The electronic word of mouth has gained attention from researchers because of its important effect on individuals' behavior. This study proposes a model that identifies the motivational factors that may influence electronic word of mouth on social network sites. We propose that self-involvement, self-enhancement, concerns for others, and message intrigue are determinants of electronic word of mouth on social network sites.

KEYWORDS: Electronic word of mouth, social network, involvement

INTRODUCTION

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWoM) has recently attracted a great deal of attention among researchers and practitioners (Cheung & Lee, 2012; Goldsmith, 2006; Yo et al., 2015). eWoM has been found to have a strong influence on individual’s beliefs about a product or service and buying behaviors because of the persuasive role it plays in influencing individual’s attitudes and decisions (Bone, 1995). Mangold et al. (1999) argue that one dissatisfied individual can be expected to tell many other individuals about their experiences that could change the behaviors of these people. Introducing the social network sites (SNS) during the last decade can be considered as one of the major trends that is causing a pattern shift of people’s lifestyle and behavior. Social media shifts the patterns of Internet use to become more socially interactive and gives individuals the opportunity to communicate with others from all around the globe in a convenient way which makes the eWoM flow faster and easier. Although some researchers have started investigating the role of eWoM in SNS, there are still many unanswered questions that need to be addressed to gain deep and better understanding on the antecedents of eWoM. This study aims to investigate the motivational factors that influence eWoM behavior in SNS.

As information and communication technologies (ICTs), and specifically the Internet, have advanced, organizations as well as individuals have become more dependent on it, becoming a main tool of their communication. The rapid growth of the Internet has drastically shifted the way consumers buy and access information about the products (Hesser et al., 2012). It also encourages consumers to share a huge amount of information about their experiences with the products which affects others’ decisions to buy or not. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) define eWoM as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (p.39). The SNS offers easy-to-use tools for current users to invite
others to join the network, create pages about specific products, and share their experiences with others. Recently, research that focus on SNS have begun to profile user behaviors and characteristics (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007; Golder, Wilkinson, & Huberman 2007; Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield 2007). With this being noted, Mooradian and Swan (2006) assert that organizations are regularly concerned with understanding and predicting the behavior of individuals and any changes in that behavior. Thus, studying the factors that motivate consumers to share their experience on the SNS (eWoM) seems to be important for practitioners.

Studying the antecedents of eWoM is also important for researchers. Dichter (1966) thoroughly examined the offline (face-to-face) WoM concept and found support for its relevance to changing consumers’ behaviors. Based on information provided by the Institute of Motivational Research, Dichter (1966) classified the motive behind stimulating customers’ WoM to four categories: product involvement, self-involvement, message involvement, and other involvement. Based on these categories, Engel et al. (1993) presented four distinguishable motivational aspects. These motivational involvement aspects include: product involvement, self enhancement, concern for others, and message intrigue. Vilpponen et al (2006) argue that the electronic communication network structure is different from the traditional interpersonal communication network structure. The anticipated differences of individuals’ behavior between online and offline context have been examined by several scholars in an effort to identify a framework that can be utilized as a guide for both researchers and practitioners within the social sciences fields. These studies aimed to identify how Internet users behave differently and the implications such difference carry compared to that within the traditional offline setting (Jones 1998; Turkle 2007). Aaker’s calls for papers that investigate the practicality of Dichter’s (1966) involvement categories in an online setting. To our best knowledge, no study has empirically investigated the relationships between Dichter’s categories, Engel et al. (1993) and eWoM in SNS. We, in this research-in-progress propose that Engel et al. (1993) categories are valid in the SNS setting and have influence on consumers’ behavior. Our goal is to empirically test the propositions presented in this paper. We will share our findings at the conference if we are able to collect and analyze the data by then.

DICHTER’S INVOLVEMENT CATEGORIES AND THE RESEARCH MODEL

Motivational research has always tried to determine the factors that encourage people to act in a particular way. More than fifty years ago, the Institute for motivational research carried on a study to explore what motivate people to talk about their consumption experiences. Dichter (1966) summarized the findings of the institute into four categories that should yield higher contribution in sharing opinions and talking with others. Based on these categories, Engel et al. (1993) presented four involvement categories. We discuss each of these categories in the next paragraphs and provide the reasoning for their effects on eWoM.

Product Involvement

Involvement refers to the level of interest an individual has in a topic which stimulates discussions (Engel et al., 1993). This motive arises when consumers feel so “strongly about the product that a pressure builds up in wanting to do something about it; recommending the product to others reduces the tension caused by the consumption experience” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This type of motive is thus a result of the gratification and pleasure arousing from consuming a certain product or service. The higher the level of satisfaction and gratification, the higher the level of participation in spreading the word will be. This could be positive or negative WOM depending on the experience itself.
Researchers found that the level of product involvement affects the WOM stimulated after or during the experience (Xue and Zhou 2011; Berger and Stephen 2010). Jin (2009) studied the product involvement classification within a virtual setting and found that “In interactive virtual environments, motivated people with high product involvement are likely to interact actively with other avatars and show higher intention to communicate with them”. For this part, individual needs to consume the product and to have some related information that might be shared. Thus, we argue that higher product involvement motivates consumers to talk more their experience. Based on this, we propose that:

**P1.** *Product involvement positively impacts individuals’ willingness to share their experience with others.*

**Self Enhancement**

Self-enhancement refers to “recommendations that allow person to gain attention, show connoisseurship, suggest status, give the impression of possessing inside information, and assert superiority” (Engel et al., 1993). Ahuja et al. (2007) asserted that the way individuals behave in a virtual environment is similar to the behaviors carried by these individuals in the real life. Peris et al. (2001) found that satisfying social needs that are not met in the real-world to be a primary purpose of internet access. Those individuals who prefer to talk about products that are relevant to them and that make them socialize are more likely to do so. Thus, sharing experiences with others might be considered as a “way to gain attention, show connoisseurship, feel like a pioneer, have inside information, seek confirmation of a person’s own judgment, or assert superiority” (Aaker, 2011). Chung and Darke (2006) found that consumers are more likely to share their experience of products that are relevant to their “self-concept”. Based on this reasoning, we propose that:

**P2.** *Individuals who have greater perception of self enhancement are more willing to share their thoughts and ideas with others.*

**Concern for Others**

This category refers to the desire of help a friend or relative in making a better decision (Engel et al., 1993). Individuals share their experiences/opinions with others in an effort to assist
bypass difficult times (Berger and Stephen, 2010; Trusov et al., 2010) or to strengthen the ties of relationships with other individuals (Chu and Kim, 2011). People who like to help others in their society are always looking for new ways to interact with as much individuals as possible and provide guidance and directions that enhance the social welfare and wellbeing of the community. SNS offer a convenient way to individuals to reach others and help others. Based on this, we propose that:

**P3.** *Individuals who have greater concern for others are more willing to share their thoughts and ideas with others.*

**Message Intrigue**

This category of motivation results from a certain ads or selling appeals and thus does not require previous experience or direct exposure to the product itself. Message intrigue relates to the level of interaction that has been established through a promotional message to audiences in order to acquire their attention and to encourage them to get more information about a product and hopefully try it in the future. The main justification to have this category has been related to the fact that people like to share funny or informative messages as part of their day to day interaction (Dichter, 1966; Berger and Stephen, 2010; Kozinets et al., 2010).

Message intrigue used in promoting different products can attract individuals to view the message frequently and share it with others based on the uniqueness and/or the humor it triggers through the ideas used within these messages. As the Internet, precisely social media, eased such tendency, it is assumed that people might share some distinct promotional messages with others in order to fulfill certain objectives in their minds. Based on this, we propose that:

**P4.** *Distinct and unique promotional messages positively relate to eWoM on SNS.*

**CONCLUSIONS**

The advancement of the ICTs opened the doors widely for opportunities that firms never considered possible. With more and more people adopting these technologies, it becomes essential for firms to follow people’s trend in order to be able to maintain their businesses and compete successfully in today’s markets which are highly turbulent. Among these new technologies is the introduction of SNS that are attracting hundreds of millions of people every day. These unprecedented social gathering in specific places attract firms to think of how to better adjust their capabilities to benefit the most from these new trends.

Using these SNS for promotion is one opportunity that came along such invention. Firms can now promote their products in cheaper and more effective ways by utilizing these SNS. This trend raised many questions about the influence it has on WoM and if similarly a parallel eWoM exists in the virtual world. Many studies were able to provide highlights of the importance of such potential. However, to the best of our knowledge no research until now has examined the drivers motivating individuals to share eWOM on SNS. This research is an attempt to examine the motivators of eWoM on SNS.

References are available upon request