

MODERATING EFFECT OF CREDIBILITY AND THE IMPACT OF MOTIVATION  
AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP PROPERTIES ON ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH  
VIA SOCIAL MEDIA



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## Abstract

Social media has a lot to offer to the marketers in the form of a ‘web of brand-related-conversations’. Social interaction, via social media, is on the increase because of its “speed, scale and economies”<sup>1</sup>. During the course of social interactions users indulge in brand-related conversations or Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) thereby diffusing the message to a much larger audience. Researchers have found eWOM via social media to be capable of influencing, both, consumption-related behavior and brand equity (Wang, Yu & Wei, 2012). A lot of eWOM behavior understanding is based on WOM behavior; however the two have fundamental differences. Unlike traditional WOM, which mostly originates from known and trustworthy sources, eWOM may originate from sources where no significant prior relationship exists (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009). Users derive perceptions of credibility based on all the variety of informational cues embedded within a given social media interface. (Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel, and Shulman, 2009) Therefore, the influence of eWOM towards consumption-related behaviors will be determined by the perceptions of credibility, of both source and message, derived from self-generated as well as system-generated informational cues. More over precursors that lead to eWOM behavior in form of motives and social relationship properties which are significant in the context of eWOM are not well understood.

This research comprises of three studies: (I) Motivation and Social Relationship Properties to eWOM behaviour via Social Media; (II) Moderating role of Credibility; (III) Self-generated Credibility Cues versus System-generated Credibility Cues.

Study I of the research is aimed at understanding the motivation and social relationship properties significant of eWOM behavior in the social media context. Some of the core uses of social media are social connectivity and networking therefore motivation and social relationship-related variables are critical to understand eWOM behavior (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011; Chu & Kim, 2011). Four social relationship properties were tested: Homophily, Strong tie strength, Weak tie strength, Electronic propinquity. Motivations tested for driving eWOM behavior were: Altruism; Social benefit; Vengeance; Advice seeking; Self enhancement. Survey based method was used and 370 responses were considered for analysis. Results of the study suggest both strong and weak tie

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/high\\_tech\\_telecoms\\_internet/the\\_social\\_economy](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/high_tech_telecoms_internet/the_social_economy) retrieved as on June 2013

strength to be significant social relationship properties enabling eWOM behaviour. Advice seeking and social benefit are significant drivers of eWOM behavior.

Study II and Study III are based on two factorial design experiments. They examine all the manifestations of credibility on social media and check for its moderating effect over eWOM. A total of 124 and 246 experiments are conducted for Study II and III respectively. Results of our study confirm the moderating role of credibility over the influence of eWOM and also suggest that source credibility may have a more powerful effect in the overall credibility perception. System-generated credibility cues also have a confounding effect; they may be able to compensate for low expertise of source and low believability of message derived from self-generated credibility cues.

Social media is growing rapidly and eWOM behaviour influence consumer choices significantly. In conclusion this research was set to examine various aspects of eWOM behaviour on social media thereby bringing in better understanding of the nature of these conversations, drivers, enablers, factors that make these conversations influential and how it may be made more effective. The findings have both theoretical as well as managerial implications. Overall the study suggests a strong need for caution to marketers while selecting *online influencers* to operationalize an *exogenously created eWOM campaign*. Believability and influence of the *online influencers* may be moderated by all the manifestations of credibility examined in our research therefore a judicious operationalization may prove more productive.

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