Preface

Word of Mouth (WOM) remains an extensively researched marketing paradigm since 1960’s with incessant evolution in its forms and definitions. The growth of Information technology and Internet in particular, has led to the emergence of new forms of communication channels and platforms, which are not only user-friendly, but also highly interactive and provide several means to create and exchange user-generated content. In the context of growing usage of Internet and social media as a preferred channel of communication, WOM may be “e-defined” as ‘eWOM’ or online Word of Mouth, which covers all Internet-mediated informal communications directed at consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods, services or their sellers where the communicator is perceived to be free of any commercial influence. This new phenomenon is creating an inevitable impact on marketing tactics and strategies adopted by the companies. Hence, in order to ride this wave of change, a clear understanding of the various factors that influence the WOM in online world is essential.

This edited book was conceptualised with an objective of covering various aspects of electronic WOM and social media. The chapters describing its meaning, growth, recent trends, practices, issues and main challenges were sought from academicians, researchers and practitioners. Special emphasis was given on describing the online word of mouth phenomenon in the form of conceptual and empirical research articles and/or case studies, both in international and Indian context.

This book provides relevant theoretical frameworks and the latest empirical research findings in the area so as to contribute substantially to the body of knowledge on online word of mouth. It has been written for academicians, students as well as marketing professionals who wish to enhance their understanding of the subject. This shall help the marketers to plan their marketing strategies more effectively and to tap the potential benefits from this highly pervasive and influential tool of communication.

The book has been organised into following sections:

**Section 1:** Electronic Word of Mouth: concepts and practices.
**Section 2:** Precursors to electronic word of mouth.
**Section 3:** Capturing and analysing electronic word of mouth.
**Section 4:** Studies in Indian context.

The first Chapter of the book is an attempt to organise the fragmented literature related to eWOM. The authors have drawn attention to the fact that fragmentation of the research on eWOM can be traced back to a lack of conceptualization of the term eWOM. Therefore, this chapter highlights the great impact of eWOM on consumer’s behavior and sheds light on this concept. The chapter first introduces the context of eWOM, defines the concept and distinguishes it from other close concepts like traditional
word of mouth, buzz marketing and viral marketing. At the end, the last section of the chapter focuses on the importance given by consumers to eWOM.

Chapter 2 explains the strategic importance of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) for organisations. This chapter discusses the genesis of eWOM from word-of-mouth and the differences between the traditional word of mouth and the eWOM. The chapter also presents a literature review to explain what motivates consumers to share their consumption experience through eWOM. The author has described the various eWOM marketing techniques, a criticism of eWOM and the fields yet to be explored in eWOM research.

Social media marketing is gaining increasing importance and businesses worldwide are aiming at gaining website traffic or attention with the use of social media websites. In a very short span of time, social media has become one of the most loved media for the youths today and every business owner wants to know the way in which social media can generate value for their business. Social media marketing is being used for grabbing attention, stimulating interest, creating desire and promoting action. It has become a panacea for communication, visibility, promotion, brand building and everything. In this context, the third chapter of the book highlights the significance of e-WOM on social media as a tool for brand building and creating value to business. It also discusses its role, benefits and challenges.

Chapter 4 describes the significance of Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as a theory of technology acceptance to propose a conceptual model for eWOM in tourism industry. The author has emphasized upon application of digital storytelling as a form of eWOM for tourism promotion within the UTAUT capacities in selected ‘developing’ tourism markets.

The growing popularity of Online Social Networks(oSNS) has been a primary reason behind the eWOM phenomena. The oSNSs enable users to construct strong relationships with friends, family, as well as strangers. They also enable users to share information concerning experiences and opinions about products, brands and companies via electronic word of mouth (eWOM). This unique nature of relationship between Online social networks (oSNS) and eWOM forms the basis of Chapter 5. The authors report the results of a research investigating six motivational factors for engaging in eWOM communication, investigated under three dimensions; producing, consuming and forwarding of content on oSNSs. The study reveals that eWOM production behavior on oSNS is mainly motivated by altruism, self enhancement, electronic social interaction and exhibitionism. The motivating factors of eWOM forwarding behavior include electronic social interaction and exhibitionism, whereas the motivating factors for eWOM consumption behavior are altruism, electronic social interaction and need for intellectual engagement. Aversion of cognitive activities appeared to have a negative effect on consumption of eWOM communication.

Chapter 6 takes fashion blogs as a case to explain motivations behind becoming a blogger and continuing being one on the long-term. The authors present a review of past research findings and discussed the results of a study conducted with authors of successful blogs as interviewees. The chapter highlights the typology of motivations and the nature of potential brand-blogger relationships. The findings described in the chapter are useful for planning successful eWoM strategies using blogs as the media of communication especially in the case of fashion industry.

Chapter 7 is based on a research study conducted by the author to investigate the factors that affect electronic word of mouth. The chapter deals with different elements that conceptualize the phenomenon of eWOM and analyze what may be the possible ways for service marketers to influence this recommendation-based communication among online consumers.
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The social networks and other forms of electronic communication on Internet have created enormous amount of online data regarding customer opinions and their preferences. These data sources and consumer networks can provide significant and noteworthy insights about the consumer behaviour, and thus must be gathered and analysed using various tools and techniques.

Chapter 8 highlights the role of Social Media, like social networking sites, wikis, web forums or blogs and their relevance for organizations. In the chapter the authors have introduced two strategic tools to monitor and analyse online conversations, Sentiment Text Analysis (STA) and Network Text Analysis (NTA). An empirical example in which these tools are integrated to analyse word-of-mouth regarding products and services in the digital marketplace is also presented.

Another approach for analysing consumer opinions shared on online platforms has been described in Chapter 9. Authors of the chapter have described qualitative research approach that is termed as Netnography. Netnography is a specialized form of ethnographic research that has been adapted to the unique contingencies of various types of computer-mediated social interaction. This chapter proposes Netnography as an effective research method to assess online consumer behavior. The chapter not only helps in providing future agenda for research, but also presents a framework that may be adopted to carry out Netnography of e-commerce related websites in India.

Chapter 10 describes the application of a text mining tool, Rapidminer. Text mining is appropriate for analysing textual data in the online environments, and especially for electronic word-of-mouth. The author has explained the practical application of Rapidminer with the help of description of specific steps and screen shots.

According to 2014 statistics published on www.internetlivestats.com, India is ranked third in terms of number of Internet users, after China and USA at first and second rank respectively, with a 14% one year growth in number of users. This is much higher than that of China and United States. With this tremendous and fast growth in the number of Internet users and the rise of e-commerce companies in India, the world of business has been completely transformed. The proliferation of Internet enabled devices coupled with the changing demographics and life style of middle class population of the country has helped in creation of a huge market full of endless business opportunities for online marketers. The shopping preferences of the consumers are also changing and a large number of Indian consumers are now buying online. They are not only sharing their shopping experiences online, but also referring to information shared by other consumers for making their purchase related decisions. Hence, it is imperative to understand the role played by the online reviews and electronic word of mouth in shaping online consumer behavior and their opinions towards e-Commerce companies in Indian context.

Chapter 11 highlights the significance of Social Media being used by organisations as a supplementary platform to enhance customer experiences. The authors have emphasised in this chapter that experiences of customers with various social media platforms may rub on to their experiences with the brands being promoted through these. The chapter describes a research undertaken to study the experience of select social media platforms in Indian context. The findings indicated in the chapter are important for platform developers as it helps them to improve their platforms and for marketing managers as it guides them to associate their brands with the more favourable platforms in order to reap concomitant benefits.

Chapter 12 is based on the notion that e-WOM is not restricted to strong social tie groups and thus the role of message itself in building purchase intentions is critical. The author of the chapter attempts to investigate messages efficacy on identified constructs and has recognized credibility of message as a sole component that could moderate the discord between level of involvement and expected intention for online purchase.
Chapter 13 looks closer upon how Electronic Word of Mouth faced challenges related to social, personal, psychological and human appeal in FMCG sector which influence customers as well as firms. The authors have presented the results of a study that was undertaken in India. The chapter explains the association among various variables and concludes that mostly customers have positive attitude towards E-WOM phenomenon.

In the digital marketplace, emotions lead users to like or dislike, share or not to share messages, thus evoking, influencing and shifting public opinions on everything from political parties to corporate reputations, brands, products etc. It is important to understand how emotions and content relevance make these messages go viral. To explore this relationship, the author of Chapter 14 conducted in-depth interviews with people of Generation Y, who were shown two videos that have gone viral. The chapter described the findings of the study that focus on how the content of these videos and emotions generated will lead the respondents to share them online. The chapter also proposes an Emo-Cog (emotion –cognition) induced decision tree model which the generation Y consumers might frequently be using to decide on whether to share the videos or not. An extensive literature review on related topics has also been presented in the chapter.

Internet has enabled today’s consumer to transform himself from passive to an active and an informed consumer who can share his experiences, opinions about product or services with an infinite number of consumers around the globe. These reviews or opinions are further used by potential buyers of that particular product or service via electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM). The Chapter 15 is based on a study carried out on Indian academicians to assess the impact of one type of e-WOM, i.e., the online consumer reviews, on purchasing decisions of electronic products. This empirical study also focuses on the relationship between reviews and purchasing behaviour. The authors have demonstrated the causal impact of customer reviews on product selection and consumer purchasing behaviour.

To summarize, this publication is an attempt to encompass various aspects of electronic word of mouth and will serve as a ready reference for the Marketing practitioners, academicians and students to understand the notion of online Word of Mouth and Social Technologies.