Measuring Consumer Motivations to Share Rumors: Scale Development

Subin Sudhir, Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode, Kerala, India
Anandakuttan B. Unnithan, Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode, Kerala, India

ABSTRACT

Rumors are often shared in the marketplace about products, services, brands or organizations; both in the online as well as in the offline scenarios. These rumors get communicated from consumer to consumer in the form of Word of Mouth (WOM). An exhaustive review of literature identified four motivations for consumers to share rumors in the marketplace; which included anxiety management motivation, information sharing motivation, relationship management motivation and self enhancement motivation. The review was not conclusive in identifying any scales for the measurement of these motivations. The article develops a scale for measuring these four motivations. Structured interviews were initially conducted to identify 33 items that motivate a consumer to share rumors. Based on an exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis four factors were identified and the final scale retained 21 items. The scale displayed good scores of reliability and validity.

Keywords: Marketing, Motivation, Rumor, Rumor Scale, Word of Mouth

INTRODUCTION

Word of Mouth (WOM) communications has been an integral part of marketing scholarship. “WOM is a consumer-dominated channel of communication where the sender is independent of the market” (Brown, Broderick and Lee; 2007). The initial work in the field of WOM started in the early 1950s, ever since the field has seen a flurry of research interests; including the recent developments into e-WOM (e.g. Arndt, 1967; Sheth, 1971; Day, 1971; Stock and Zinsner, 1987; Engel et al., 1969; Richins, 1983; Mangold, 1987; Bolfling, 1989; Murray, 1991; Herr et al., 1991; Woodside et al., 1992; Webster, 1991; Zeithaml et al., 1993; Buttle, 1998).

Koenig (1985) suggests that rumors are the dominant form of WOM in circulation. A rumor is defined as “an unverified and instrumentally relevant information statement in circulation that arises in contexts of ambiguity, danger, or potential threat and that functions to help people make sense and manage risk” (DiFonzo
and Bordia, 2007). Rumors can potentially affect perceptions about the product and brand images, cause changes to the credibility of the brands and affect consumer loyalty (Kimmel, 2004; Kapferer, 1990; Koenig, 1985). The overload of commercially generated marketing communication confuses the consumer and guides the consumer to explore non-commercial forms of information; like WOM (Meiners, et al., 2010). Marketplace rumors are fast propagated especially through social networks (Kostka et al., 2008). In the recent years there have been many rumors that have emerged in the marketplace and have created drastic effects on the marketing scenario (Kimmel, 2004). But, despite the importance of rumors, there has been little attention paid to rumor research in the marketing context (Kimmel and Audrain-Pontevia, 2010), although this stream of research is not totally new (e.g. Kamins et al., 1997; Kimmel, 2004; Kimmel and Audrain-Pontevia, 2010).

Despite the importance of rumors in the marketing context, little is known about the psychological factors driving rumor propagation (Dubois, et al., 2011). Although, there have been a few studies focusing on the motivations to share WOM (e.g. Dichter, 1966; Engel et al., 1993; Sundaram, Mitra and Webster, 1998; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), sparse attention has been given to the motivations to share rumors in the marketplace and correspondingly there are inadequacies in the instruments to measure these motivations. The objective of this paper is to identify the consumer motivations to share rumors in the marketplace and to develop appropriate scales to measure these motivations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Word of Mouth (WOM)

WOM has been defined as “an oral, person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a brand, a product, or a service offered for sale” (Arndt, 1967). There have been further definitions in literature (e.g. Westbrook, 1987; Stern, 1994; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

WOM has been identified to be more persuasive on consumer behavior than other sources of information that are marketer controlled (Buttle, 1998), neutral sources of information like market reports (Herr et al., 1991) and advertising (Sheth, 1971; Meiners et al., 2010). WOM is found effective at changing negative or neutral attitudes into positive attitudes (Day, 1971). It has been suggested that WOM will influence the expectations and the perceptions of consumers (Lynn, 1987; Stock and Zinsner, 1987; Woodside et al., 1992; Webster, 1991; Zeithaml et al., 1993). WOM has also been mentioned to be one of the most influential methods to manage the expectations of consumers (Engel et al., 1969; Richins, 1983; Tybout et al., 1981; Bolfing, 1989; Mangold, 1987; Berger and Heath, 2007; Basuroy, Chatterjee, and Ravid, 2003; Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). WOM increases sales and helps in the diffusion of new products (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Moe and Trusov, 2011; Godes and Mayzlin, 2009; Iyengar et al., 2010).

Motivation to Share WOM

Research in WOM has looked at the motivation for people to engage in WOM. The research on this stream can be categorized into three domains (i) Self Enhancement Motivation, (ii) Emotion Motivation and (c) Information Exchange Motivation.

The Self Enhancement motivation to engage in WOM suggests the motivations of a consumer to engage in WOM for enhancing his/her self-image and thereby self enhancement. The self enhancement motivation of engaging in WOM includes (i) self-disclosure (Berger and Milkman, 2013), (ii) sharing interesting products and messages; which deals with sharing interesting, original, funny or controversial messages (Moldovan, Goldenberg, and Chatterpadhay, 2011; Heath, Bell, and Sternberg, 2001) and (c) impression management (Sengupta, Dahl, and Gorn, 2002; Argo, White, and Dahl, 2006).

The Emotional motivation to share WOM suggests that people communicate to manage
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www.igi-global.com/article/international-student-collaboration-experiential-exercise/76359?camid=4v1a