

ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH (EWOM) MESSAGES AND SPORTING GOODS: INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTS OF EWOM MESSAGES ON PURCHASE INTENTIONS AND CREDIBILITY

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Abstract

Introduction

With the development of Internet technology, the popularity of e-commerce is growing and it is important for marketers to understand the consumption behavior of online shoppers. For example, online customers often search for product information before making purchase decisions, and use other customers reviews as primary sources that influence their buying decision. Arndt (1967) noted that Word-of-Mouth was one of the most effective marketing sources for consumers. With the introduction and growth of internet, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) communication has become one of the most important and powerful marketing sources (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). It is recognized that eWOM is an effective and economical marketing source in which consumers can gather product information from a large community (Dellarocas, 2003).

Literature Review

Park et al. (2007) examined the effects of both the quality and the quantity of eWOM messages. According to these scholars, customers purchase intentions increase when they are exposed to high quality messages which include information that is specific, objective, and logical. However, when they are exposed to the low quality messages which include information that is vague, subjective, and emotional, purchase intentions decrease. In addition, customers purchase intentions increase when they are exposed to more messages. Meanwhile, Dellarocas (2003) suggested that information posted by the consumer was more credible and trustworthy than information given by the marketer (e.g., seller, advertiser).

Aim of Abstract/Paper

While there have been efforts to pinpoint the role of eWOM message factors on consumers purchase intentions, little is

known as to what impact the combination of the quality of eWOM messages and the provider of eWOM messages has on purchase intention and credibility. In addition, among the consumer factors, consumer expertise with the type of sport product being considered for purchase should be vital to evaluating messages as researchers (e.g., Petty et al., 2009) have argued that the level of expertise is determined by the level of knowledge which leads to the different message interpretation skills. Due to this reason, the effects from the eWOM message will not directly influence the individual interpretation but may be mediated by different expertise levels. The purpose of the present study is to add to the body of literature in sport marketing and management by examining how the combination of the quality of eWOM messages and the provider of eWOM messages affects both purchase intention and credibility depending on the expertise level of consumer.

Methodology

The current study utilized repeated measures of ANOVA, with tripartite groups of expertise (i.e., high, medium, vs. low) and experimental eWOM conditions (i.e., quality of message and source of message) as independent variables, with credibility and purchase intention as the dependent variables. Experiment 1 was examined by showing the first sample (n=34) the first set of eWOM messages (high quality/marketer generated and low quality/marketer generated) while showing the second sample (n=35) the second set of eWOM messages (high quality/consumer generated and low quality/consumer generated). Similar to the first experiment, Experiment 2 was examined with the third sample (n=33) by showing the third set of eWOM messages (high quality/marketer generated and high quality/consumer generated) while the last set of eWOM messages (low quality/marketer generated and low quality/marketer generated) was shown to the last sample (n=32).

Results

The current study collected a sample (n=134) of students enrolled in undergraduate courses at a large Midwestern university in the United States. The sample consisted of 67.9% males and 32.1% females. Data analyses revealed that all the measured scales reached satisfactory reliability levels with Cronbach alpha ranging from .74 (credibility) to .96 (expertise). There was a significant finding indicating that the provider of the message moderates the effect of message quality on purchase intention ($F(1,63) = 4.27, p < .05, \Sigma^2 = .06$). In addition, it was found that the provider of the message and expertise moderates the effect of message quality on purchase intention ($F(2,63) = 4.30, p < .05, \Sigma^2 = 0.12$). However, the current study did not find any significance between credibility and the types of the eWOM message. The findings indicate that the provider of the message and the expertise of customers are important factors influencing purchase intentions for customers using eWOM messages.

Discussion

This study is the first known attempt to investigate the role of eWOM on decision making regarding a sport product. The significant interaction effect between message quality and message source suggests that sport marketers should play an important role in managing the eWOM messages. Further, the significant influence of consumers expertise suggests that marketing efforts should be based on consumers knowledge levels concerning the sport product.

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