Introducing the Wom Transmitter in Generational Word of Mouth: Why Consumers Refuse to Transmit Positive Or Negative Word of Mouth

Florian Dost, ESCP EUROPE Campus Berlin, Germany
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[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/16324/volumes/v38/NA-38

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ABSTRACT

Taking a transmitter’s perspective, this study identifies reasons to refuse word of mouth (WOM) transmission, creates a category system and analyzes the influence of either positive or negative WOM. We show that the transmission of negative WOM is refused more often, a result which is mainly driven by social constraints.

INTRODUCTION

Word of mouth (WOM) has become increasingly popular, both among marketing academics and marketing practitioners. While academics tend to focus on the generation of WOM (Oetting 2009), the excitement of practitioners more relates to the fact that WOM is spread by transmission. The rationale behind this is that network effects, also called contagion or viral effects, create powerful and potentially costless benefits, as WOM spreads across multiple generations of communicators (Carl, Libai and Ding 2008). However, knowledge on the individual processes of transmission is scarce. Moreover knowledge on why consumers might choose not to transmit and thus inhibit network effects is missing. Research on the WOM transmitter has been largely neglected on an individual level: Most previous studies on transmission focus on a network perspective (Bass 1969; Coleman, Katz and Menzel 1957). Additionally most past research is about successful WOM communication only. This is particularly surprising as it is already known that WOM transmission is a deliberative process (Banerjee & Fudenberg 2008), which implies that a transmitter will not only reason his decision to transmit but also might reason against it. Transmission refusal is therefore a key in understanding transmission process.

Moreover, despite extensive literature on positive and negative WOM, it is not known how WOM valence might influence whether WOM gets transmitted at all.

This study aims at exploring this gap by answering the following research questions:
1. What are reasons for a transmitter to refuse WOM transmission?
2. Do PWOM and NWOM have a different impact on transmission refusal?
3. If so, what are the reasons for this different impact of PWOM and NWOM?

Our study is mainly explorative in nature. Taking the perspective of the WOM transmitter, we aim at identifying and categorizing the reasons for transmission refusal. In order to do so, precise definition and clarification of terms are mandatory, followed by a review of relevant literature, the study design and then the study results. Implications are presented at the end of the paper.

WORD OF MOUTH TRANSMISSION

Word of Mouth, Positive and Negative Word of Mouth

Word of mouth is “a process of personal influence, in which interpersonal communications between a sender and a receiver can change the receiver’s behavior or attitudes” (Sweeney, Soutar and Mazzarol 2008, 345). We additionally introduce a third party to the sender and the receiver which we call “the transmitter”. We will explain why we do so in the subsequent section.

Throughout this paper we will use the term ‘WOM impact’ to describe any effect that is caused by WOM and the term WOM topic when referring to the actual content of the WOM message. When referring to the tone of the WOM message, we will restrict this to WOM valence. Most researchers divide WOM according to its valence into positive word of mouth (PWOM) and negative word of mouth (NWOM). We will also use this distinction.

WOM Transmission and Transmitter’s Perspective

Unlike most prior WOM research we will take the perspective of the so-called WOM “transmitter”, an intermediary of WOM. WOM transmission occurs when a WOM message generated by a sender is received by a transmitter and then passed on to another receiver. The transmitter himself acts on a dual role as he is first a receiver and then a sender. The WOM roles of sender, transmitter and receiver are shown in figure 1. We take the transmitters’ perspective for two reasons. First, the unique feature of WOM is that WOM is frequently transmitted. This is known as contagion, viral, or cascade effect (Coleman et al.1957). Secondly, prior research has focused on dyadic WOM between sender and receiver. While this approach is useful when describing the antecedents of original WOM generation (sender) or the impact of WOM (receiver), it implies that the mere transmission of the WOM would be actually a generation of new WOM by the former receiver.

Taking the transmitter’s perspective incorporates existing knowledge on WOM generation, but also allows for a simple WOM transmission as in the case of viral campaigns.

FIGURE 1

The Roles of WOM Sender, Transmitter and Receiver

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENDER</th>
<th>Transmitters’ Perspective</th>
<th>RECEIVER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- generates WOM according to antecedents and experiences</td>
<td>Transmitter - receives WOM, compares WOM with own experiences, is impacted by WOM and transmits (or alters) WOM</td>
<td>- receives WOM and is impacted by WOM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

410 Advances in Consumer Research Volume 38, © 2012
LITERATURE REVIEW
Reasons for WOM Transmission
A broad body of literature focuses on transmission processes, such as diffusion studies (Bass 1969) or studies on social contagion (Coleman et al. 1957). However, the focus is on aggregate measures and network characteristics, neglecting the individual processes (Bansal and Voyer 2000). Only few works provided some insights into individual WOM transmission processes. Most important is that the transmitter's decision to engage in SOM transmission is deliberate (Banerjee and Fudenberg 2004; Stephen and Lehmann 2009). WOM is transmitted because it can lead to potential social benefits but it also involves risks if transmitted WOM is incorrect, not helpful, or not wanted. Therefore WOM transmission is selective (Stephen and Lehmann 2009). Transmission depends on the motivation or willingness of the transmitter to share WOM (Granovetter 1973; Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993). Moreover, it is particularly surprising that most research is about successful WOM communication only, implying that transmission refusal occurs in the absence of these antecedents. The fact that transmission refusal might be caused by particular reasons is neglected.

The Impact of WOM
WOM has an influence on the receiver's perceptions and therefore can lead to changes in judgment and likelihoods of choice (Arndt 1967; Fitzgerald Bone 1995). Regarding brand or product attitude, this is mainly due to an impact in reducing perceived risk (Roselius 1971). Consequently, WOM has a larger impact on consumers' attitudes in riskier categories.

Regarding WOM valence, PWOM and NWOM are usually seen as closely similar behaviors (East, Hammond, and Lomax 2008). In contrast, Sweeney et al. (2008) argue that PWOM and NWOM are not homogenous in impact as people vary in their reaction to PWOM and NWOM.

Marketers usually believe that NWOM is more common and has more impact than PWOM (East, Hammond, and Wright 2007). Still, there is an ongoing debate on the effect of WOM valence (East et al. 2008; Stephen and Lehmann 2009): Some works (e.g. Arndt 1967) support that NWOM might have a larger impact than PWOM. In contrast, East et al. (2008) state that the positive effect PWOM exerts on purchase probability is larger than the negative impact NWOM exerts on purchase probability. Other studies find that positive and negative information have much the same impact size on brand attitudes (Ahlulwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava 2000; Ahluwalia 2002). However, these works do not refer specifically to an impact on WOM transmission. We have to distinguish between the WOM impact on receiver's attitudes and the WOM impact on WOM transmission (Merton 1968). Therefore we will turn to the underlying explanations for different impacts of PWOM and NWOM. We should also note that any impact on a receiver is somehow intertwined with the impact on transmission. This transmitted impact is often referred to as "ripple effect" (Gremler and Brown 1999; Sweeney et al. 2008; Osborn 2009), a multiplication effect of WOM that is not part of the current study.

Skowronski and Carlston (1989) find that negative information has a stronger impact on judgment than positive information and is therefore more persuasive. One reason for a greater diagnostic value of negative information is its rarity, compared to positive information (Anderson 1965; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2003; Mizerski 1982). Also, people prefer diagnostic information to more accessible ones (Lynch, Marmorstein, and Weigold 1988). With social desirability effects favoring recall of positive information (Fisher 1993), PWOM gets more accessible and is thus less preferred.

Given a higher diagnostic value of NWOM, we should expect that NWOM is more likely to be transmitted. However, social desirability may also let consumers avoid NWOM (Rosen and Tesser 1972), resulting in higher rates of NWOM transmission refusal.

Another explanation for the impact dominance of NWOM is the attribution effect (Mizerski 1982). Consumers attribute an adversary motive to positive information. They think for example that positive information might be manipulated. Now one would expect PWOM to result in more transmission refusal. However, attribution is not by definition restricted to positive information. Our research questions refer to that overall ambiguity.

Antecedents of WOM Generation and Transmission
Research on WOM antecedents is restricted to WOM generation. While generated WOM starts with the sender as a reaction to any antecedent, transmitted WOM is passed on or altered after the event of received WOM. However, as the transmitter is also a sender, we argue that antecedents of original WOM generation may also influence WOM transmission.

Valence as Antecedent. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction are the main sources for PWOM and NWOM, respectively (Richins 1983). Dissatisfied consumers produce more WOM than satisfied consumers (Hanna and Wosniah 2001; Silverman 1997). A contradictory finding says that satisfied customers outnumber dissatisfied customers (Mittal and Lassar 1998). Still, East et al. (2007) show that in general, PWOM exceeds NWOM. We therefore also propose a higher occurrence of PWOM than WOM:

Proposition 1: PWOM occurrence exceeds NWOM occurrence.

Also Anderson (1998) states that WOM generation is higher for dissatisfied consumers and that extremely satisfied or dissatisfied consumers spread WOM most. Remarkably, about 80% consumers that were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied still engage in WOM generation of the more extreme cases. This is a general tendency for WOM generation or engagement that is not explained by satisfaction or dissatisfaction. According to Mangold, Miller, and Brockway (1999), satisfaction or dissatisfaction account for only 25% of all WOM generation, whereas over 50% relate to the need for WOM activity. In all, research fails to explain how valence direction relates to WOM generation while it is obvious that valence strength seems just to be one influence on WOM generation among many. Given this dominance of other reasons, such as a need for WOM activity, we expect and propose fewer transmission refusals than transmissions:

Proposition 2: There are fewer WOM transmission refusals than WOM transmissions.

Intrapersonal Antecedents. De Matos’ and Rossi’s (2008) meta-analysis on antecedents of WOM generation reveals that apart from satisfaction, key antecedents of WOM generation are brand or product loyalty, quality, commitment, perceived value, and trust. Most of these factors are intrapersonal to the transmitter. We would expect to see reasons for WOM transmission refusal that are related to such intrapersonal antecedents.

Interpersonal Antecedents. Other antecedents such as trust or source credibility lie in the transmitter’s perception of the sender. These perceptions can be influential in a WOM context (Bansal and Voyer 2000; Fitzgerald Bone 1995). Therefore it is likely that perceptions such as the WOM need of the receiver assumed by the transmitter (Mangold et al. 1999) are influential. Another antecedent is the type of relationship between sender and transmitter. Numerous studies have shown an effect of tie strength. The stronger the tie strength the more likely it is that this relationship will be used for WOM communication (Brown and Reingen 1987), and more WOM occurs between close ties such as friends or relatives.
Literature also states an explicit influence of weak ties on WOM transmission (Granovetter 1973). However, this explicit influence is not relevant for our study, as it refers to a network perspective, arguing that weak ties foster the wider spread of WOM by means of larger relationship distances. Still, we expect to find reasons for transmission refusal that relate either to the transmitter’s perceptions of the sender or the receiver’s needs or to the closeness of the relationship. As close relationships incorporate intimacy and trust we additionally expect that matters of privacy play a role in transmission refusal.

**Message related Antecedents:** It is known that the style, power, and content of WOM can have an influence on the receiver (Dichter 1966; Herr, Kardes, and Kim 1991). Therefore these WOM message characteristics may be crucial for the decision whether to transmit or not.

**Context related Antecedents:** Time constraints were found to have an effect on WOM generation (Sweeney et al. 2008). But to our knowledge there are no studies on an effect of WOM place. However, we expect reasons that refer to context.

### RESEARCH METHOD

#### Data Collection and Sample Structure

We collected data using an online questionnaire. Respondents were asked to remember an actual, recent WOM incident and to state details such as topic, category, WOM channel and type of relationship. Perceived WOM valence was measured as the average on three seven-point scale items (Cronbachs Alpha: .94). Respondents were then asked to state whether they would transmit this WOM. Any respondent to refuse WOM transmission was asked to state his top of mind reasons for doing so. The questionnaire was presented to about 200,000 members of a German panel in winter 2009. The panel is one of the biggest professional marketing communities in Europe and specialized in WOM marketing. A total of 31,173 respondents from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland returned the questionnaire resulting in a response rate of about 16% in two weeks.

Because the panel is especially aware of WOM related topics and has conducted several studies with professionally managed WOM, a careful but rigid data cleansing was mandatory with respect to the data validity and generalizability of our results. The elimination was done by an excessive search for all relevant brand or product names, including all spelling mistakes, in all open questions, to excluded any cases related to professional campaigns. Furthermore all cases with incorrect, or incomplete data (any missing values) were removed from the dataset. Regarding valence, the few respondents stating an average of exactly 4.0, and thus perfectly neutral WOM, were also excluded as we could not put them into one group or the other without risking bias.

The mean age of the remaining 19,648 respondents was 29 years (s.d. = 9.10), with a gender distribution of 74.9% female and 25.1% male. Therefore the sample structure was not representative for the German population but neither age nor gender had a main effect on transmission behavior, confirming the general suitability of the sample structure for our study.

#### Procedure of Data Analysis

The focus of our research is on the analysis of the open-ended question dealing with the reasons for transmission refusal. We aim at developing a categorization system inductively extracted from the 2,254 textbox answers in order to gain deeper insights into consumers’ barriers for transmission of either positive or negative WOM as well as underlying mechanisms of WOM transmission behavior. We took the steps of Mayring’s (2000) framework for inductive category development. This procedure is in line with the reductive processes in psychological text processing (van Dijk 1980).

After having defined a scope of research derived from theoretical background and research question (step 1) the material was coded and paraphrased by two independent coders. Then, categories (for details see next section) were formulated (step 2). After having coded 30% of the material, we revised the category scheme (step 3) and in a feedback loop the new categories were applied to the whole material (step 4). Inter-coder consistency in a final loop check was 97.8%, and simple inter-coder percentage of agreement (Bettman and Park 1980) was 91.2%. The results of the described process were the following main categories: intrapersonal reasons, interpersonal reasons, situation or context related reasons and message or topic related reason. Based on this category scheme, we analyzed relative frequencies of the different subcategories (step 6).

### RESULTS

#### Intrapersonal Reasons

**Missing Relevance of Product or WOM Topic to the Transmitter.** Some respondents stated that they are generally not interested in this brand, product, or WOM topic. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Because I’m not interested.” “Because I don’t need that product.”

**Missing Judgment Ability.** Some respondents said that they were not able to evaluate the product, brand, or WOM topic because of too little experience or because of lack of knowledge. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Because […] I couldn’t check the product myself.” “Because I did not try it for myself and I do not recommend anything I do not know.”

**Product or WOM Topic Dislike.** Some respondents disliked the product, brand, or WOM topic. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Because I disliked the taste of it.” “The product failed to entice me after I tested it.”

**Alternative Product or WOM Topic Favorite.** Some respondents expressed their preference or loyalty to another brand, product, or WOM topic as a reason to refuse WOM transmission. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Because I use very good products myself.” “Because I am against constantly changing my provider.”

**Judgment Differences.** Some respondents said that they hold opposite experiences or attitudes about the brand, product, or WOM topic. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Because my own experience is otherwise.” “Because it was a one time event, bad luck.”

**Received Information was Forgotten.** Some respondents stated that they were inattentive or had forgotten relevant information. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Because I did not listen well enough.” “Because I have forgotten so much.”

**No WOM Motivation.** Some respondents said that they did not have a reason to transmit or they expressed missing motivation. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Because I don’t want to.” “Because I don’t have a reason for this.” “I don’t feel like it.”

#### Interpersonal Reasons

**Missing Perceived Relevance to Potential Receiver.** Some respondents stated that they do not perceive an interest in the product, brand or WOM topic by anyone who could serve as a potential receiver. Exemplary respondent answers are: “I don’t know anyone who would be interested in it.” “Because no one I know would buy the product.”

**Interpersonal Barriers.** Some respondents said that it was a conversation about private or personal topics, internal information, or private or business secrets and nobody else should or needs to
know. Exemplary respondent answers are: “It was about something very private.” “It was only intended for myself.” “Family matter.” “Because it should stay between us.”

**Missing Credibility.** Some respondents perceived the sender or the product, brand or WOM topic as not reliable or credible. Some even assumed hidden motives. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Because I don’t know if it’s true.” “He was too pushy.”

**Solicitation Expected.** Some respondents said that they are only willing to transmit WOM if a potential receiver requests the information. Exemplary respondent answers are: “As long as nobody asks me about it, I will not carry it further.” “Somebody has to ask me.”

**Uncertainty about Receiver’s Benefit.** Some respondents expressed their concerns that they cannot judge on the receiver’s taste or preferences. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Because everybody will rate this differently.” “I don’t like it, someone else might.”

**Facilitate Own Experiences.** Some respondents stated that everybody should make his own experiences. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Everybody should get his own view on it.” “Because everybody should make his own experiences.”

**Reasons Attributed to Situation or Context**

**Missing Opportunity.** Some respondents said that they had not found the time or opportunity to spread WOM. Some would only talk about the topic if it’s appropriate and of relevance to the conversation. Exemplary respondent answers are: “No time.” “I will only talk about it if a conversation touches the topic.”

**Information Saturation.** Some respondents said that all people they know already knew about the product, brand or WOM topic. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Because everyone I know owns one for himself.”

**Reasons Attributed to the Message or Topic**

**Not Convinced by Received WOM.** Some respondents stated, that they were not convinced. Usually it was not obvious whether this related to the topic, the sender, the message or anything else. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Because I was not convinced.” “Because the information was not convincing to me.”

**Doubted Applicability to Receiver.** Some respondents said that the product, brand or WOM topic is tailored to specific needs or is only applicable in specific contexts. Exemplary respondent answers are: “It is a very special product.” “Very specific information.” “Because it is a local offer.”

**Missing Novelty.** Some respondents stated that the brand, product, or WOM topic was either too old or not available anymore. Exemplary respondent answers are: “Because the article is outdated.” “It was nothing new.”

**Other Reasons**

Categories that received only minor counts were summarized to “Other” and are as such presented here in shorter form. We deliberately set the threshold for this category at below 1% of all counts. Additionally this category includes all not interpretable answers. The categories were: **Negative WOM attitude** (some respondents had specific opinions about positive or negative WOM that let them to transmission refusal), **replace with own experience** (some respondents said that they had own experience and would transmit them instead)

**relevant information was omitted** (some respondents said that relevant information was missing when WOM was received or that it was to general) **missing self credibility** (some respondents stated the fear of not being a reliable source to spread the WOM), **self solicitated** (few respondents said that they specifically asked for information themselves), and **don’t know/error** (this last category subsumes all respondents who stated that they don’t know as well as all cryptic or otherwise non interpretable answers).

**Descriptive WOM Results**

After having described and categorized the reasons for WOM transmission refusal in a qualitative way, the following results aim to draw a more quantitative picture.

As expected the total occurrence of NWOM was relatively low in respect to PWOM, thus confirming the findings of East et al. (2007) and our proposition 1. Also the total occurrence of not transmitted WOM was relatively low with 11.5% of all WOM transmitters not willing to transmit, thus confirming proposition 2. Still a first interesting finding to potential differences of PWOM and NWOM regarding transmission refusal is the relatively large share of NWOM incidents. A Pearson chi-square test revealed the difference as highly significant ($\chi^2(1, 19648) = 306.42, p < .001$) but according to Cramer’s V the association is not a very strong one (Cramer’s V = .125).

**Frequencies of Transmission Refusal Results**

All frequencies of categories are shown in table 2. The number of counts (2,254) is slightly different from the number of refusing respondents (2,261) because some respondents provided several answers and others provided none. The three most common reasons for refusal were: (1.) the transmitter has a low interest in the WOM topic (Missing Relevance of Product or WOM Topic, 16.0%), (2.)

### Table 1: Counts of Transmitted and Not Transmitted WOM by WOM Valence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WM Type</th>
<th>PWOM</th>
<th>NWOM</th>
<th>Total WOM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transmitted WOM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Counts</td>
<td>16270</td>
<td>1117</td>
<td>17387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Relative to Column)</td>
<td>(89.6%)</td>
<td>(74.6%)</td>
<td>(88.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Transmitted WOM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Counts</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>2261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Relative to Column)</td>
<td>(10.4%)</td>
<td>(25.4%)</td>
<td>(11.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolute Counts</td>
<td>18151</td>
<td>1497</td>
<td>19648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Relative to Column)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Relative to Row Total)</td>
<td>(92.4%)</td>
<td>(7.6%)</td>
<td>(100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the transmitter perceived the relevance or interest of potential receivers as low (MISSING PERCEIVED RELEVANCE TO POTENTIAL RECEIVER, 14.8%), and (3) the transmitter felt not able to judge or evaluate the WOM topic (MISSING JUDGMENT ABILITY, 11.1%). Intrapersonal reasons were most common, followed by interpersonal reasons. Keeping in mind the little research on interpersonal reasons in a WOM context, this is of surprisingly high importance. Specifically, the transmitter’s perceptions of the receiver seem to be important while at the same time being neglected by previous research, thus potentially guiding future research. The same applies to situation and context factors which seem to be of importance (MISSING OPPORTUNITY, 9.2%; INFORMATION SATURATION, 5.8%), although prior research largely neglected them as antecedents, too.

Regarding the differences of PWOM and NWOM we find support for the notion that NWOM is perceived as being more relevant or diagnostic (MISSING PERCEIVED RELEVANCE TO POTENTIAL RECEIVER: PWOM, 15.8% vs. NWOM, 9.9%). NWOM therefore seem to be less susceptible to time constraints in conversation (MISSING OPPORTUNITY: PWOM, 9.8% vs. NWOM, 6.0%), and is faster perceived as being saturated (INFORMATION SATURATION: PWOM, 5.4% vs. NWOM, 7.8%).

In line with prior research, we also observe that NWOM is more easily recalled (RECEIVED INFORMATION WAS FORGOTTEN: PWOM, 2.5% vs. NWOM, 0.8%). However, the differences of PWOM and NWOM within the important interpersonal category indicate that the spread of NWOM is socially more constrained, supported by the category ‘negative WOM attitude’ (not shown in table 2: PWOM, 0.6% vs. NWOM, 2.3%) and typical respondent statements in this category (“You should not talk about bad memories.” “I just tell about positive things.”). Prior research supports the notion that people may avoid NWOM because of potential social undesirability (Rosen and Tesser 1972), or because NWOM is relatively scarce, implying the risk of social inconformity (Moscovici 1985; Burnkrant and Cousineau 1975). The latter is strongly supported by our data: For example, respondents are less willing to take the risk of transmitting a negative message they do not approve of than a positive message (JUDGMENT DIFFERENCES: PWOM, 1.7% vs. NWOM, 9.1%). In the case the transmitter already has a negative conviction, he will more likely transmit NWOM than without such a conviction (PRODUCT OR WOM TOPIC DISLIKE: PWOM, 7.2% vs. NWOM, 2.6%). Furthermore missing credibility should then be more relevant for NWOM than for PWOM transmission (MISSING CREDIBILITY: PWOM, 3.3% vs. NWOM, 7.3%).

To further verify that NWOM transmission is socially constrained, we should expect that tie strength moderates the importance of some reasons of transmission refusal. While the differences in relative frequencies are generally low, however the three criteria with the largest differences do all reflect the tie strength’ influence. As expected, transmission refusal due to missing relevance for the next receiver is higher for close ties (RELEVANCE TO RECEIVER PERCEIVED AS MISSING: weak tie, 12.6% vs. strong tie, 16.1%) and nearly similar regarding WOM valence. Perceived sender credibility is also lower for weak ties (MISSING CREDIBILITY: weak tie, 9.0% vs. strong tie, 1.1%) and not different in terms of WOM valence. However, the most interesting effect is seen on transmission refusal due to judgment differences. In support of the social conformity principle,

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>PWOM</th>
<th>NWOM</th>
<th>Total WOM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abs. Count</td>
<td>% of Col.</td>
<td>Abs. Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Relevance of Product or WOM Topic</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Perceived Relevance to Potential Receiver</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Judgment Ability</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Opportunity</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product or WOM Topic Dislike</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Saturation</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Barriers</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Credibility</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment Differences</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Convinced by Received WOM</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doubt Applicability to Receiver</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received Information was Forgotten</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No WOM Motivation</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Product or WOM Topic Favorite</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Novelty</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicitation Expected</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty about Receiver’s Benefit</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate Own Experiences</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Thereof Don’t know/Error)</td>
<td>(88)</td>
<td>(4.7%)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1869</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the higher risk by NWOM than by PWOM is more severe when the relationship is close (Judgment Differences weak tie 4.3% vs. strong tie 11.8%).

CONCLUSION

We developed a category system for reasons to refuse WOM transmission, comprising intrapersonal, interpersonal, context-related, and topic-related reasons as categories. We identified the most important reasons for transmission refusal, including the transmitter’s perception of the receiver and context factors that have so far been neglected in WOM research. Further research should go into more detail with respect to these categories. We additionally replicated the larger occurrence of PWOM as previously found by East et al. (2007). Moreover, we confirmed that the refusal of WOM transmission is relatively scarce (transmission refusal rate below 10% of all WOM incidents). Still, there is a highly significant influence of WOM valence on WOM transmission. We then identified reasons for the different influence of WOM valence. This supported the notion that NWOM is perceived as being more relevant or diagnostic. Furthermore, we showed that social constraints are more related to the transmission of NWOM than of PWOM. We were able to argumentatively validate this finding using the moderating effect of tie strength on the social constraints proposition. This finding adds to the debate about differences of PWOM and NWOM in respect to their effects and may provide an additional explanation on the relative scarcity of NWOM occurrence. Social constraints are a topic with few related studies in WOM literature. But given the potential influence, this is another path for future research.

Marketing managers might be delighted to hear that NWOM is more susceptible to transmission refusal. But our key contribution is the categorized system of transmission refusal. The particular merit lies in a differentiated picture of the drivers for transmission refusal reasons for PWOM and NWOM which could be used to gain detailed insights into why PWOM campaigns might fail or to tailor specific marketing measures to fight NWOM.

For example, to minimize transmission refusal in a PWOM campaign, managers should engage in increasing the perceived topic relevance to the transmitter. This can be achieved by a variety of traditional communication measures that focus on generating awareness and need. In order to tackle missing judgment ability as a reason for transmission refusal, one should focus on informative communication as collateral measure.

REFERENCES


Introducing the WOM Transmitter in Generational Word of Mouth: Why Consumers Refuse to Transmit Positive or Negative Word of Mouth


