Impact of Electronic Word of Mouth Evaluation on Purchase Intention: The Mediating Role of Attitude toward the Product

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of exposure to Electronic Word of Mouth (EWOM) on consumer purchase intention. More specifically, the study focuses on the mediating role of attitude towards the product in the relationship between purchase intention and EWOM exposure. To this effect, the study was conducted over a number of 204 internet users who were exposed to online hotel comments. Three distinct linear correlations were used. First, the correlation between the intention to visit the hotel and EWOM evaluation, then a second correlation between attitude towards the hotel and EWOM evaluation and finally, a third multiple regression of purchase intention on both attitude towards the hotel and EWOM evaluation. The obtained results indicated that attitude towards the product is a full mediating variable between purchase intention and EWOM evaluation. The study concludes with managerial implications recommending the use of EWOM as an efficient communication tool.

Keywords: Attitude Towards The Product, Electronic Word of Mouth, Mediating Role, Purchase Intention, Recommendation Online Sites, Touristic Products

INTRODUCTION

In the consumer behavior literature, a lot of attention has been given to the traditional WOM concept (Gupta & Harris, 2010). Today, and thanks to the Web 2.0 and the advent of the user-generated content, new opportunities of electronic communication between consumers are born. This new form of communication has led to a new interest in the WOM concept under its electronic form.

Nowadays, many consumers use web 2.0 tools (such as online discussion forums, blogs, social networks and recommendation sites) to express their opinions and exchange information about products (Gupta & Harris, 2010).
Thanks to the generalized use of the social media, consumers begin to influence other internet users via EWOM communication (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Just like the traditional WOM which may affect consumers decision making (Herr et al., 1991), it has been shown that EWOM-based communication may affect consumers decision making process (Cheung et al., 2009).

In fact, EWOM is being used by consumers as an information source to reduce risks that may take place when purchasing online. It has also been proved that the use of EWOM generally leads the consumer to perform better buying decisions (Awad & Ragowsky, 2008).

Despite many studies on the impact of exposure to E-WOM on consumer behavior, and specifically on attitude and purchase intention, these studies were limited to addressing these two concepts as effects related to exposure to EWOM (Doh & Hwang, 2009; Huang et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2012; Martin & Lueg, in press). In fact, while there is an abundance of studies dealing with the influence of EWOM on the purchase intention, those using mediating variables to evaluate this relationship are rare.

This mediating effect of attitude has already been tested on an offline context. Indeed, while conducting a study to understand traditional WOM use, Zhang (2009) highlighted the mediating role of attitude towards the product on purchase intentions.

Therefore, this paper aims at better understanding the impact of EWOM on attitude towards the product and on purchase intention. More precisely, our study will investigate whether the conclusions of Zhang (2009) on the mediating role of attitude between WOM and purchase intention could be generalized to EWOM. Then, in this study, we will try to respond to the following issue: Could attitude towards the recommended product have a mediating role on the relationship between EWOM and consumers purchasing intention after being exposed to this EWOM communication?

Thus, rather than hypothesizing a direct causal relationship between purchase intention and EWOM, a meditational model hypothesizes that EWOM influences attitude towards the product, which in turn influences purchase intention. The mediator effect of attitude towards the product is used to clarify the nature of the relationship between EWOM and Purchase intention. In other words, mediating relationships occur when an attitude variable plays an important role in governing the relationship between the other two variables.

Hence, the paper will begin first by presenting the literature review which illustrates the relationships between the different variables of our study. This theoretical review enables us to develop the conceptual framework and to generate the research hypothesis. Next, we will conduct the survey and analyze the data collected by using a principal component analysis (to explore the data collected) and a linear regression (to test the hypothesis). Then, we will interpret and discuss the results. Finally, we will conclude by proposing the managerial implications of this research.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Electronic Word Of Mouth (EWOM): Definition and Channels**

Electronic word of mouth research has often been inspired by the traditional word of mouth literature. Electronic word of mouth is, indeed, an advanced form of the traditional word of mouth. Many researchers on traditional word of mouth agree to define it as “an exchange, flow of information, communication, or conversation between two individuals.” (Goyette et al., 2010, pp. 6). In other words, WOM consists in transmitting information and specifically a personal opinion about an experience with a product or a service. The literature has also highlighted that traditional WOM communication is usually transmitted from person to person or by phone.

Thanks to the development of information and communication technologies and more precisely internet, some researchers pointed out that nowadays interpersonal communication is not just based on the traditional WOM, but
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