Motives and Corresponding Behaviors in Reading Electronic Word of Mouth

Angeline Te-Yi Lin, National ChengChi University
Shu-Ling Liao, Yuan Ze University
Tom Cheng-Wen Yao, Yuan Ze University

With the growth of eWOM, researchers pay much attention to eWOM-related issues. In these studies, eWOM is viewed as a source of information or knowledge, and much attention is paid to eWOM creation and its types. Besides eWOM itself, users’ motives and corresponding behaviors are also potential issues in eWOM-related study. However, topics of users’ motives and corresponding behaviors, especially eWOM receivers’ motives and corresponding behaviors, have been ignored for a long time. In the present study, we try to interview several consumers to explore their original motives and corresponding behaviors of reading eWOM.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1009021/volumes/ap09/AP-09

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Motives and Corresponding Behaviors in Reading Electronic Word of Mouth
Tom Cheng-Wen Yao, Yuan Ze University, Taiwan*
Shuling Liao, Yuan Ze University, Taiwan
Angeline Te-Yi Lin, National ChengChi University, Taiwan

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Word of mouth (WOM) is an interactive communication among consumers regarding their personal experiences with products or enterprises (Richins, 1983). The emergence of the Internet has made a huge growth of WOM content and diffusion. Such growth enables WOM to have more powerful and important influence on a consumer's decision making process (Sun, Youn, Wu, and Kuntaraporn, 2006). WOM posting and passed on the Internet is generally called electronic word of mouth (eWOM). eWOM is defined as a positive or negative statement related to a product, a service, or a company, and widely delivered through the Internet (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler, 2004).

Going along with the aforesaid growth, eWOM provides a more convenient way for a consumer to obtain information or opinions of products and services. eWOM refers to individual experiences and stories so many researchers believe that eWOM causes more consumers’ empathy and it is also reliable information for a consumer (Bickart and Schindler, 2001). Compared with eWOM, a consumer’s trust toward advertising and enterprises is much less in such situation (Sweeney, Soutar, and Mazzarol, 2008).

With a strong effect on consumers’ perceptions of products and services, eWOM guides consumers to change their evaluations, value rating and the possibility of purchase (Bone, 1995). eWOM dispels consumers’ doubt and reduces consumers’ pre-purchase uncertainty, especially in the last stage of purchase process (Sweeney et al., 2008). Therefore, eWOM becomes a new form of promotion with its potential power (Dye, 2000).

With the progress of Internet technology, eWOM has been recognized as an important information source between consumers. However, there is very little research on this issue. Even though there are some studies about the issue, most of eWOM research has concentrated on its generation, types, and senders in eWOM activity (Chang, 2009). Little research has focused on receivers in eWOM activity (Bansal and Voyer, 2000). As eWOM effects are heterogeneous, consumers have various actions after they read eWOM. It is important to know what motivates consumers to read eWOM and what corresponding behaviors consumers may take after reading eWOM (Bansal and Voyer, 2000).

Different from those method applied by previous eWOM related studies, this study uses qualitative method. Most of prior studies use quantitative methods, such as questionnaires, scales, or surveys, to testify their arguments. In the present study, we use interview to explore consumers’ original motives and corresponding behaviors of reading eWOM. Through the interview, consumers may provide richer and deeper views about the research issue. Therefore, by a qualitative method, the study complements those quantitative studies and provides a more thorough understanding about consumers’ motives and corresponding behaviors of reading eWOM.

METHOD

In the study, we interview participants about their motives and corresponding behaviors in reading eWOM. We adopt snowballing process to obtain participants. Firstly, we ask several students as volunteer participants to individually share their thoughts about motives and corresponding behaviors when they read eWOM. At the end of each interview, participants are asked to nominate qualified candidates for our next interviews. In order to broaden sample variety of the study, we also request participants to avoid recommending students in our study.

We conduct interviews individually by a trained researcher to collect information about possible consumers' reading eWOM motives and corresponding behaviors. The participants are asked by a guiding interview question, such as “For what purpose will you read eWOM?” or “Why will you read eWOM?” For acquiring broad and thorough description about consumers’ reading eWOM motives and corresponding behaviors, the interview question is as simple as possible to help them freely express their opinions. The interviews are continued until participants have significantly no new idea to say.

All records of individual interviews are stored in digital content. The interviews are all transcribed for further analyses (Spiggle, 1994). Through the process, the verbatim transcripts of consumer’s interviews form the main data which is used for analyzing consumers’ reading eWOM motives and corresponding behaviors.

In the study, we use the method similar to the phenomenographic method (Marton, 1981) and revised by Tsai (2004)”s research to analyze the verbatim transcripts of consumer interviews. First of all, the study reviews each consumer’s ideas presented in the interview content. In the next, the researcher marks some important sentences and extracted some keywords from those sentences. By this way, the researcher characterizes consumers’ notions about reading eWOM motives and corresponding behaviors. These notions form a foundation of the study.

In turn, the researcher compares the sentences marked in the interview transcripts, and further explores and summarizes consumers’ similar and different notions. Eventually, we construct some categories of description to classify motives and corresponding behaviors of reading eWOM expressed by consumers. The purpose of categories developed is to exemplify the consumers’ reading eWOM motives and corresponding behaviors. For refining the best description of interviewees’ ideas, the study applies the process of data analysis to revise categories for several times.

MAJOR FINDINGS

This study tries to explore the nature of consumer’s motive and corresponding behavior in reading eWOM and could be one of the initial attempts to discuss the issue. By interviewing consumers, the study intends to find out different categories about consumers’ corresponding behaviors of reading eWOM. The study further attempts to
build up a framework by various dimensions to match the discovered categories.

By factor analysis, Hennig-Thurau, Walsh, and Walsh (2003) gathers the previous study of eWOM reading motives and corresponding behaviors, and reclassify those findings. In this study, we also try to discuss the difference in findings between Hennig-Thurau, Walsh, and Walsh (2003)’s study and our study.

Future researches are encouraged to further explore consumers’ reading eWOM phenomenon based on the findings of this study. Besides, researchers can compare and contrast differences of the motives and corresponding behaviors with different products or services, for instance, functional product, hedonic service, etc. Researchers may obtain better understanding about how product or service characters may influence consumers’ motives and corresponding behaviors in reading eWOM.

REFERENCE