information society. For example, in April 2020, globally, almost 4.57 billion people were active internet users, 59 percent of the global population (Clement, 2020b). Furthermore, the creation of many information technology systems allows individuals to reach the Internet from anywhere. This unprecedented change reshaped traditional communication styles. Nowadays, people prefer to use the Internet as a powerful communication tool.

Consequently, Customers can effortlessly post their reviews and thoughts about specific products or services. In the same way, they can easily access other consumers' reviews of products or services. People involve themselves in the digital environment, and there are many reasons behind that. As customers, they are seeking information about previous experiences from other customers related to specific products or services. As a result, marketing specialists reacted to this change by increasingly shifting the use of "Digital Marketing Channels" (Lee & Lee, 2009).

4.2 Social Media Networking

Boyd & Ellison (2007) defined Social Media Networking as a website-based service designed to allow internet users to create their profiles and personal connections, giving them space to communicate. Social media provide a virtual space for consumer to communicate their reviews and experience and share information related to the products and services which affect other buying decisions. Also, they can create a community with members who have the same interests. Internet users can participate in content generation and interact with other content through likes, comments, or sharing. The main feature of Social Media Websites is the ability to create and interchange "user-generated Content." Social media includes several online information-sharing platforms such as Facebook, creativity works-sharing sites such as YouTube, collaborative websites such as Wikipedia, and microblogging sites such as Twitter (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).



4.3 Mobile

the increase in mobile users and the shift from desktop to mobile significantly affect customers and shopping attitudes. People across the world spend more time online; the average daily time spent online worldwide increased from 43 minutes of desktop internet consumption and 32 minutes of mobile internet consumption in 2011 to 37 minutes of desktop internet consumption and 155 minutes of mobile internet consumption in 2020 (Clement, 2020a).

5. The Impact of traditional Word-of-Mouth (WOM) and Electronic W-of-Mouth (eWOM)

One of the first who wrote about Word-of-Mouth was Whyte & William (1954), who affirmed the importance of Word-of-Mouth in marketing and its fundamental impact on customers' attitudes. After that, Katz & Lazarsfeld (1966) mentioned, "Word-of-Mouth has a significant influence on individuals' shopping and buying decisions. Also, they highlighted the role that Word-of-Mouth plays in affecting the customers to change brands. They mentioned that Word-of-Mouth has an impact seven times more than newspapers and magazines, four times more than personal selling, and twice more than radio advertising. Cheung & Thadani (2012) mentioned that customers consider Word-of-Mouth a more reliable and influential source of information than classical media channels such as TV and printed promotions. Although Word-of-Mouth has many advantages, Cantalops & Salvi (2014) mentioned that e-WOM offers firms more advantages than traditional WOM. Electronic Word-of-Mouth allows companies to collect information about their customers through published feedback and reviews on the Internet and digital platform, then evaluate the impact of these thoughts on potential customers (Yang, 2017). Studies clarify the relationship between electronic Word-of-Mouth and sales and revenue by "awareness effects" or "persuasive effects." Awareness effects refer to the published evaluation of specific goods and lead to product awareness or approachability; as a result, these products will be noted more by the customers. The growth in electronic Word-of-Mouth increases "product awareness" and leads to more sales (Davis & Khazanchi, 2008).

On the other hand, "persuasive effects" from the customer's assessments of the goods impact their purchase choices. Put another way, "Positive electronic Word-of-Mouth" motivate other customers to choose and buy a product, while "negative electronic Word-of-Mouth" discourages them (Duan et al., 2008).

Firms consider traditional and electronic Word-of-Mouth as a great chance to understand the consumers' needs, then modify the marketing methods of their goods and services, which will make them increase returns. Either positive or negative feedback about the services or product impact the consumers' future purchase intention by providing them the space to compare their experience with others (Yang, 2017). Casamassima & Royo-Vela (2011) mentioned that customers become more loyal



when they receive positive Word-of-Mouth, which considers a competitive advantage of the organizations. Usually, Word-of-Mouth has two directions, either "Positive" or "Negative." Researchers had many arguments and discussions about the impact of these two directions on the consumers and which one has more influence over them. Arndt (1967) argued that negative Word-of-Mouth (traditional and electronic) has a more significant impact on the customer assessment of the brand than positive Word-of-Mouth. Ather study confirmed the same results, as Park & Lee (2009) highlighted that negative electronic Word-of-Mouth impact the purchase decision more than positive Word-of-Mouth. According to Sen & Lerman (2007), customers feel that the providers of negative feedback are encouraged by the willingness to provide accurate information based on their experience. Chatterjee (2001) studied the impact of negative online reviews on consumers' evaluation and patronage intentions. The study showed that customer familiarity with the information producer could lessen the hurt of negative Word-of-Mouth.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to explain if the use of electronic word-of-Mouth has replaced the traditional way. Traditional WOM is “face-to-face oral communications between two parties, the communicator and the receivers, about their experience related to specific products or services. Usually, the two parties have a previous relationship as family members or friends, and the communication happens privately.” On the other hand, eWOM is “virtual written communications happen either between one-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-many via the internet, using several channels and platforms. Usually, these communications happen publicly, and the communicated parties do not know each other. These conversations aim to exchange information related to products or services.”

As mentioned in the paper, there are several different characteristics between eWOM and traditional WOM depending on several factors: (1) credibility, and the communicators have a solid social tie in WOM. In contrast, in one eWOM, the two communications parties have limited or no relation. (2) Privacy. WOM happens in private, while eWOM occurs in public. (3) Speed, WOM is slow. On the other hand, eWOM is fast. (4) Accessibility, finally, the WOM is less accessible, and eWOM is easily accessible. Traditional Word-of-Mouth and Electronic Word-of-Mouth have a powerful influence on sales volume, purchases, revenue, and company reputation. Moreover, negative WOM has more impact than positive WOM.

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