DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH IN eWOM: ISSUES OF CREDIBILITY, FORMAT AND IMPACT

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Abstract: Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is an important tool for getting necessary useful information about a product or service. Although the concept of eWOM has attained substantial attention from the researchers, there are certain avenues of eWOM which have not been investigated thoroughly. The goal of this study is to highlight some of such avenues of eWOM where future researchers can focus on. For this purpose, three issues of eWOM were selected which are credibility of eWOM, format of eWOM and impact of eWOM. In recent years, credibility has become one of the most important issues regarding eWOM considering the widespread practice of counterfeit or fake online opinions. Format of eWOM is another important area because studies related to eWOM mostly focused on text-based eWOM. However, eWOM can be shared in different forms like text-based, video-based, mixture of text and visual etc. Very few studies have been undertaken to look into these diverse formats of eWOM. Impact of eWOM on different outcomes is the most extensively researched topic in eWOM literature. Despite this fact, impact of eWOM on some of the marketing related outcomes have received minimum attention from researchers as well as produced contradictory findings. Discussions about all three selected aspects of eWOM in this study shows the current state of literature as well as highlight the relevant literature gaps. Finally, some prospective research areas related to eWOM are presented which can be utilized by future researchers.

Keywords: Electronic word of mouth (eWOM); Credibility; Text Versus Visual eWOM; Brand Trust; Brand Loyalty; Online Purchase Intention

I. INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) communication has evolved a lot which created new avenues of research over the years. However, although the topic eWOM was of great interest among researchers over the past one decade, several theoretical and managerial aspects of eWOM have remained unexplored (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014). According to works of Cheung and Thadani (2012) and King *et al.* (2014), studies on eWOM are fragmented in nature. The reason behind this fragmented nature can be attributed to the wide variety of platforms and diverse type of eWOM. Applying different methods to study these wide variety of platforms and eWOM types made the eWOM literature fragmented in nature (King *et al.* 2014).

The diverse type of eWOM availability can be understood from the presentation format aspect of eWOM. Although majority of eWOM communications across different platforms are mostly text-based, it is possible to constitute an eWOM message with mixture of text and image, text and video, only video and so on. There is a possibility that this wide array of eWOM

patterns may have different impact on different people. To be more specific, it is possible that people may evaluate different forms of eWOM differently. While the extant literature on eWOM mostly focused on text-based eWOM (Lin, Lu & Wu, 2012), relatively little is known about the comparison of different types of eWOM formats. Moreover, the domain of visual-based eWOM has attained minimum attention from researchers.

On the other hand, although eWOM or online consumer reviews play a vital role in consumer decision making process, people now tend to possess higher degree of disbelief regarding the online product reviews (Shan, 2016). The issue of fake eWOM is growing day by day throughout the world and affecting both the customer and the companies. Over the past few years the practice of fake online review has become a global issue. In 2015, lawsuits were filed by Amazon.com against more than one thousand people who were accused of publishing fake online reviews in exchange of cash (Gani, 2015).

Furthermore, since inception, the stream of research on traditional word of mouth marketing tried to focus on two fundamental issues which are: 1) antecedents of WOM and 2) Consequence of WOM (Buttle, 1998). Research stream of eWOM also followed similar pattern. Over the years, numerous studies have been undertaken to measure eWOM effect on different type of outcomes like product sales (Cui, Lui, & Guo, 2012), purchase decisions (Park, Wang, Yao & Kang, 2011), trust formation (Ba & Pavlou, 2002), decision making process (Shan, 2016; Jeong & Koo, 2015), purchase intention (Erkan & Evans, 2016a; Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013; Park, Lee & Han, 2007), value co-creation (See-To & Ho, 2014).

Results of the above mentioned studies mostly showed that eWOM has significant positive impact on the marketing outcomes and thus established the fact that eWOM is a very important concept for both marketing practitioners and researchers. However, majority of the studies on eWOM focused on attitude, purchase intention, purchase and eWOM adoption as the outcome variables of eWOM study (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). There are few studies which focused on outcomes relating to brand such as brand trust & brand loyalty. Moreover, studies on the relationship between eWOM, brand trust and brand loyalty resulted in mixed findings which makes it necessary to look into the issue. Furthermore, very few studies have been undertaken on the concept of online purchase intention.

This paper aims to explore some critical issues pertaining to electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Some of the concerning issues regarding eWOM such as credibility and format are discussed. Moreover, there are some inconclusive findings regarding the impact of eWOM which constitutes literature gap are highlighted in the present study. Finally, direction for future research in different areas of eWOM are outlined.

II. ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (eWOM) AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

In today's world, before purchasing an electronic gadget or travelling in an airline, a customer can go to internet and look for consumer or expert opinions which helps the customer to make a better purchase decision. The Global Trust in Advertising report by Nielsen (2015) showed that almost 66% of the respondents trust online consumer reviews making online consumer opinions as the third-most-trusted format of advertisement. These opinions and experiences shared by other consumers or experts through the online media is known as electronic word of mouth (eWOM).

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) refers to the product related opinions and experiences shared by other consumers or experts via an online platform. One of the most popular and widely used definition of eWOM is given by Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004) where they said that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is positive or negative statements about a product or company which are made available to other entities through internet. Unlike traditional word of mouth (WOM) where messages were shared on a face-to-face basis with people of known identities, eWOM takes place over internet where majority of the people are anonymous or unknown (Shan, 2016; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; King *et al.* 2014). eWOM acts as a vital source of information for potential buyers. Potential customers look for eWOM or online reviews to attain valuable product related information or user experience related information which can make their purchasing decision comfortable (Pitta & Fowler, 2005; Hu, Liu & Zhang, 2008).

There are several characteristics of eWOM which makes it distinguishable from traditional WOM. According to King *et al.* (2014) there are six specific characteristics of eWOM which are the ability to cover a wide range of people, the wide variety of online platforms to get distributed, persistent and observable nature, the anonymous nature, presence of both positive and negative opinions, and the ability to generate engagement among different consumer communities. These characteristics enables eWOM to distinguish itself from traditional WOM.

III. FROM TRADITIONAL WORD OF MOUTH TO ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH

Although the traditional word of mouth (WOM) phenomena is an ancient concept, the WOM communication attained the attention of marketing researchers since 1940s (Buttle, 1998). Over the years, researches on WOM showed that it has influence on a wide range of factors such as awareness, attitudes, perception, behavioural intention, behaviour, and expectations (Ha, 2004). Traditionally, WOM had influence in selection of financial services (File & Prince, 1992), can influence product judgement (Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Bone, 1995), can impact acceptance of a new product (Arndt, 1967) and so on. Gradually, with advancement in technology and advent of world wide web, the traditional word of mouth shifted towards an online domain and became electronic word of mouth (eWOM).

Realizing the huge potential of internet, researchers started to focus their interest on digital domain during the beginning of year 2000 (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). During this time several researchers focused their study on online consumer opinions or eWOM. According to Lamberton & Stephen (2016) two most important seed articles in the domain of eWOM were conducted by Dellarocas (2003) and Godes and Mayzlin (2004). These studies showed that online consumer opinions have significant importance on different marketing outcomes such as brand building, consumption and customer acquisition. Their studies laid the path following which a lot of studies started to emerge in the following years highlighting the concept of online customer reviews and eWOM.

There are numerous notable works in the field of eWOM. Some studies directly focused on the impact of eWOM. For example: Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) found positive impact of reviews and ratings on sales; Gruen, Osmonbekov, and Czaplewski (2006) showed the impact of customer-to-customer online know how exchange on customer value and loyalty. On the other hand, there are studies that used a comparison approach highlighting the relative importance of eWOM. For example: Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels (2009) found positive impact of eWOM on new customer acquisition. They also found that in long term the effect of online WOM is greater than the traditional marketing activities. Villanueva, Yoo, and Hanssens (2008) showed acquiring customers through traditional marketing activities are not good for long term value generation compared to WOM. Furthermore, there are studies that focused on the characteristics of eWOM users and eWOM message. For example: Chu & Kim (2011) identified the determinant factors of consumer engagement in social networking sites; Teng, Khong, Goh, & Chong (2014) showed what are the antecedent factors of a persuasive eWOM message in social media.

Prior works on eWOM highlighted the fact that eWOM is an important tool for both consumers and marketers. However, there is a concerning issue relating to eWOM which is impacting all the parties and the issue is credibility of eWOM. Credibility of eWOM is an important issue to focus on because users of eWOM find it difficult to determine whether an eWOM message is credible or not (Shan, 2016; Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013). From customer's point of view, encountering a fake eWOM may result in a dissatisfactory decision making because the customer might not get the desired result from the product or the service. On the other hand, from company's point of view, fake eWOM may deteriorate the goodwill of the company. This is why some global big companies like Amazon is trying to initiate steps that will reduce this practice. As internet is comparatively an anonymous platform and sellers might possess an incentive to deceive the consumers through fake opinions, importance should be given in assessing the quality of the eWOM (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; King *et al.* 2014).

IV. ISSUE OF CONCERN: CREDIBILITY

(A) eWOM Credibility

Credibility is a form of trust which says that the other party is able to perform the job in a reliable manner (Ba & Pavlou, 2002). eWOM credibility refers to the extent to which a review is perceived as true, believable and factual (Tseng and Fogg, 1999; Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2009). In general, opinions coming from a credible source are perceived to be more useful and considered as good quality opinion. As mentioned earlier, the issue of fake online review has become a widespread fact. Thus, determining whether an eWOM message is credible or not has become a critical factor. There are several reasons for which people find it difficult to determine eWOM credibility among which anonymous nature of the reviewer is the most common and widely cited reason (Cheung *et al.* 2009; Park & Lee, 2009; Kusumasondjaja, Shanka, & Marchegiani, 2012). Several other reasons identified by Jiménez & Mendoza (2013) include hired associates by companies, huge number of available reviews etc.

It is very essential to determine whether an eWOM is credible or not because it can impact attitude and behaviour of consumers (Shan, 2016). Considering the fact that new social media and ecommerce platforms are emerging continuously, it is very crucial to ensure eWOM or online review credibility. Ensuring credible eWOM is very essential for the marketers as it can have impact on trust and loyalty formation of a customer (Gruen *et al.* 2006; Ha, 2004). Furthermore, credible eWOM has significant positive impact on purchase intention of a consumer (Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013).

(B) Key Factors Affecting eWOM Credibility

To assess the credibility of eWOM the two most influential variables are source and message content of eWOM as identified by Moran & Muzellec (2014). Prior researchers have used both source credibility and argument quality literature in the analysis of general eWOM credibility issue (Cheung *et al.* 2009; Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Source credibility can be termed as the extent of reliability a message receiver possesses on the source of the message (Wu & Wang, 2011). Source

credibility is a multidimensional concept and two of the most commonly cited components of source credibility are expertise and trustworthiness (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Hu *et al.* 2008; Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Trustworthiness can be termed as the level of confidence and acceptance a message receiver possesses toward the sender of the message (Teng *et al.* 2014; Wu & Wang, 2011). Expertise refers to the extent of knowledge the review provider possesses about the reviewed product/services (Teng *et al.* 2014). An eWOM received from an expert is considered as more believable and can have significant impact on the receiver (Lis, 2013).

Another factor that impacts credibility of eWOM is the content of the message. The quality of eWOM message content can be termed as Argument Quality (Racherla, Mandviwalla, & Connolly, 2012). Similar to source credibility, argument quality is also a multidimensional construct (Zhang, Zhao, Cheung, & Lee, 2014). Literature analysis by Zhang *et al.* (2014) revealed that there is no concrete indication of specific factors that determines argument quality. Some of the literature review done in the present study also reveals the fact that there is no specifically mentioned dimensions of argument quality. For example: Zhang *et al.* (2014) used informativeness and persuasiveness to measure argument quality in their study. Bhattacherjee & Sanford (2006) used informativeness, helpfulness, valuable and persuasiveness as dimensions of argument quality. According to Lee & Xia (2011) argument valence and argument strength are the two dimensions of a persuasive argument quality. McKinney, Yoon and Zahedi (2002) in their study of web-customer satisfaction measurement used relevance, timeliness, reliability, scope and perceived usefulness as factors of web-information quality. It is evident from the above literature analysis that there are multiple dimensions of argument quality. As the practice of online shopping is growing day by day, new dimensions of information quality are being introduced in the literature by researchers (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008).

However, it is not sufficient to use only source and message content to determine eWOM credibility. Considering the fact that eWOM is mostly generated from anonymous source, a comprehensive concentration should be ensured to determine eWOM credibility which

can be done by incorporating source, message and vehicle of the message (Park & Lee, 2009). Here, the vehicle of the message refers to the respective platform through which eWOM is created and disseminated. On the other hand, Wathen & Burkell (2002) highlighted the fact that information credibility can be determined by three factors which are source, message and receiver of the message. Since the level of prior knowledge/belief varies from person to person, it is possible that their evaluation of information credibility as a receiver will also vary according to their level of prior knowledge. A study conducted by Cheung *et al.* (2009) showed that one of the determinant factors of perceived eWOM credibility is prior belief of the receiver. Based on the analysis of prior studies it can be postulated that source and message are the most common factors for eWOM credibility. However, several other studies outlined above also highlighted two other factors i.e. vehicle factors and receiver factors that are also important for credibility assessment of an information.

(C) Gaps in eWOM Credibility Study

So far, some works have been done on credibility of eWOM in general which focuses mostly text-based reviews like how travellers perceive review credibility based on reviewer identity and review valence (Kusumasondjaja *et al.* 2012), how system and self-generated cues are used to evaluate review credibility (Shan, 2016),), impact of social influence on eWOM usefulness (Cheng & Ho, 2015), how profile characteristics of reviewer has impact on eWOM credibility (Xu, 2014). Based on the literature review, most of the studies regarding eWOM credibility focuses on text-based eWOM or eWOM in general. However, there are lack of studies focusing solely on the assessment of credibility of visual eWOM. One of the findings from King *et al.* (2014) highlighted that the issue of credibility has never been researched in context of visual reviews.

The impact of platform difference in assessing eWOM credibility is another less explored area. eWOM takes place in online environment and there are several platforms where eWOM can be created and disseminated (King *et al.* 2014). According to prior studies the influence of online reviews is associated with variety of platforms

(Park and Lee, 2009; Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Since internet is a continuously evolving, the platforms are expected to become a very important factor in adopting eWOM (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Considering the lack of work in the field of platform comparison, the importance of platform comparison was outlined by researchers previously (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Cheng & Ho, 2015).

As per Constantinides & Fountain (2008) five categories of platforms exist in online environment which are blogs, social networking sites (e.g. twitter, facebook), forums (e.g. epinion), content communities (e.g. Youtube) and content aggregators (e.g. google, yahoo). Since these online platforms differ based on their fundamental platform nature, it is expected that different platforms may have different effect on the credibility perception of eWOM. For example: in social networking sites people have the ability to communicate within existing network of people (friends and associates) which reduce the anonymity level of eWOM and increases the trustworthiness, reliability and credibility (Chu & Choi, 2011; Erkan & Evans, 2016a; Erkan & Evans, 2016b). On the other hand, eWOM on other platforms occur mostly among anonymous people (Erkan & Evans, 2016a) which might impact credibility assessment of eWOM differently.

One of the key areas that needs attention of the researchers in eWOM credibility study is the diverse format of eWOM. As stated earlier, majority of research on eWOM are focused on text-based format. This is also true for eWOM credibility study where majority of the studies highlighted text-based reviews so far. However, there are other forms of eWOM format available and credibility should also be ensured for those other type of eWOM as well. Moreover, study of different formats of eWOM should be extended beyond the scope of credibility to enrich the overall eWOM literature.

V. eWOM FORMAT

(A) Types of eWOM Format

The presentation format of eWOM has evolved over time. Earlier eWOM consisted of texts only. However, with passage of time as different technological

advancement took place, people were able to post online reviews with different formats such as picture-based reviews, video-based review etc. (Lin *et al.* 2012; Xu, Chen, & Santhanam, 2015). These types of review where visibility attribute is incorporated for which people can actually see the products and its benefits can be termed as visual eWOM (Yu & Natalia, 2013). Majority of the popular and well established online platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram etc. hosts online reviews of diverse formats. The formats are text-based, image-based, video-based, mixture of text and visual etc. Among these formats visual reviews are on the rise and gaining popularity day by day. For example: the "unboxing" video reviews on YouTube have gained huge popularity (King *et al.* 2014).

Today different types of visual reviews can be found in almost every type of online platform. Starting from retailer websites like Amazon.com up to social networking sites like Facebook, Tweeter all have picture and video message sharing functions. Apart from these, there are image sharing and video sharing sites like YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, Dailymotion etc where people also posts visual product reviews. Compared to text-based eWOM, visual eWOM helps a customer to make better and informed purchase decision because the expected outcome of the decision can be understood in a much better way. This is the reason for which majority of the hotels now highlights pictures and videos to promote their property.

Study of presentation format aspect of eWOM is important because it will help to understand and expand the overall eWOM literature. Whether a eWOM is going to be persuasive or not can be influenced by the eWOM format. This is because presence of a visual element can enhance the message's persuasiveness (Herr *et al.* 1991). It is important to understand the persuasiveness aspect of eWOM because a persuasive eWOM can lead to change in attitude, intentions and perceptions of the customer influencing purchase decision (Jeong & Koo, 2015, Lin *et al.* 2012).

(B) Perception of eWOM Format: Text versus Visual

Although majority of eWOM still depends on text-based format, amount of visual eWOM is growing day by day

and expected to have better utility. A study finding by Teng *et al.* (2014) suggests that audiences prefer an online review having detailed information along with visual cues. Online video-based reviews are considered to be more persuasive since it involves imagery presentation and movement (Xu *et al.* 2015). They postulated that generally eWOM with visual cues will have better acceptability than the text ones but this mechanism is subject to contextual factors such as product type. According to Erkan & Evans (2016a) presence of visual elements in an eWOM message makes it more enjoyable. Visual information in a message can help to improve the quality of the message as well as make it more reliable in the eyes of the review readers (Lin *et al.* 2012). In their study Lin *et al.* (2012) evaluated the effect of visual information on customer's evaluation of eWOM and found that eWOM articles in blogs that have visual information are perceived as more credible by the respondents.

In general, presence of visual element in an information makes the information receiver more comfortable. This notion is supported by work of Angeli & Valanides (2004) who conducted a study where they investigated whether different presentation formats (only text versus mixture of text and visual) of instruction manuals constitutes different levels of achievement by the learners. They found that instruction manual which consisted the combination of text and visual was considered as easier to understand. Another work by Lurie & Mason (2007) highlighted that in online environment customers are exposed to a lot of information which creates information overload and thus makes it difficult for the receivers to extract the true value out of the information (Lurie & Mason, 2007). One of the efficient ways to avoid this information overload is visual representation of information since visuals has the ability to distinguish important information from unimportant ones which helps decision makers to make better decision (Lurie & Mason, 2007).

When evaluating contents on a website, contents that have high aesthetics properties in the form of superior looks and design are considered as more credible (Robins & Holmes, 2008). This finding highlights the fact that people prefer contents on a website that are visually attractive which can generate positive responses. The role

of visual elements like logos are one of the ways to effectively achieve such responses (Lowry, Wilson, & Haig, 2014). However, on the contrary of the majority studies, according to Kisielius & Strenthal (1984) pictorial & verbal presentations of a message do not always lead to positive outcomes, rather the effect is subject to contextual situations (favourableness of the information elaborated).

It can be understood from above discussion that a person's perception may vary based on the difference in eWOM format. Therefore, while studying impact of eWOM, the role of different formats of eWOM should also be considered. As mentioned earlier, there are a lot of studies on impact of eWOM on different type of outcomes but very few studies incorporated the role of eWOM format on those outcomes. Furthermore, there are few aspects of impact of eWOM which are yet to be explored thoroughly irrespective of eWOM format. The following section will highlight some of such aspects of eWOM impact.

VI. IMPACT OF eWOM

In the following section, eWOM impact on three different outcomes will be discussed which are brand trust, brand loyalty and online purchase intention. A brief literature review will be presented which will help to unveil some important facts about the impact of eWOM on the stated outcomes.

(A) Brand Trust

In general trust refers to the perception of an individual regarding the other party where it is assumed that the other party is reliable and will not deceive or lie regarding any matter. This trust concept can be transferred to a marketing outcome called brand trust which refers to a person's feeling of security that the specific brand will meet his/her consumption expectations or the brand is able to perform the stated function (Delgado Ballester & Munuera Alemán, 2001; Ha, 2004). Reliability, honesty, safety these are important determinants of trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Having trust on a brand means that the customer expects the brand to bring positive and favourable result (Delgado Ballester & Munuera Alemán, 2005).

As mentioned earlier the study of brand trust and brand loyalty as a consequence of eWOM is a less explored area in the context of eWOM. However, there are some studies (Ha, 2004; Bhuian, 2016; Rupareila, White, & Hughes, 2010) that focuses on the relationship between eWOM and brand trust but the findings of these studies are mixed and contradictory. For example: Ha (2004) and Bhuian (2016) showed that online word of mouth communication has significant impact on developing brand trust, but Ruparelia *et al.* (2010) showed that positive word of mouth is not a significant factor in developing brand trust. Study of Ruparelia *et al.* (2010) again contradicts the finding of Lim, Sia, Lee and Benbasat (2006) who found that it should be the "negative" word of mouth that should impact trust negatively, not the positive WOM.

(B) Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is something where the customer has strong emotional attachment and commitment towards a particular brand and that commitment is expressed through consequent repeat purchases of that particular brand (Oliver, 1999; Holland & Baker, 2001). Both repeat purchase and attitudinal commitments are two relevant components of brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Gruen *et al.* (2006) also considered repurchase intention as one of the indicators of brand loyalty in their study. People having higher brand loyalty towards a brand tend to select the brand not by assessing the product attributes but from having favourable feelings toward the brand (Murtiasih, Sucherly, & Siringoringo, 2014).

Similar to brand trust, studies focusing on the relationship between eWOM and brand loyalty are also very few in number. Some of the studies (Setiawan, Troena, & Noermijati, 2014; Severi, Ling, & Nasermoadeli, 2014; Gruen *et al.* 2006) focusing eWOM and brand loyalty resulted in contradictory findings. For example: studies conducted by Severi *et al.* (2014) and Gruen *et al.* (2006) supports the fact that online word of mouth has significant positive relationship with brand loyalty formation of the customer. Severi *et al.* (2014) identified five different dimensions of brand equity where one of the dimensions were brand loyalty. While

investigating the inter-relationship between eWOM and different dimensions of brand equity, Severi *et al.* (2014) found that eWOM has significant positive impact on brand loyalty. Gruen *et al.* (2006) investigated the relationship between eWOM and online consumer to consumer know-how exchange which is one form of eWOM communication. Their study findings showed that online consumer know how exchange has a significant direct relationship with customers loyalty intentions. From these findings, it can be argued that brand loyalty is an outcome of eWOM effect i.e. eWOM helps to form brand loyalty. However, study by Setiawan *et al.* (2014) showed that eWOM does not have a direct significant relationship with loyalty formation. This result causes a contradictory finding regarding the impact of eWOM on brand loyalty.

(C) Online Purchase Intention

It is evident from prior studies that eWOM has significant positive impact on different marketing outcomes but study of impact of eWOM on online purchase intention is comparatively a less explored area (Erkan & Evans, 2016b). Online purchase intention is something where different websites are associated through which a consumer's desire of making purchase gets reflected (Chen, Hsu, & Lin 2010). When making an online purchase a customer faces higher proportion of uncertainty compared to purchase from traditional brick-and-mortar setting because product attributes cannot be evaluated physically (Ha & Stoel, 2009).

There are several studies conducted on online purchase intention. Dai, Forsythe and Kwon (2014) conducted a study on online purchase intentions where they analysed the effects of online shopping experience and perceptions of risk on online purchase intention. Ling, Daud, Piew, Keoy and Hassan (2011) conducted a study on Malaysian young consumers to investigate the role of perceived risk, perceived technology and online trust on online purchase intention in which they concluded that perceived technology and online trust is positively associated with online purchase intention. The role of website design in developing trusting beliefs among consumers which leads to online purchase intention was explored by Schlosser, White and Lloyd

(2006). Lin, Lee and Horng (2011) studied the effect of online reviews and one of their study findings showed that quality of online review's argument has significant positive impact on online purchase intention.

VII. DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several avenues in eWOM domain which can be utilized for future research purpose. One of the areas can be comparison of text versus visual eWOM. Although the amount of visual review is growing day by day, text-based reviews still dominates the segment of eWOM. However, study of visual eWOM is important because visual eWOM can have significant impact on consumer perception and purchase decision (Lin *et al.* 2012). The relative importance of visual information in eWOM as well as comparison between text and visual eWOM is an area which is still unexplored and was also highlighted by King *et al.* (2014) in their research. Therefore, future studies can highlight comparison among different formats of eWOM (e.g. text only, combination of text and visual, visual only etc.) on customer attitude to see which format is more preferred by the audience. Moreover, impact of different forms of eWOM format may vary based on product type, customer prior knowledge, platform difference etc. Future studies can also take into account these factors while analysing the impact of different types of presentation format of eWOM on customer attitude and behaviour.

Considering the fact that visual eWOM has attained minimum attention from researchers, future researchers can also focus on different areas of visual eWOM. One such area can be the study of credibility of visual eWOM. Moreover, impact of visual eWOM on different marketing outcomes such as purchase intention, brand awareness, purchase decision and other marketing related outcomes can be conducted. Study of credibility of eWOM can be enhanced by incorporating the platform difference factor. This will help to unveil whether credibility perception of eWOM varies based on difference in platform type, design, attributes and reputation.

Impact of eWOM credibility on brand loyalty can be another prospective area to work on. A recent study by Chakraborty & Bhat (2018) analysed the impact of

credible online reviews on customer-based brand equity (CBBE) dimensions. They studied three CBBE dimensions which are brand awareness, brand association and perceived quality. They didn't include brand loyalty in their study as it was not within their scope of study. Therefore, impact of credible eWOM on brand loyalty remains unexplored which can be capitalized by future researchers.

Finally, study can be undertaken to see impact of eWOM on brand trust and brand loyalty. The mixed findings as stated earlier regarding both brand trust and brand loyalty calls for a further investigation of the relationship between eWOM, brand trust and brand loyalty and to see if eWOM helps to form enhanced brand trust and brand loyalty. Moreover, another area which can be utilized by future researchers is to see the impact of eWOM on online purchase intention by incorporating different product types, customer characteristics, platform types and country context.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The present study highlighted some key issues pertaining to eWOM by discussing relevant literature associated with the issues. Areas of eWOM which are yet to be explored extensively have been discussed such as study of visual eWOM, comparison of text-based and visual-based eWOM. The issue of credibility of eWOM is also discussed briefly to focus on the area which has become a great concern for both marketers and customers. Some of the gaps in eWOM credibility study is also discussed such as assessing credibility of visual eWOM and impact of platform difference in eWOM credibility perception. Finally, discussion on the impact of eWOM on several marketing outcomes revealed some inconclusive findings which is ripe for future research.

According to research finding in the area of marketing, people are focusing more and more on eWOM (Cheng & Ho, 2015). Understanding the huge potential of eWOM, the present era of digital marketing research stream for past two or three years has started to re-investigate the earlier ideas from new perspectives and point of views to have further extensive understanding (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). This study is expected to facilitate future researchers by providing useful literature relating to eWOM. Future studies focusing on eWOM

credibility, eWOM format and eWOM impact can use this paper to have an understanding about the existing literature as well as to accumulate suggestions regarding areas of future research in eWOM domain.

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