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# A Study On Dimensions Of Electronic Word Of Mouth: The Role Of Social Media In Tourism Destination Choice

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## ABSTRACT

There are studies that points out the continuous contribution of social media on the choice of destination. Especially with the rise of electronic word of mouth (EWOM) as compared to older version i.e. word of mouth (WOM). This paper attempts to understand the basic concept of EWOM in the context of tourism and how WOM is different from EWOM and how it affects the choice of destination at small and larger level. In this paper four dimensions have been mentioned, that will help distinguish between EWOM and WOM with primary focus on factors influencing destination choice and image. This paper helps in understanding the EWOM in credibility characteristics towards tourism.

**Keywords:** Word of mouth, Electric word of mouth, Choice of destination, Credibility, Destination marketing organizations.

## INTRODUCTION

Word of Mouth is considered to be the effective medium of communication when it comes to receiving and providing information between consumers (Cheung, Lee and Thadani, 2009; Brown et al.,2007; Kim et al., 2014; Kunja & GVRK, 2018; Richins, 1984). Out of all the other marketing tools like personal selling, Word of Mouth is considered to be more effective when it comes to decision making for consumers (Yan et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2006) and assumed to be worthy & relevant over other details (Wu & Wang, 2011).

With the advancement and awareness of technology, the traditional word of mouth has shaped itself to electronic word of mouth, allowing consumers to interact and share information with each other regarding their experiences and spreading awareness in the

form of advice through social media and review pages (Brown et al., 2007; Bulearca & Bulearca, 2010 ; Xia and Bechwati, 2008) which later on acts as a powerful tool for information before making any purchase decision ( Zhu and Zhang, 2010; Hu et al., 2012 ; Lee and Koo, 2012). In the context of tourism, advancement in the sector of technology has increased the area of interest for researchers towards tourism, as tourism is said to be one of the most revenue generating sectors of a country (Pangestuti, 2017). Since the degree of uncertainty is high with tourism sector, leading the tourists to pay attention towards review sites like trip-Advisor.com etc. Tourists check online reviews as an individual cannot experience the service till the time of actual consumption, which automatically leads to a great risk (Abubakar & Ilkan 2016). EWOM has become a center of attraction for many business firms as it affects sales in a positive way in the fields like tourism (Casalo et al., 2015).

Even though a lot of research has been done on EWOM and visitors and companies are using EWOM as a pivotal tool to promote themselves, but still some researchers highlighted the need to study EWOM as the scope of EWOM is rising (Kim & Hardin, 2010; Albarq A., 2014; Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen , 2011). Both WOM and EWOM plays a similar role but with the different mode used to convey the information (Litvin et al., 2008). Current studies reveals that choice of destination is affected by EWOM at destination of small medium (Di Pietro, Di Virgilio, & Pantanim, 2012). So far the studies regarding destinations at a larger level is not yet conclusive (Jacobsen & Munar, 2012; Filieri and McLeay 2013).

In this paper, the argument has been made that the clarification should be given to differentiate the basic differences between WOM and EWOM and the traits of EWOM which effects destination choice.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Choice of destination is said to be a first priority in the process of decision making; along with this needs like emotional and pleasure loving also demands to get fulfilled (Crompton, 1992; Decrop & Snelders, 2005). According to the needs of a decision maker, the final choice gets selected and the rest destinations gets eliminated (Crompton, 1992; Seddighi & Theocharous, 2002). Thus the profitability of destination depends on power to influence tourists (Gartner, 1993). Decision behind selecting a destination consists of many factors, called “agents” (Gartner, 1993; Goodall, 1991; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). Under this paper, “agent” stands for elements affecting the choice of destination. Through the series of agent, the image of the destination is formed (Echtner & Ritchie 1991; Gartner 1993; Jenkins, 1999). In order to understand the choice of destination, destination image plays an important role and studies states that agent have different kind of impact on the image of destination (Gartner, 1993; Molina & Esteban, 2006). Image of the destination is a time consuming process and the probability of choosing a destination increases with a positive image of the destination (Croy, 2010; Gartner, 1993).

Lately, WOM has emerged itself to contract EWOM, with the help of internet (Smagilova, Dwivedi, and Slade, 2019; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). EWOM consists of channels like blogs, social networking sites etc. allowing people to communicate with each other and give reviews (Jalilvand, Esfahani and Samiei 2011; Cheung, Lee and Thadani, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Generally, the variables of social media and EWOM can be used in place of each other as both are presenting the same traits of online reviews via online (Litvin et al., 2008) resulting in the same level of effect of both WOM and EWOM (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008; Hennig- Thurau & Walsh, 2003; Lee & Youn, 2009; Litvin et al., 2008).

Macro destination refers to a risky choice due to its characteristics that are not known (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989) resulting in the tourist search for various information before finalizing a destination. It has been noted that the number of choices present for a decision making has different level of acceptability (Gartner 1993). Creditability is believability (Tseng & Fogg 1999). Self (1996) said authentic sources can be trusted. The elements of creditability includes contents, channel and source. Information received depends primarily on creditability and then creates its impact (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008; Park and Lee 2009).

In approaching creditability four types of typology (Tseng & Fogg 1999) namely proposed creditability that is presumed, creditability of reputation, creditability of surface , experienced is the last creditability. The number one creditability depends upon the mediator who interprets information from source so it can be trusted. Reputed creditability depends on third party interpretation (Tseng & Fogg 1999) for example, a hotel that won hotel of a year and featured in travel magazine, gains more high creditability. Surface creditability (Tseng & Fogg 1999) proves that a destination seeker filters source information on primary engagement (Meuter et al., 2003) for example, systematic travel arrangements on tour operator's website has been considered surface creditability. Experienced creditability referred as the trustworthiness that can be gained by previous experience. This shows creditability of real image agents for destination marketing organizations (DMO) experienced creditability is most important (Hilligoss & Rich 2008), which is not an easy task in destination choice as tours are finalized many times without seeing.

## **DIMENSIONAL DISTINCTIONS**

Some characteristics of distinctions between both WOM and EWOM cannot be applied to both. Analyzing EWOM is more complex than WOM. Differences are relationships of source receiver, variety of channels, solicitation of information, retention of text, & motivations for unfolding the information.

First is relationships of source receiver (Brown et al, 2007; Chen & Xie, 2008; Lee & Youn, 2009; Park & Lee, 2009). Under WOM use of information is known for the information fetched (Stern, 1994). Whereas in EWOM source of information exchanged is unknown for analyzing and the objective behind details (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011).

Usefulness of WOM and the other EWOM is dependent upon perfectionism of the source and the trustworthiness of social media platform receiver has. Lack of information about source makes the receiver dependent upon other credibility cues like source providers the experience regarding travelling on other consumer's feedback (Mack et al., 2008). This separates source and receiver apart which is not present in WOM. Hence sender and receiver relationships being originated through EWOM could decrease credibility and information impact (Brown et al., 2007; Lee & Youn, 2009). Therefore, tourists may depend on the experience of oneself and analyze EWOM and WOM simultaneously (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004; Volo, 2010).

Variety of channels is second. Described as the way in which information is shared. For example, in WOM information is shared personally which involves one to one direct conversation or through phone communication with source information provider which provide personal credibility cues (Buttle 1998). Whereas in ewom, conversation is done through a medium of technology where third party is used, hence many personal cues are lost or can be misinterpreted (Hennig- Thurau & Walsh, 2003).

Third dimension is about information of solicitation which is necessary for source information gathers who try to extract as much information about destination as possible which in turn makes the tour more comfortable (Kasavana & Teodosic 2010). In EWOM more information about source destination is garnered in social media to get a more credible information from communities and friends online (Cheung et al, 2009; Hung & Li, 2007).

The fourth refers to motivations for unfolding the information. In WOM old chats are conserved to be recalled at sometimes in the form of messages (Buttle 1998). In EWOM messages have a far more outreach than WOM as they can be saved and read by large number of destination seekers (Cheung et al, 2009; Gretzel, 2007; Steffes & Burgee, 2008) . This option enables a user to analyze data of a source at will or when needed (Chen & Xie, 2008; Doh & Hwang, 2009).

## **CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study has contributed in comprehending in choice of macro- destination in context of EWOM, specifically trustworthiness varies WOM. Conceiving a part of electronic web in the choice of destination, paper helped to pick out four differences betwixt EWOM and WOM. Differences has shown various stages of credibility that exist market organizations and questions has been raised that EWOM should be considered and has become more common in this era of socialization.

Primarily, WOM is still a dependable & swaying agent for destination image & choice and should be nurtured. Secondary, EWOM is different from WOM & this paper has revealed that divergence more than mere differences in process of interchanging of knowledge & information. Thirdly, EWOM is considered less dependable than WOM although EWOM has a widespread reach & exposure over the internet. Fourthly, social media platforms disperse various outlook of destination, likely improving destination vision image and

impacting choices micro destination. This paper has improved our understanding about the working process of EWOM.

This is very crucial information for all those institutions who are behind destinations of market, as EWOM is normally to enhance visit over internet. Thus, becomes necessary for DMO to have the knowledge of ongoing consumer discourses over various internet platforms in order to understand target markets (Pesonen, 2012).

From this paper, implications are recognized for the DMO, taking in view the importance of WOM, DMO may provide social media platforms to various consumer to discuss & describe tourism experience. A warning for DMO indicates incitement of EWOM should exclude paid provider to kind of information because monetary benefits may lead to defamation of positive EWOM, reducing in creditability of this type of information (Scott & orlikowski, 2012).

Media platforms is used by DMO to indulge the potential consumer in favor of industry partners.

Irrespective of low trustworthiness, media, till offer to point negative WOM and EWOM. The success of DMO strategy to influence the needs of destination. Decision maker is relied upon the knowledge of strengths & weakness of EWOM.

#### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE**

This paper is conceptual and also has limitations like any other research theories. Although this paper of research relied over all read information but still it is not existential tested. It enforces requirement of future research & look into test the dependence of EWOM as influential agent in walks of choice of destination & preferences. However, this is crucial to know the variables of media & EWOM for the perspective for coming times. Next research can research tourism & identify the divergent source regarding EWOM & differentiate about credibility of dimensions. From such research more information might be gathered about the credibility of various platforms of social media such as blogs, forums etc. Another field which can be researched is the impact of media altogether & individual parts of social media in choice macro destinations.

In the end, wide range of destination to tour has created the details research to a extent components in destination social choice media has grew exponentially in last few years increasing the role in the choice of destination. Due to this paper, EWOM has become a crucial factor in determining choice of destination.

This paper author argued four differences between WOM and EWOM which gave birth to credibility concerns. In conclusion this paper provides the understanding of social media within the field of travel and growing constantly, forming travel decisions of potential tourists.

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