Consumer Adoption of Mobile eWOM Messages

Akinori Ono
Keio University, Japan

Mai Kikumori
Keio University, Japan

INTRODUCTION

In marketing and consumer studies, word of mouth (WOM) is one of the most fascinating topics for scholars and practitioners. WOM is defined as oral, person-to-person communication between a communicator and a recipient who perceives the respective message as non-commercial although the subject is a brand, product, or service (Arndt, 1967, p. 3). Previous studies on WOM have found that WOM has a great impact on consumers' attitude formation, purchase decisions, and even post-usage perceptions of a product/service (e.g., Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Brown & Reingen, 1987; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Bone, 1995).

Since the early 1990s, with the advent of the Internet, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has become increasingly important (Bickart & Schindker, 2001; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Consumers increasingly communicate product information to other consumers via new media such as e-mail, community sites, review sites, social networking sites, blogs, online discussion forums, and news groups (e.g., Goldsmith, 2006; Okazaki, 2008). Many scholars have found that such eWOM messages have a great impact on consumers' purchase decision making (Chung, Lee, & Rabjon, 2008; Park & Kim, 2008; Schlosser, 2011; Sen & Lerman, 2007).

With the rapid growth of mobile phone ownership, an increasing number of consumers can send and receive product information through their wireless messaging service on their mobile phones (cf. Shen, Wang, & Xiang, 2013). Communication via mobile phones in the form of e-mail, SMS, and text messages via mobile Internet access has the unique characteristic of ubiquitous connectivity, which enables consumers to exchange information anytime and anywhere (Lee, 2005; Okazaki, 2008). As a result, mobile-based electronic word of mouth (mWOM) has been regarded as an important mobile marketing tool to offer consumers context-sensitivity and time-critical recommendations (Okazaki, 2009).

As the growing importance of mWOM has been recognized, mobile viral marketing has become more popular. Mobile viral marketing is defined as the distribution or communication that relies on consumers to transmit content via mobile communication techniques and mobile devices to other potential consumers in their social sphere and to animate these contacts to also transmit the content (Wiedemann, 2007, p. 53). Because mobile viral messages from friends and relatives might be perceived to be more credible than marketer-generated promotional messages via mobile phones (Wiedemann, Haunstetter, & Pousttchi, 2008), more marketing practitioners are starting to utilize mobile-based viral marketing and, in turn, marketing scholars are starting to investigate mWOM message senders and recipients in the context of viral marketing.

Because pioneers in mWOM research focused on viral marketing, a number of scholars have shed light on how recipients of mobile viral messages from marketers via friends and relatives

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8239-9.ch014

evaluate and use the messages (Okazaki, 2008; Wiedemann, Palka, & Pousttchi, 2008; Palka, Pousttchi, & Wiedemann, 2009; Pescher, 2014). Other scholars, following the research on non-mobile eWOM, have focussed on how recipients of anonymous mWOM message senders evaluate and adopt the reviews (Shen, *et al*., 2013; Wang, Shen, & Sun, 2013).

OVERVIEW

While mobile viral marketing has often been utilized by marketing practitioners, there has not been much academic research on this topic. The earliest studies on mobile viral marketing focused only on the demographic, psychographic and behavioral characteristics of mobile phone users engaged in viral marketing behavior (e.g., Wiedemann, 2007; Wiedemann, *et al*., 2008; Chen, *et al*., 2008).

As a pioneer who addressed this gap, Dr. Okazaki (Okazaki, 2008) at the Autonomous University of Madrid examined the causal relationships between demographic characteristics, attitudes, perceived values, motivations, intentions and the behaviors of consumers who send mWOM messages and participate in mobile-based viral marketing. Although he emphasized the consumer role as a mWOM sender–not a recipient, the proposed model explained why mWOM recipients send viral messages to their friends and relatives. Thus, Dr. Okazaki (Okazaki, 2008) can be regarded as the pioneer researcher in this area.

Like Dr. Okazaki's research (2008), Dr. Yang and Dr. Zhou (Yang & Zhou, 2011) at Appalachian State University proposed a causal model identifying determinants of consumers' intentions to participate in viral marketing campaigns as mWOM recipients and, in turn, mWOM senders. Their model was partially supported with consumer data.

On the other hand, Dr. Wiedemann, Dr. Palka and their colleagues (Wiedemann, *et al*., 2008; Palka, Pousttchi, & Wiedemann, 2009) at the University of Augsburg developed a customer funnel-type process model named the "basic model (or grounded theory) of mobile viral marketing process," which described a consumer's psychological process. Whereas Dr. Okazaki's research (2008) constructed and tested a causal model to explain why a recipient of mobile viral marketing messages forwards the messages to his/her friends and relatives, Dr. Wiedemann and Dr. Palka's studies focused on illustrating a multi-stage cognitive and behavioral customer journey towards receiving, using, and forwarding viral marketing messages via mobile phones.

While scholars at the University of Augsburg did not empirically test their process model, Dr. Pescher and colleagues (Pescher, *et al*., 2014) at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich applied a dataset to their own three-stage (reading, interest, and referring decision) process model of consumer referral behavior via mobile phones.

Whereas all the studies mentioned above addressed consumer referral behavior in mobile viral messages from marketers via friends and relatives, Dr. Shen at Wuhan University and Dr. Wang at the University of Science and Technology of China (Shen, *et al*., 2013) proposed and tested a model describing the effects of system and information characteristics of mobile devices on consumers' intentions to use mobile applications and adopt mWOM reviews. Moreover, in another article published in the same year, they (Wang, *et al*., 2013) investigated the effects of consumer trust in eWOM services on usage of mWOM services based on the trust transfer perspective.

According to our knowledge, the current leading scholars are (1) Dr. Yang and Dr. Zhou (Yang & Zhou, 2011) at Appalachian State University, (2) Dr. Pescher and colleagues (Pescher, *et al*., 2014) at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, and (3) Dr. Shen at Wuhan University and Dr. Wang at the University of Science and Technology of China (Shen, *et al*., 2013; Wang, *et al*., 2013).