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Bittersweet! Understanding and Managing Electronic Word of Mouth

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For 'viral marketing', it is critical to understand what motivates consumers to share their consumption experiences through 'electronic word of mouth' (eWoM) across various social media platforms. This conceptual paper discusses eWoM as a coping response dependent on positive, neutral, or negative experiences made by potential, actual, or former consumers of products, services, and brands. We combine existing lenses and propose an integrative model for unpacking eWoM to examine how different consumption experiences motivate consumers to share eWoM online. The paper further presents an eWoM Attentionscape as an appropriate tool for examining the amount of attention the resulting different types of eWoM receive from brand managers. We discuss how eWoM priorities can differ between public affairs professionals and consumers, and what the implications are for the management of eWoM in the context of public affairs and viral marketing. Copyright © 2013 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

Social media (SM) is all about conversations, which are often based on user-generated content (Pitt, 2012; Plangger, 2012). In many cases, such conversations spread fast and reach millions (Reynolds, 2010), and it seems that such 'virality' is achieved primarily when people create videos that contain an element of surprise (e.g., the Diet Coke and Mentos experiment), trigger an emotional responses (e.g., babies dancing to Beyonce), and show creative talent or make their viewers laugh (e.g., the 'Get a Mac-Feat. Mr. Bean' mashup).

This paper concentrates on a type of user-generated content that is particularly important to researchers and practitioners in the domain of public affairs (especially pertaining to those responsible for issues management, community relations, political strategy, and marketing/brand management). Specifically, it focuses on how SM provides a formative context for how people share specific

experiences (Chakrabarti and Berthon, 2012) with firms or their products and services. As the title suggests, this electronic word of mouth (eWoM) can have positive or negative implications for the firm. When positive conversations spread quickly (e.g., through reviews on TripAdvisor), they can lead to virtually free advertising for the firm, growing brand recognition, increased sales, and so on. (Longart, 2010). Negative eWoM, on the other hand, can cause costly (Khammash and Griffiths, 2010; McCarthy, 2010) or even irreparable damage (e.g., the financial impact of the United Breaks Guitars is estimated at \$180m) (Ayles, 2009).

Hence, to manage 'viral marketing', it is critical to understand what motivates consumers to share their consumption experiences (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011; Mills, 2012). Likewise, it is important to recognize that diverse types of consumption-based content are distributed differently (Reynolds, 2010) by often highly socially networked individuals (Kietzmann and Angell, 2013; Schaefer, 2012). It follows that, from a public affairs perspective, the importance of eWoM as a spark for potentially viral content should not be underestimated. For firms, this suggests that understanding eWoM and how it can vary are paramount,

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and that such an understanding should inform eWoM management strategies accordingly.

This is a conceptual paper that (i) proposes an integrative model for unpacking eWoM by combining existing theories and (ii) puts forward an appropriate way for firms to manage the attention the pay to eWoM. With these goals, this paper proceeds as follows.

We begin with a brief review of the pertinent literature of traditional and eWoM.

In the next section, entitled 'A Matter of Disconfirmation: Unpacking eWoM', we present an integrative model for unpacking eWoM for understanding eWoM. We draw from Oliver's (1980) disconfirmation paradigm, Schmitt's (2003) customer experience management framework, and the comparison standards of Niedrich *et al.* (2005) to examine how different consumption experiences motivate consumers to post content online. We illustrate the value of this combination through a sample study and discuss its findings to show how eWoM differences matter. The survey's intention was not to develop generalizable findings for eWoM, but rather to bring to life the value the integrative model can offer to public affairs researchers and practitioners.

In the following section, 'A Matter of Attention: Managing eWoM', we build on the data generated from our integrative model for unpacking eWoM and discuss how public affairs managers handle consumers' comments online. Specifically, we present an eWoM Attentionscape, based on four important dimensions from Davenport and Beck's (2001) work, to examine the amount of attention different types of eWoM (unpacked in our integrative model) receive from brand managers. Following the logic from the previous section, we illustrate the usefulness of the eWoM Attentionscape through data from one selected public affairs manager, without making any claims for generalizability. After we show the important difference of eWoM priorities between managers and consumers, we conclude with a discussion of the overall implications for the management of eWoM in the context of public affairs and virality.

FROM WoM TO eWoM

Word of Mouth (WoM), defined as 'oral, person to person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product or a service' (Arndt, 1967, p. 3) has grown in research popularity since the mid-20th century. Katz and Lazarsfeld (2006), for instance, analyzed how WoM influences public opinion in 1955, and Engel *et al.*

(1969) found that, with respect to purchasing decisions, WoM is more effective than other marketing tools and conventional advertising media. As WoM research evolved, Burzynski and Bayer (1977) studied its effect on post-purchase attitudes, and Herr *et al.* (1991) studied WoM's effect on pre-usage attitudes through 'all informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers' (Westbrook, 1987, p. 261). In some cases, research focused more on the 'input' side of WoM to understand why and how it is created (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Richins, 1983). Others focused on how WoM affects organizations (Garrett, 1987), with the general understanding that WoM shapes consumer decision making (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; Steffes and Burgee, 2009) especially when the source of the message is perceived independently (Litvin *et al.*, 2008).

During the height of the dotcom boom, Buttle (1998), among others, supported that [28] WoM could be mediated through electronic means. As more and more people went online, they started to exchange product information electronically (Cheung and Thadani, 2010) and broadcasted consumer preferences and experiences (Dumenco, 2010) through the high reach of interactive Web 2.0 technologies (Huang *et al.*, 2011). Although eWoM may be less personal than traditional WoM, it is seen as more powerful because it is immediate, has a significant reach, is credible, and is publicly available (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). Much like WoM, research of eWoM focuses on motivational forces (e.g., Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003), processes (e.g., Boon *et al.*, 2012; Lee and Youn, 2009), demographics or psychographics of users (Williams *et al.*, 2012), or the impact on firms and institutions (e.g., Varadarajan and Yadav, 2002).

Today, Facebook counts more than 900 million users, Twitter generates over 340 million tweets daily, and 61 million unique Yelp visitors per month span 13 countries. SM is enormous, without a doubt, and the general consensus is that a large percentage is concerned with 'pointless babble', or 'social grooming', and creating 'peripheral awareness' (Boyd, 2008). However, it is also commonly accepted that many of these conversations are indeed truthful accounts and valuable exchanges of consumer experiences (Campbell *et al.*, 2012).

On the basis of the work of Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004, p. 39), our definition of eWoM is

eWoM refers to any statement based on positive, neutral, or negative experiences made by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product,

service, brand, or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet (through web sites, social networks, instant messages, news feeds. . .).

In fact, the growth in the diffusion of such eWoM since 2004 has led to an expansion of the WoM Marketing Association from three to around 300 corporate members (Chan and Ngai, 2011), with the highest growth rates found online and on social networking media (Brown *et al.*, 2007), where eWoM is perceived to have higher credibility, empathy, and relevance for consumers than marketer-created sources of information (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Oosterveer, 2011).

Unquestionably, consumers' online interactions are a 'market force' (Chen *et al.*, 2011) not to be ignored. Over the past decade, the topic of eWoM and 'viral marketing referrals' have caught the attention of practitioners and academics alike, as these strive to adapt to the changing technical and social environment and keep pace with consumer behavior. The unabated eWoM debates led to calls for research and even talks of a distinctive marketing sub-discipline (e.g., Lindgreen *et al.*, 2011).

Today, it is accepted that eWoM, also called 'online referrals', influences purchase decisions, from which movie to watch to what stocks to buy (Dellarocas, 2003). A highly cited study by Gruen *et al.* (2006), for instance, focuses on consumer perceptions of value and consumer loyalty intentions. It argues that consumer know-how exchange has an impact on consumer perceptions of product value and likelihood to recommend the product, but that it does not influence consumer repurchase intentions. Other studies are more narrowly focused on one particular type of consumer interaction. For example, Park and Lee's (2009) study on how positive versus negative eWOM and a website's reputation (established versus unestablished) contribute to the eWOM effect. They found that, in general, eWoM has a larger impact in cases of negative eWoM (compared with positive), which is greater for established websites than for unestablished ones and more influential for experience goods than for search goods. With a similar focus on the relationship between a Web presence and eWoM, Thorson and Rodgers (2006) showed that interactivity in the form of a politician's blog (interestingly, the authors interpret this as eWoM) significantly influenced the visitors' attitude toward the website but not their attitudes toward the candidate or their voting intention. No matter what their specific focus is, researchers agree that eWoM plays a significant role in public affairs and marketing

today (Hung and Li, 2010; Lee, 2009). Accordingly, some firms have tried to influence what is being said about them online, as new technologies not only provide new opportunities for consumers to share their opinions about products and services, but are also new marketing tools and channels. But the rules of conduct for engaging in the social and responding to eWoM are not yet clearly understood, and the results can be dire (Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010).

Despite the rising importance and popularity of eWoM studies, researchers have not yet been able to develop a cogent understanding of how eWoM varies and what the implications of this variance are for firms. To advance the field, research is needed into (i) the different reasons why people create eWoM and (ii) how eWoM should be handled by firms (Canhoto and Clark, ; Sweeney *et al.*, 2011). Our paper aims to contribute to this research area by first developing a conceptual understanding of eWoM through a disconfirmation perspective and second, by discussing how attention management is key for managing eWoM.

A MATTER OF DISCONFIRMATION: UNPACKING eWoM

In our eWoM definition discussed earlier, the likelihood of creating eWoM is dependent on 'positive, neutral, or negative experiences' related to a 'product, service, brand, or company'. This definition implies that eWoM is a coping response resulting from an emotional reaction/degree of satisfaction that itself is the outcome of an appraisal process (Bagozzi, 1992). To unpack this relationship and add granularity to the analysis of the conditions that give rise to eWoM (the coping response), we present our integrative model for unpacking eWoM (Figure 1). This model includes appropriate theoretical lenses for the examining appraisal processes (e.g., Is the experience what I expected?) and the resulting emotional reactions/degrees of satisfaction (e.g., Am I happy with the experience?). We begin with the emotional reaction and then work toward the appraisal process.

We build our first analytical lens from Oliver's (1980) disconfirmation paradigm, which is used widely in the field of satisfaction research, to measure the differences between a customer's 'expected' performance and her perception of the actual performance of a product, service, or brand. The basic premise is that, if expectations, low or high, are confirmed, consumers feel indifferent about the actual performance. When expectations are

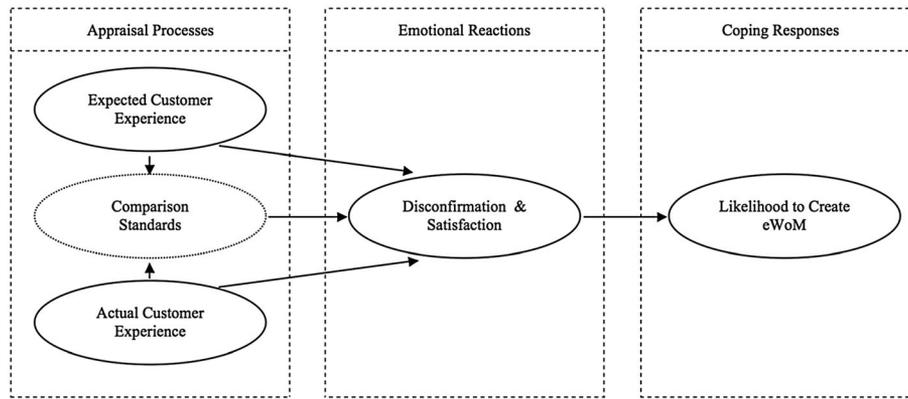


Figure 1 Integrative Model for Unpacking eWoM

Table 1 Disconfirmation outcomes

	Pre-consumption		Post-consumption
Neutral confirmation	Expected performance	=	Actual performance
Positive disconfirmation	Expected performance	<	Actual performance
Negative disconfirmation	Expected performance	>	Actual performance

Table 2 Comparison standards

Comparison standards		Example
'Wanted'	Expresses to what degree <i>goals</i> based on a desire were met	'I really <i>wanted</i> the movie to be romantic.'
'Needed'	Expresses to what degree <i>goals</i> based on a requirement were met	'I <i>needed</i> the computer battery to last one full day.'
'Expected'	Refers to the degree to which performance <i>expectations</i> about specific products, etc. were met, based on experience, third party reviews. . .	'Based on Yelp reviews, I <i>expected</i> the new Chinese restaurant to be amazing.'
'Should'	Expresses to what degree <i>norms</i> of general performance standards were met, regardless of product, service, or brand	'Customer representatives <i>should</i> always be friendly on the phone.'

disconfirmed, they dramatically affect consumer satisfaction (Szymanski and Henard, 2001). For instance, if expectations are exceeded, they lead to a satisfied consumer; unmet expectations lead to a dissatisfied one (Table 1, adapted from Oliver, 1980).

Given the importance of disconfirmation on satisfaction and the role of satisfaction as a driver of eWoM, the investigation of how confirmation and disconfirmation contribute to eWoM is essential. We thus separate three confirmation outcomes to differentiate conditions under which people might share eWoM. Accordingly, we introduce measures that indicate whether an actual consumer experience was (i) as good as, (ii) better than, or (iii) worse than they had expected.

Second, to understand the appraisal process in more detail, we adopt goals, expectations, or norms as the most commonly used post-consumption

comparison standards (Halstead, 1999; Miller, 1977) from Niedrich *et al.* (2005)¹ as detailed in Table 2.

Third, in order to add yet more detail to the appraisal process, we need to separate different types of experiences more narrowly. To examine how these experiences could vary for eWoM, we build on Schmitt's (2003) work on customer experience management), which divides usage and consumption encounters into brand experiences (i.e., the product itself, logos and signage, packaging, brochures, and advertising) and customer interface experiences (the dynamic exchange of information and service that occurs between the consumer and

¹NB: Oliver uses the term 'expected' in a general sense. In the interpretation in Table 2, the same term adopts a much more specific meaning.

a company: in person, over email, online, or in any other way). Together, these brand experiences amount to a perception of a brand's attractiveness (Schmitt, 2003). Thus, we propose that the propensity of consumers to create eWoM depends on whether their expectations of the product attributes, the look and feel, and its advertising, and its innovativeness (compared with previous versions or compared with the competition) are confirmed or not (Table 3, adapted from Schmitt, 2003).

Lastly, in order to understand the coping response, the consumers' likelihood to share feedback about these customer experience dimensions, the conditions under which they (i) most likely, (ii) possibly, and (iii) least likely share eWoM (the coping response) are important. Similarly, where consumers share eWoM also matters, because most eWoM does not necessarily take place on a company's website (Fisher, 2009). Research shows that choices (e.g., different SM platforms) can be influenced by people's perceived ease of access to a competent contact person (Stauss, 2002), the firm's expected ability to handle feedback efficiently (Gelbrich and Roschk, 2011), or degree of comfort and experience with a platform (Johnston, 2001).

THE INTEGRATIVE MODEL FOR UNPACKING eWoM IN ACTION

With the ambition of illustrating the usefulness of the integrative model for unpacking eWoM, with the objective of showing how the theoretical lenses can be operationalized and with the goal of bringing our conceptual development to life, we conducted a sample study.

We approached survey participants through the most popular SM platforms in North America and Europe—Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. We

recognize that SM usage is highly influenced by demographic factors (Hargittai, 2007), and that responses will be highly subjective in nature (Stauss, 2002). As aforementioned, we did not seek to generalize results to the overall population but rather outline how a variance in eWoM likely exists within, and across, different subject samples. Particularly in the spirit of the research topic, we deem SM to be a suitable channel of inviting participants for the data collection. To increase the number of largely self-selected respondents, we followed the snowball sampling approach, which is a suitable technique for settings where it is difficult to identify subjects with the desired characteristics *ex ante* (Saunders *et al.*, 2007).

Participants were asked questions for each of the three coping mechanism (most likely, possibly, and least likely) related to each of the eight customer experiences. The latter included each type of brand experience (where respondents were asked to relate their experiences of a product, service or event, look and feel, advertisement, and degree of innovativeness) and each type of customer interface experience (where respondents were asked to relate their replies to face-to-face, personal-but-distant, and mass electronic communication experiences). Accordingly, the survey included a total of 24 questions, each of which also included an open text form for comments (see Figure 2 for a sample question).

Findings

Our 58 respondents (29 male and 29 female), ranged in year of birth from 1955 to 1992, with the majority born between 1988 and 1990. More than half (57%) stated that they post and read eWoM equally often, 40% read more than they post, and 2% post more than they read. Just under 18% *read* eWoM mostly

Table 3 Customer experiences

Brand experiences	<i>Product, service or event</i>	The consumption of the product, service or event itself, etc.
	<i>Look and feel</i>	The visual identity (name, logo, signage), packaging, the store design and merchandising, the graphic design elements on a website, etc.
	<i>Advertising</i>	Includes the overall tone of an ad, whether it is aggressive or soft, focuses on your intellect or emotions, etc.
	<i>Innovativeness</i>	Refers to the advancement and novelty of the product's functionality, its look and feel or its advertising compared to previous versions or compared to the competition, etc.
Customer interface experiences	<i>Face-to-face</i>	Exchanges and interactions occur in a specific place (e.g., store) and can include buying advice, consulting services, counseling, and entertainment, etc.
	<i>Personal-but-distant</i>	Exchanges and interactions occur via phone, in writing, via e-mail, Twitter, Facebook etc.
	<i>Mass electronic</i>	Exchanges and interactions occur on e-commerce site, TV, radio, etc.

on their mobile devices, compared with 33% who use mostly their computers, with the remainder using both mobile devices and computers equally much. A total of 24% use mostly mobile devices to write eWoM, 30% use mostly their computers, and 52% use both evenly.

Brand experience

Respondents were most likely to talk about positively disconfirmed expectations (product and look and feel) on Facebook. In other words, they indicated an inclination to post eWoM on Facebook when their experiences were better than they had expected. Positive disconfirmation became a weaker indicator in the ‘possibly’ category. Here, relatively more respondents stated that they might share eWoM about negatively disconfirmed product expectations, desires, and requirements (in that order), mostly on Twitter. For the look and feel category, norms were important, and respondents stated that they might share eWoM on Twitter if the look and feel is not as good as it should be.

Those who most likely create eWoM about advertising follow a similar pattern as aforementioned. They mostly talk about positively disconfirmed advertising expectations on Facebook: ‘I don’t feel the need to mention an ad when it is what I expected it to be, it must “wow” me for it to be posted on my Facebook wall.’ Comments also suggested that respondents might not talk about negatively disconfirmed ads to avoid slander and legal consequences. Interestingly, they also indicated a strong connection between humor, whether positive or negative disconfirmation, and the likelihood of creating eWoM: ‘I only discuss ads if they are particularly entertaining/viral’, ‘I don’t talk about a brand’s advertising unless I can make a joke about it’, and ‘If the advertising was horribly bad (worse than it should have been), it might make

for humorous fodder on Facebook.’ Moreover, respondents might share eWoM if an advertisement is as good as they wanted (desire confirmation), but respondents were unlikely to create advertising eWoM when it was as good as or worse than it should have been (when norms were confirmed or negatively disconfirmed).

With respect to a brand’s innovativeness, respondents unanimously stated that they create eWoM on Facebook in cases of positively disconfirmed expectations, in other words, when the product’s functionality, its look and feel, or its advertising is better compared with previous versions or compared with the competition, and so on. They might talk about innovativeness on Twitter if this is worse than they expected. Across most categories (product, look and feel, innovativeness), respondents stated that they are unlikely to share eWoM if brand expectations were confirmed.

Customer interface experiences

Respondents were most likely to talk about positively disconfirmed face-to-face interactions, with Facebook and Twitter both listed as the preferred choice. This quantitative measure was offset slightly in open-text comments that included ‘Usually I do not talk not about my personal interactions unless they’re on either extreme side’, ‘Only vocal when it’s worth sharing; good or bad’ and ‘If the firm is on either side of the spectrum: great or horrible, they’re going to hear about it’.

Interestingly, the response patterns changed dramatically when face-to-face was replaced by ‘personal-but-distant’ exchanges and interactions (via phone, e-mail, Twitter, or Facebook) and exchanges and interactions occur on e-commerce sites, and so on. In these cases, most respondents stated that they were most likely to share their experiences through eWoM when interactions with firms were worse than

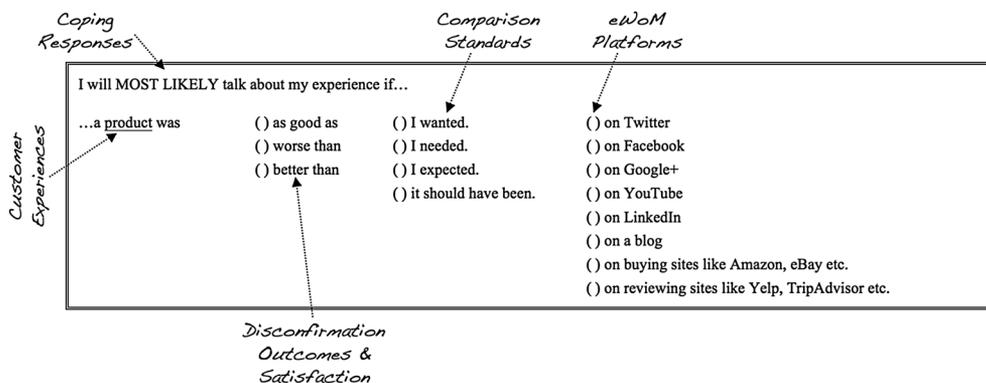


Figure 2 eWoM Survey

they needed them to be (e.g., when problems were not solved), they expected them to be (based on prior experience), or they should have been (based on general norms respondents had for these types of interactions). They might comment in cases of positive norm disconfirmation. Their choices for Twitter and Facebook as their preferred platforms were accompanied by comments such as: 'If it's really horrible, Twitter', 'Twitter for a public kudos', and 'I will most likely leave feedback on the company's Facebook page or user forums when I am less than satisfied'.

The majority of respondents stated that they would unlikely share their customer interface experiences if their norms were confirmed. Put differently, our study confirmed that when face-to-face, personal-but-distant, and electronic interactions were as good as they should have been, respondents would unlikely talk about them on SM (DeWitt and Brady, 2003).

In Table 4, we summarized our findings. The likelihood to create eWoM is summarized as high (H) for most likely, medium (M) for possibly, and low (L) for unlikely. Positive (+), negative (-), as well as neutral (=) disconfirmations correspond to our measures of 'better than', 'worse than', and 'as good as'. Comparison standards include desires (wants), requirements (needs), expectations, and norms. For the reader, we have also included sample posts and tweets as examples for the respective eWoM messages. A higher level of granularity can be achieved by including some of the demographic data in the analyses.

Implications for Public Affairs

These findings are very interesting and point toward a number of implications for managing eWoM, even from a small and broad sample size. In terms of platform preferences, Facebook and Twitter were clearly the dominating choices. Respondents favored their Facebook presences for positive disconfirmation, in most cases to share better-than-expected experiences with their friends (in agreement with survey comments). For negative disconfirmation, Twitter was the preferred choice when consumers wanted to let the world know about a bad incident or express their need for redress (Mattila and Wirtz, 2004), or when they hoped to start an open discussion or tried to engage with the firm about the worse-than-expected experience. These choices speak to the semiprivate nature of Facebook (where users have some degree of control over who sees their posting) versus the public nature of Twitter. For public affairs managers (especially those involved in issues management, community relations, political strategy, and

marketing/brand management), collecting data about platform preferences will point out where different kinds of eWoM conversations take place and which SM channels they ought to be monitoring. In our sample, Facebook should be the tool of choice for engaging with positive experiences, and Twitter should be monitored to detect early signs of negative sentiment toward the brand. But these choices will naturally vary. For instance, restaurants will likely see that a lot of eWoM is shared on Yelp, DineHere, and Urbanspoon.

In terms of comparison standards, expectations were clearly the most important measure for our respondents, followed by requirements, norms, and desires. In general, this suggests that respondents either engaged in repeat purchases (with performance expectations based on prior experiences), or become highly educated about a product's performance standards through pre-consumption research, possibly through reading other eWoM. The latter points toward the potential reach of eWoM, which in the context of virality, suggests that managing comparison standards is particularly important. Based on our findings, we believe that eWoM managers are well advised to analyze comparison standards in the context of their brand. For instance, one would expect stark differences between the importance of expectations, requirements, and desires for commodities (e.g., sugar), for computer equipment and for luxury goods. A failure to build responses to eWoM around the specific comparisons standards of the consumer might do more harm than good.

The disconfirmation paradigm provided a useful underlying framework. Responses exhibited the same pattern for all brand experiences, where positive trumped negative disconfirmation. Respondents were more likely to talk about a better than a worse experience. This allows a number of conclusions. First, people like to be positively surprised and are very likely to share such experiences with others. In terms of public affairs and virality, this suggests that organizational resources used to develop these types of disconfirmations might help create the highly desirable echo-chamber effect where positive eWoM is amplified widely. Second, the fact that negative disconfirmation was not the highest priority for brand experiences suggests that our respondents would rather be sharing positive comments, and that an experience really needed to be bad in order to motivate them to share negative eWoM. Accordingly, public affairs managers ought to listen very carefully to negative eWoM, as this is most likely a sincere concern. This matters not only for reducing the impact of negative online chatter and its viral potential, but

Table 4 eWoM unpacked

Type of experience	Likelihood	Disconf.	Standard	Platform	Example	
Brand experiences	<i>Product, service or event</i>	H	+	Expectation	Facebook	1. Avengers Alliance was the best 3D movie yet.
		M	-	Expectation Desire	Twitter	2. Well, it's official, @AirCanada lost one of our checked bags. I had high hopes for you guys! #disappointed
		L	=	Expectation		
	<i>Look and feel</i>	H	+	Expectation	Facebook	3. I can't believe how much thinner the iPad 2 is.
		M	-	Norms	Twitter	4. Worst signup flow / experience ever for a cloud hosting product goes to @bkspc - bad ui, weird errors, US vs. UK mess - should never happen!
		L	=	Expectation		
	<i>Advertising</i>	H	+	Expectation	Facebook	5. This is the best EA ad I have ever seen (http://bit.ly/1a1lwk).
		M	0	Desire	Facebook	6. Just saw a HILARIOUS Sealy Posturepedic commercial at http://bit.ly/feLh42 .
		L	=/-	Norm		
<i>Innovativeness</i>	H	+	Expectation	Facebook	7. WOW, Tupac-style hologram at NY airport, that was unexpected.	
	M	-	Expectation	Twitter	8. Straight up: I'm a disappointed with the new iPhone 4S. Nothing new, really.	
	L	=	Expectation			
Customer interface experiences	<i>Face-to-face</i>	H	+	Expectation	Facebook & Twitter	9. Unbelievable: at Lin's Cuisine they looked after our screaming kids while we had dinner.
		M	-	Norm	Facebook	10. Valvoline Instant Oil Change in Mission Viejo has horrible customer service. They broke my battery terminal then claimed it wasn't their fault.
		L	=	Norm		
	<i>Personal-but-distant</i>	H	-	Norm Requirement	Facebook & Twitter	11. No, United, I do not want to follow you on Twitter. I think I'm still on hold from that time I called your customer service two years ago.
		M	+	Norm Expectation	Twitter	12. @Gadling: @RitzCarlton Demonstrates Customer Service Excellence, Missing Stuffed Animal http://bit.ly/L9bM4n #travel
		L	=	Norm		
	<i>Mass electronic</i>	H	-	Norm	Facebook & Twitter	13. Nestlé, Your Facebook page, your rules, true, and you just lost a customer, won the battle and lost the war! Happy? Don't tell us what to do!
		M	+	Norm Expectation	Facebook & Twitter	14. Love how Skullcandy stays current, posts news updates, product announcements, behind-the-scenes pictures, and videos to its wall.
		L	=	Norm		

comments should also be taken as serious input for products and service improvements.

Separating between brand experiences (i.e., the product itself, its look and feel, advertising, and degree of innovativeness) and consumer interface experiences (in person, over the phone, online, or in any other way) (Schmitt, 2003) proved a very insightful way of unpacking consumer experiences. For one, the shift was evident between positive disconfirmation as a primary driver for brand

experiences to negative disconfirmation for interactions that were mediated. This is important, as it offers an opportunity to engage with consumers who are unlikely to complain about brand experiences but likely to criticize negative consumer interface experiences. Moreover, in the brand category, respondents clearly preferred Facebook or Twitter, whereas in the personal-but-distant and electronic interface section, respondents would share their eWoM equally on both. In combination with the

previous findings, this suggests that in cases of a negative disconfirmation, when the interaction with the brand was worse than it should be, people will share it on all fronts. This, in turn, suggests that in order to manage eWoM and reduce the potential for negative virality, eWoM managers need to pay close attention to negatively disconfirmed mediated interactions between consumer and brand.

A MATTER OF ATTENTION: MANAGING eWoM

Traditionally, WoM was not observed by firms (Day and Landon, 1977). However, this is no longer the case. Increasingly, users see SM as a platform to make their message heard and to influence outcomes (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011). How firms respond to eWoM is very important, as the degree of satisfaction with the company's response, which is independent from satisfaction with the transaction or with the relationship (Stauss, 2002) influences intention to repurchase and to provide positive referrals (Gelbrich and Roschk, 2011).

Our aim for this paper was to develop a better understanding of how eWoM can be unpacked, which we hope to have achieved with our integrative model for unpacking eWoM. But this only tells half of the story and leaves public affairs managers unclear about how to proceed. At the outset, we had committed to include an appropriate actionable tool to help public affairs professionals manage the tremendous amount and variance of eWoM. In this section, we propose that the eWoM Attentionscape can be one of such instruments.

Paying attention to eWoM

In the findings section in the previous texts, numerous recommendations suggested that eWoM managers need to be mindful of the variance in eWoM types and need to pay close *attention* to eWoM to minimize the risks of harmful comments and to maximize the impact of helpful eWoM. Handling both positive and negative consumer feedback is as an essential part of consumer service (Cho *et al.*, 2002), but managing *attention* selectively (according to eWoM type) is not yet a conscious process. Attention is key to managing eWoM—it is a finite resource, and public affairs managers must increasingly prioritize what, where, and when they read and respond to eWoM, and how much time to devote to any individual post.

Davenport and Beck (2001) rejuvenated earlier work by Simon (1971) and highlighted how attention had not previously been considered among strategic capabilities (Makadok, 2001) for building competitive advantage. Attention, they argued, is a scarce commodity that limits how much information a firm can consume in an information-rich world, where '[...] the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it' (Simon, 1971, p40).

At a time of growing information availability, in no small part due to the availability of content on SM, managing attention appropriately becomes increasingly important. In order to understand how marketing managers 'allocate' their attention on responding to different consumer communication types and to propose how their time can be leveraged to develop eWoM as a key marketing asset, we propose four dimensions (Table 5) from Davenport and Beck (2001):

In order to create the important visual representation of how public affairs managers should pay attention to different types of eWoM, we adapted Davenport (2001) and Lowy and Hood's (2004) work to develop an 'eWoM Attention Analysis Process' (Table 6).

To illustrate its usefulness, in Figure 3, we present the Attentionscape of a brand manager from an online gaming firm, along with a summary of the results from the Preparation Stage.

Interpretation of eWoM Attentionscape

The Attentionscape mentioned in the preceding texts points to a number of interesting findings. It is important to note that a public affairs manager (or team of managers, etc.), whose attention is 'balanced', will score near the intersection of the two axis (Davenport and Beck, 2001). Types of eWoM that are far from the center, or Attentionscapes that are more populated in one area than in the others are signs of imbalance.

Here, the top-left quadrant is marked by conscious attention paid to eWoM posted on the firm's website, Facebook wall, Twitter presence (i.e., by aiming tweets at #company name), and so on. It is clear that the brand manager here pays attention to negative comments (negative disconfirmation) because of a fear of the impact these might have if left alone, thus trying to prevent potentially

negative virality. In combination with the findings from the disconfirmation study, indicating that consumers might post negative comments only when these are truly warranted (based on unfulfilled expectations), the amount of attention paid to such eWoM appears appropriate. However, the brand manager tends to perceive these as mildly unattractive to unattractive, suggesting that she pays a lot of attention to these types of eWoM, although she really does not want to. From a firm's perspective, it might be worthwhile to align the interests of the brand manager more closely with the strong interests of those who comment on their brand online, so that genuine, constructive conversations can ensue without a negative undertone. The famous Nestlé public affairs disaster shows what can happen when these interests are ill-aligned.

When consumers used altered version of the Nestlé logo as their profile pictures, the brand manager created a hostile us-against-them atmosphere and engaged in an aggressive dialog with a consumer, publically on Twitter. It was generally seen as poor taste and Nestlé's statement 'But it's our page, we set the rules, it was ever thus' was shared, retweeted, and posted widely.

The bottom-left quadrant represents unconscious attention to eWoM posted on the firm's website, Facebook wall etc. The fact that some eWoM based on negatively disconfirmed experiences are managed unconsciously might be problematic. If for instance, the brand manager simply uses standardized eWoM responses, rather than engaging with the consumer and the underlying problem, his or her behavior might be seen as lip service to

Table 5 eWoM Attentionscape dimensions

Dimension	Selection	Description
Mindfulness	Front of mind	Attention to eWoM that is conscious and deliberate.
	Back of mind	Attention to eWoM that is unconscious or even spontaneous.
Choice	Captive Voluntary	eWoM is thrust on the manager, like comments on the company's Facebook wall. Manager looks for eWoM anywhere, of his or her own free will and volition.
Appeal	Aversion	Manager pays attention to eWoM because (s)he is afraid of the consequences of not paying attention.
	Attractiveness	Manager pays attention to eWoM because it fascinates him or her.
Amount of attention		

Table 6 eWoM attention analysis process

Stage	Activity
Preparation	This involves using our integrative model for unpacking eWoM to survey customers of the organization/users of their products or services. This survey should yield data on their brand and customer interface experiences, from which a table with eWoM unpacked (similar to our Table 5) can be populated.
Definition	Interviewees (public affairs managers) review the eWoM unpacked table, provide feedback, and eliminate and add different types of eWoM if appropriate.
Qualification	Using a Likert scale, Interviewees qualify each type of eWoM from the eWoM unpacked table, according to mindfulness (ranging from front to back of mind), choice (captive to voluntary), and appeal (aversive to attractive).
Quantification	From the eWoM unpacked table, interviewees quantify the amount of attention spent on each type of eWoM (using a Likert scale).
Visualization	1) As circles, we plot ¹ each type of eWoM according to its degree of: Mindfulness on the vertical axis (ranging from back to front of mind) Choice on the horizontal axis (extending from captive to voluntary) 2) Depending on the appeal of each type of eWoM, we change the <i>shade</i> of its circles: Aversion is lighter in color, attraction is darker. 3) Conditional on the amount of attention spent on each type of eWoM, we adjust the <i>size</i> of its circle: The bigger the circle, the more attention this type of eWoM receives.

¹Attentionscapes can be produced with pen and paper, simple word or image processing software, or bespoke Attentionscape applications.

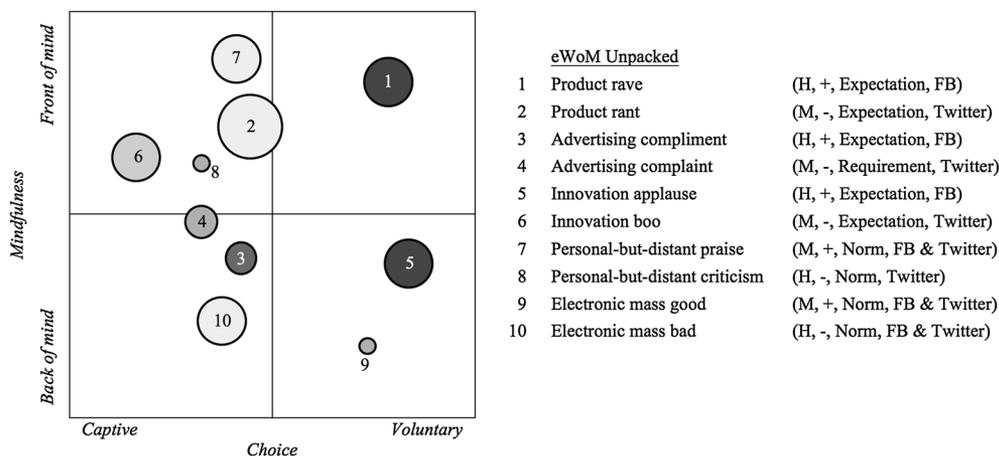


Figure 3 eWoM Attentionscape

a problem that warrants genuine, conscious attention. Moreover, positive eWoM, focused on experiences with the firm's advertising, does not receive a lot of attention, although the brand manager finds this type mildly attractive. On the contrary, negatively disconfirmed advertising experiences, although they don't seem to matter to the brand manager as much, are dealt with more consciously.

The eWoM on the bottom right quadrant seems to be attractive, and the brand manager actively looks for this type, not just directly on the firm's website. Although a disconfirmation study might show that eWoM about positively disconfirmed innovative experiences is more likely than about negatively disconfirmed ones, paying attention to positive eWoM is unconscious in nature. The firm might need to provide better incentives so that this managers pay conscious attention to this important type of eWoM.

The top-right quadrant shows that positively disconfirmed product experiences (based on expectation) are most attractive to the brand manager who pays voluntary and conscious attention to it. This approach is highly appropriate if the disconfirmation study shows that this type of eWoM is also important to consumers. In such a case, by consciously tending to positive eWoM, the brand manager might be able to create a positive echo-chamber where genuine conversations about great product experiences might go viral.

CONCLUSIONS

Our findings show that SM users have clear preferences regarding which platforms to use, how, and when. Although there are common aspects between SM and other channels of communication between the firm and its consumers, some are unique to the medium (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2012). Examining these

differences is crucial for managing eWoM effectively and for advancing our conceptual understanding of eWoM behavior. With the adaptation and combination of insightful theories in this paper, we hope to have contributed to this understanding in a way that is meaningful for both researchers and practitioners.

We operationalized the integrative model for unpacking eWoM by conducting a survey, which we populated with responses from a broad sample to illustrate the model's usefulness. We hope that eWoM managers and fellow researchers will find this approach insightful for examining eWoM behavior of more narrowly defined populations (e.g., a specific firm's consumers). In our model, we propose a number of relationships between theories and behavior to help explain why and when people create eWoM. These relationships need to be measured, assessed, and evaluated, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. These findings, once available, will be presented in a separate paper.

Consumers have gone beyond accepting that firms eavesdrop on SM conversations. In fact, they expect companies to be present across an array of platforms, even those not traditionally thought of as a corporate channel (e.g., Facebook). Consumers pull firms into SM, not the other way around. A company's absence is quickly noticed by its consumers, as well as its competitors (Fisher, 2009). Consumers also expect companies to use the various platforms efficiently, working around their limitations (Crosby, 2011). This expectation, combined with the enormous amount of eWoM available on a plethora of SM channels, adds tremendous complexity to any marketing strategy. We adopted the perspective that the attention becomes the limiting factor in the management of eWoM and consumer relationships over time. Accordingly, we presented the Attentionscape as an appropriate tool for public affairs managers to examine how they indeed

manage different types of eWoM, and whether this is appropriate given their audience's engagement needs. The usefulness of the Attentionscape increases when managers are able to separate how they pay attention to different types of eWoM, and on different SM platforms.

Our findings also contribute to the academic debate on eWoM and its management. Although this is now a firmly established public behavior, likely to grow (Zhang and Li, 2010), classical approaches still depict referrals as a private behavior, largely outside the marketers' control or reach. Although this study contributed to the understanding of eWoM, both from a consumer's and a marketer's perspective, the causal relationship of eWoM sharing, eWoM management, and virality requires further attention. There is still much work to be done to understand when eWoM is bitter and when it's sweet for firms. It is the authors' hope that this paper inspires further eWoM research during this technical and social formative phase.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Jan Kietzmann PhD, is an assistant professor at the Beedie School of Business at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. Jan has a particular interest in management information systems, strategy and marketing. His current work, in terms of research, teaching and advising organizations focuses on the intersection of innovation and emerging technologies, including the impact of social media on individuals, consumers, existing and new ventures.

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