Chapter 66
Facebook eWOM: Self-Shared Versus System-Generated Credibility Cue

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ABSTRACT

The study examines how consumers, in a Facebook eWOM context, perceived source and message credibility by utilizing self-shared and system-generated cues. It investigates:(1) to what extent source and message credibility derived from these cues may lead to significant attitudinal responses and intentions to purchase; (2) and to what extent attitudinal responses are likely to vary with different levels and combinations of these credibility cues. Data was collected from 246 respondents who were exposed to Facebook eWOM scenarios. The structural model results confirm that the perceived source and message credibility derived from self-shared and system-generated cues are significant antecedents to purchase-related consideration for a brand. The results further confirm that these cues have an overall balancing effect: one compensates for the low level of the other leading to a significant persuasive response. The study evaluates traditional antecedents of WOM adoption, namely, perceived source and message credibility derived from unique interface-related features.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has enabled consumers the world over to share and access the personal experiences, thoughts, and opinions of others with ease. A great deal of brand-related information which is not marketer generated, or electronic word of mouth (eWOM), can be transferred via social media with the click of a few buttons. Prior studies suggest that eWOM shared or received via social media is changing the consumer decision-making process (Edelman, 2010; Schultz and Peltier, 2013). Consumers are connected in a network of brand-related conversation, and while this may facilitate the widespread dissemination of information, the downside is that eWOM on social media may be shared between those who have no prior relationship with the user in question. Furthermore, the interface may ensure significant anonymity to users, and very limited or no real personal information may be available about the users; in some cases, users may even be susceptible to identity deception (Moran and Muzellec, 2017). The interface itself is devoid of interpersonal and social context cues (Walther, 1996; Walther, 2007). Therefore, a critical question regarding this widespread medium of communication is: how do consumers perceive the credibility of brand-related information on social media? In other words, how do consumers form judgments about what to believe, and what information may lead to persuasive results? What types of interface-related information, heuristics, and cues are more impactful, and how much influence will translate to attitude formation or consumption-related behavior?

Consumers process information either systematically or based on heuristics. According to the heuristic-systematic model of information processing, users of social media, bounded by rationality, are likely to rely more on heuristics than systematic information processing (Hlee et al., 2018; Metzger et al., 2010). Prior research has examined source and message related credibility, and their influence in eWOM adoption along with which heuristics enable perceptions of credibility to form. For instance, Kim et al. (2016) found that messages with high "argument quality" and high perceived source credibility result in greater perceived usefulness of eWOM (Hur et al., s2017, p. 171). Cheung et al. (2008) evaluated credibility and information adoption with respect to online review comments and found messages and reviews that rated high in terms of comprehensiveness and relevance led to greater information adoption. Along similar lines, Baek et al. (2012) established that review ratings, perceived credibility, and actual content all help in credibility judgement. Reichelt et al. (2014, p. 65) have suggested that both "perceived credibility of relatively anonymous online comments" (message) and its "contributors" (source) influence the utility users derive from the eWOM. Interestingly, Mudambi and Schuff (2010) found more detailed and extensive reviews to be more believable. However, this may differ between search and experience goods. Finally, Ghose and Ipeirotis (2011) have concluded that subjectivity, readability, and linguistic correctness of reviews is useful for credibility judgment. These studies illustrate how the traditional indicators of credibility (source and message) are constructed in online customer communities and retail markets and how consumers establish overall credibility judgments. Present work investigates the heuristics that enable judgments of credibility specifically with respect to the Facebook eWOM context.

The focus of the present research is on the user's credibility evaluation of eWOM generated between weak connections on the social networking site (SNS) Facebook. Facebook, with 2.23 billion monthly active users,[1] is a "dominant social media format" most popular among consumers and marketers (Kim et al., 2015, p. 13; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2015). Being the most popular SNS of current times, it has empowered users with easy access to social information and impression management of self. Facebook's interactive and static features that allow for user description, status updates, photos sharing, likes, comments, shares, check-ins, and recommendations, among other features, have created a unique platform