RETWEETING BRAND EXPERIENCES: FACTORS MOTIVATING RECEIVERS TO PROLIFERATE BRAND IMAGE DISRUPTIONS

Jennifer B. Barhorst, Lander University College of Business
Alan Wilson, University of Strathclyde Business School

ABSTRACT

As social network site users increasingly use microblogs to share their positive and negative experiences with brands, there is a surprising dearth of research on the receivers of MeWOM brand image disruptions (electronic word-of-mouth brand image disruptions that take place in a microblog) to determine the factors that motivate them to re-share them. 372 Twitter users in the United States were exposed to six positive and negative MeWOM brand image disruptions in an online experiment which replicated the Twitter environment. Two PLS Structural Equation Models were created to determine the factors which motivated receivers to retweet the MeWOM brand image disruptions. The results demonstrated that 'relevance' and 'issue involvement' were significant positive predictors of receivers' retweeting both positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of customers sharing their positive and negative experiences of brands within social media, and the viral nature of these shared experiences, has received a tremendous amount of media coverage over the last few years. For example, a tech blogger, Casey Neistat, shared a positive experience of being upgraded and flying in first class with Emirates in 2016. His video went viral and achieved over 20 million views and received media coverage (Sharman, 2016). Another example, in the negative context, is the violin group, Time for Three, who were denied boarding a US Airways flight, and shared their negative experience with US Airways. Their negative experience went viral and received media coverage and a hashtag named #violingate (Ng, 2014). These are just a couple of examples of the types of eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) that either enhance or detract from a corporate image through the proliferation of eWOM brand image disruptions. eWOM brand image disruptions have been defined as disruptions to a corporate image that either positively promote the course, progress or transmission of a corporate image, or eWOM that interrupts the course, progress, or transmission of a corporate image (Barhorst, 2017). Through the use of mobile technology such as smart phones and the platforms that host social network sites, consumers share their daily positive and negative experiences about organizations just as they would tell a close friend or next door neighbor in the past. Only now, they can tell the world about their experiences and do so through the use of a range of formats including text, photographs and videos.

Receivers of eWOM about brands within social network sites are important actors with regard to the potential virality of eWOM brand image disruptions as they have the option to re-share eWOM brand image disruptions and to proliferate them further. Given the increasing focus on the potential virality of positive and negative eWOM shared within social media in the last few years, it is surprising that there has been a dearth of research on receivers in particular. For example, little is empirically known regarding the receivers of eWOM brand image disruptions and the factors that motivate them to re-share and proliferate them further.

The overall purpose of this study is to understand the factors that motivate receivers of eWOM brand image disruptions shared in microblogs, termed MeWOM brand image disruptions, to re-share them. Two positive and negative valence structural equation models using Smart-PLS were created to demonstrate which variables motivated receivers to retweet the Twitter post after exposure to a MeWOM brand image disruption.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there is a dearth of research on the receivers of eWOM brand image disruptions and the factors that influence receivers to re-share them, the literature within the eWOM domain has provided some pertinent research on the factors that influence eWOM outcomes.

Information Source

The information source, or the giver of eWOM, and the information source's characteristics have been demonstrated to influence the effectiveness of eWOM outcomes. This includes whether the information source is perceived to be an expert, or to have a degree of expertise on a topic, whether they are viewed as credible and trustworthy and their degree of objectivity as perceived by the receiver of eWOM (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Luo and Zhong, 2015).

Relevance and Personal Involvement

The level of involvement with a product, service, message or topic can impact the effectiveness of word-of-mouth (WOM). Issue involvement has been defined as "an individual level, internal state variable that indicates the amount of arousal, interest or drive evoked by a particular stimulus or situation" (Mitchell, 1979). It has been noted that "substantial research suggests that variations in people's involvement with an issue can affect how they process and respond to it" (Maheswaran & Levy, 1990, pg. 361-362). In the eWOM domain, the level of involvement and the usefulness of the message being received have also been demonstrated to have an impact on eWOM outcomes (Park & Lee, 2007; Lee et al., 2008; Doh & Hwang, 2009; Cheung et al., 2009).

Credibility

Credibility is another factor that has been researched in the traditional WOM and eWOM domains and found to have an impact on eWOM outcomes. Two types of credibility have been discussed within the literature and it is useful to delineate between the two. There is 'source credibility' which pertains to the perception of credibility the receiver has of a giver of eWOM and there is message credibility, which is concerned with the credibility of the message itself. Cheung and Thadani (2012) call out the dearth of research on message credibility with the main focus so far being on source credibility within the eWOM literature, which is surprising due to the sometimes anonymous nature of the online environment. Unlike traditional WOM where the receiver is acquainted with the giver of WOM, receivers of eWOM may have difficulty in establishing credibility with regard to the giver of eWOM due to the anonymous nature of the online environment (Park and Lee, 2009).

Valence

The valence of eWOM has also been found to have an impact on eWOM outcomes. Research has demonstrated that negative valence eWOM can have a stronger impact on eWOM outcomes than positive eWOM (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Chakravarty et al., 2009), yet an improvement in positive valence reviews can lead to an increase in relative sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). In addition, research has shown that consumers paid more attention to negative eWOM content and negative eWOM stimuli in one study (Daugherty and Hoffman, 2013).

Emotions

The emotional aspect of eWOM is an area that has very little empirically from researchers, yet has been acknowledged to require further exploration (Kim and Gupta, 2012) with regard to the impact they can have on eWOM outcomes. Barhorst (2017) found that emotions played a key role in a change in the corporate image of firms upon exposure to eWOM brand image disruptions that took place in microblogs.

Volume of eWOM

The amount, or volume of eWOM, can have an impact on its effectiveness through what has been termed an 'awareness effect' (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Although not researched in the receiver context specifically, researchers have demonstrated a link between the volume of eWOM and sales (Liu, 2006; Duan et al., 2009).

VARIABLES TESTED IN THE MODEL

In the context of eWOM brand image disruptions that take place in a microblog environment, and any influence they have on whether receivers would re-share them, 11 different variables were created for the model based on the literature review on variables which influence eWOM outcomes - message credibility, message involvement, issue involvement and emotions. As the eWOM literature did not specifically call out any emotions in particular, a lightly modified version of Plutchik's (2001) eight basic emotions were used. The emotions used included: joy, sadness, anger, approval, disgust, fear, surprise and not surprised.

Although demonstrated as being relevant to eWOM outcomes within the literature, the variables 'source characteristics' and 'volume of eWOM' were excluded from the study. The variable 'source characteristics' was not an appropriate variable for this study as the microblogging environment is one where the identity of a source is often unknown and therefore their characteristics would also be unknown. The volume of eWOM was excluded as this study sought to understand the specific instances of individuals re-sharing eWOM brand image disruptions before they become viral.

METHODOLOGY

Experiment and Industry Selection

To achieve the objectives of the study, quantitative research in the form of an online experiment with a questionnaire was operationalized. 372 Twitter users in the United States were exposed to positive and negative MeWOM brand image disruptions about users' experiences with airlines in an experiment setting. The online experiment was created to replicate a microblog environment where respondents were exposed to six actual positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions about airlines.

The airline industry was chosen as an industry of focus as customers are increasingly using social media to air their grievances with airlines. According to one article, "customers displeased with unhelpful airline representatives behind desks in airports, or long waits on customer service phone lines are finding Twitter a far more effective forum in which to air grievances, an accessible panic button in times of trouble, or at least serious frustration (Hobica, 2013).

Measures

To measure receivers' beliefs in relation to the credibility and message involvement, four, five-point Likert scale agree/disagree questions were asked based on the literature review and modified scales utilized from the research (Zaichkowsky, 1994; Park et al. 2011). Issue involvement was measured with two, five-point agree/disagree questions to assess how likely respondents were to read a response from the organization and how likely they were to read a response from others. To measure emotions, the researchers employed Plutchik's (2001) eight basic emotion categories.

Data Analysis

To achieve the objectives of the study, two PLS-SEM models were created. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its flexibility with regard to the type of data used (Likert), the sample size and the exploratory nature of the study. In addition, the PLS-SEM statistical method has become popular for the analysis of questionnaire data in marketing, business, and management research and has been hailed as "indeed a silver bullet" for this purpose (Hair et al., 2011, p.139). Finally, over 100 studies have been published in the top marketing journals using PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2011).

RESULTS

Two PLS-SEM models were created to determine the 'retweet' predictors for the positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. 11 different variables were tested in the model based on the literature review on variables which influence eWOM outcomes - message credibility, message involvement, issue involvement and a lightly modified version of Plutchik's (2001) eight basic emotions were used - joy, sadness, anger, approval, disgust, fear, surprise, not surprised. Both models produced the same results in terms of the variables that were significant predictors of whether the receiver would retweet the MeWOM brand image disruption and are identified in this section.

Validation of the Measurement Model

In order to assess the validity of the measurement model, the methods detailed by Wong (2013) and Hair et al. (2014) were utilized. Discriminant validity was established when the factor loading coefficients for the items that constituted each latent variable were greater than their cross-loadings on alternative latent variables (Chin, 1998; Gotz et al., 2009). The cross loadings for both models were assessed and both fit the criteria.

Convergent validity was established when the average variance explained by the multiple indicators of each latent variable was > 50%. Internal consistency reliability was established when the composite reliability coefficient was > .6. For both models, Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate that convergent validity was established as the average variance explained (AVE) by the multiple indicators of each latent variable was > 0.50. Tables 1 and 2 also demonstrate that internal consistency reliability was established as all of the composite reliability coefficients for the latent variables were > 0.6.

Table 1 - Negative Valence Model Validation

Indicator	Composite Reliability	AVE
Anger_	0.845	0.645
Approval	0.795	0.568
Disgust	0.843	0.642
Fear	0.874	0.699
Joy	0.800	0.573
MeWOM Issue Involvement	0.887	0.568
MeWOM Message Credibility	0.891	0.511

	0.843	0.522
MeWOM Message Involvement	0.843	0.522
Not Surprised	0.753	0.623
Retweet	0.833	0.626
Sadness	0.842	0.643
Surprise	0.781	0.547

Table 2 - Positive Valence Model Validation

Indicator	Composite Reliability	AVE
Anger	0.869	0.772
Approval	0.85	0.655
Disgust	0.823	0.708
Fear	0.872	0.698
Joy	0.866	0.682
MeWOM Issue Involvement	0.908	0.621
MeWOM Message Credibility	0.817	0.53
MeWOM Message Involvement	0.893	0.514
Not Surprised	0.731	0.505
Retweet	0.834	0.627
Sadness	0.784	0.566
Surprise	0.762	0.521

Evaluation of the structural model

The effect size (R^2) indicated the proportion of the variance explained in the outcome variable by the predictor variables. The interpretation of R^2 was 67% = "substantial", 33% = "moderate", or 19% = "weak" (Hair et al., 2014). The statistical significance of each path coefficient (β) was estimated by bootstrapping. In order to bootstrap, the raw data were randomly sampled 5,000 times and the mean of each β coefficient was computed. Two-tailed t-tests were subsequently conducted to determine if the mean of each β coefficient was significantly different from zero at $p < .05$.

Negative and Positive Valence Models

Figure 1 in Appendix 1 displays the negative valence PLS-SEM path diagram with the β coefficients for the structural model based on the data for the three negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. A relatively moderate proportion of the likelihood to retweet (R^2 = 41%) was explained by eleven predictors with 'MeWOM Message Involvement' (β = 0.42, t = 6.07, p

<.001) and 'MeWOM Issue Involvement' being significant predictors (β = 0.15, t = 3.19, p <.001)

Figure 2 in Appendix 2 displays the positive valence PLS-SEM path diagram with the β coefficients for the structural model based on the data for the positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. Again, a relatively moderate proportion of the likelihood to retweet (R^2 = 42%) was explained by eleven predictors with 'MeWOM Message Involvement' (β = 0.30, t = 3,80, p <.001) and 'MeWOM Issue Involvement' being significant predictors (β = 0.34., t =5.43, p <.001)

DISCUSSION

In the context of eWOM effectiveness, the literature called out four different variables which could potentially have an impact on its effectiveness from a receivers' perspective including message credibility, message relevance, issue involvement and emotions. Two of them, message relevance and issue involvement were significant positive predictors of retweeting MeWOM brand image disruptions (eWOM brand image disruptions that take place in a microblog).

The extent to which the receivers of a MeWOM brand image disruption found the MeWOM brand image disruptions to be relevant was found to be a positive predictor of retweeting the MeWOM brand image disruptions when receivers were exposed to both positive and negative valence Tweets – indicating that an increase in message relevance significantly predicted how likely respondents would be to retweet the message after exposure to the MeWOM brand image disruption. With regard to what makes WOM and eWOM effective, researchers highlighted that the importance and usefulness of the information in messages influenced WOM/eWOM outcomes (Sweeney et al., 2008; Park & Lee, 2007; Park & Lee, 2008; Lee et al., 2008; Doh & Hwang, 2009; Cheung et al., 2009). The relevance of both the positive and negative valence Tweets in the study proved to be significant in the eWOM outcome of retweeting a MeWOM brand image disruption.

The extent to which the receiver of a MeWOM brand image disruption was involved in the issue being highlighted in the brand image disruption was also found to be a significant positive predictor of retweeting the MeWOM brand image disruptions for both the positive and negative valence Tweets. As noted previously, it has been highlighted in previous research that variations in people's involvement with an issue can affect how they respond to it (Maheswaran & Levy, 1990, pg. 361-362). In the context of this study, the degree of issue involvement predicted how likely receivers were to pass the message on, or retweet it.

The two results above, in and of themselves, are not surprising. From a practical perspective, one could easily posit that the level of involvement with a message and the issue highlighted, would predict how likely receivers were to share the MeWOM brand image disruption further by retweeting it. What is more surprising in the findings is a lack of significance of message credibility and the emotions experienced by the receivers of the MeWOM brand image disruptions.

With regard to message credibility, it would be plausible that the credibility of an eWOM brand image disruption could influence message spreading behaviors as the literature repeatedly calls out the importance of credibility with regard to WOM and eWOM outcomes (McKnight & Kacmar, 2006; Zhang and Watts, 2008; Cheung et al., 2008; Cheung et al., 2009). This study demonstrates that the credibility of the message, or how believable and trustworthy the recipient found the message to be, was not an influencing factor in sharing the message further.

It was also surprising that the emotions experienced by the receivers of the MeWOM brand image disruptions were not predictors of whether a receiver retweeted the message. For example, Barhorst (2017) found that emotions were key predictors in whether a change in corporate image occurred after receivers were exposed to positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions. In fact, in her analysis of positive valence MeWOM brand image disruptions, emotions were the only predictors of a change in perception of a corporate image after receivers were exposed to positive valence Tweets. It is therefore surprising that emotions played no role whatsoever in whether receivers would retweet the message.

This study provides important theoretical and managerial implications. From a theoretical perspective, the clarification of the variables which predict whether receivers re-share eWOM brand image disruptions within a microblog adds to the growing body of literature within the corporate image, reputation and eWOM domains. For practitioners, the findings demonstrate that the relevance and interest peaked by both the positive and negative valence MeWOM brand image disruptions predict how likely receivers are to re-share them – rather than whether they believe them or not, or whether they felt any emotions as a result of being exposed to them. The implications from this study are that receivers will share the good and bad brand experiences of others if the message is relevant to them and they are motivated to find out more about the issue highlighted in a Tweet.

LIMITATIONS

There are limitations associated with this study which pave the way for future research to take place. A key limitation is that the research was focused on the airline industry. The airline industry was chosen as it was recognized as one that was at the epicenter of microblog members sharing their positive and negative eWOM and offered a wealth of data for the researchers to use. Although the use of the airline industry was a practical one in terms of the execution of the study, it would be interesting to undertake a similar study with another industry, or indeed a range of industries, to determine whether similar outcomes would occur. Another limitation is the location of the experiment, the United States. With social network site users sharing their experiences of brands around the world, it would be interesting to undertake a similar analysis with receivers in other countries. Finally, the study was focused on one social media platform, Twitter. It would be of interest to undertake a similar study utilizing other social media platforms to determine if similar results occurred.
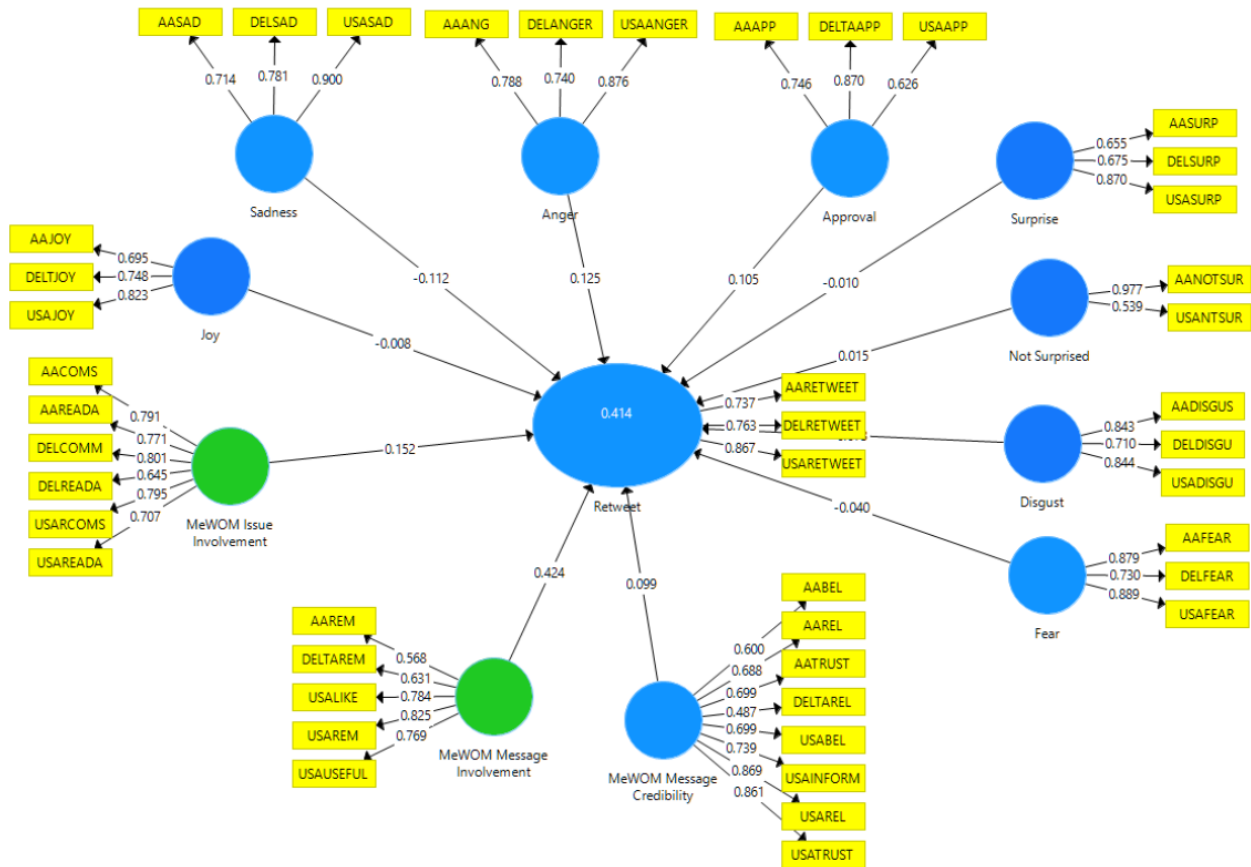
Figure 1 - Negative Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Retweet Model
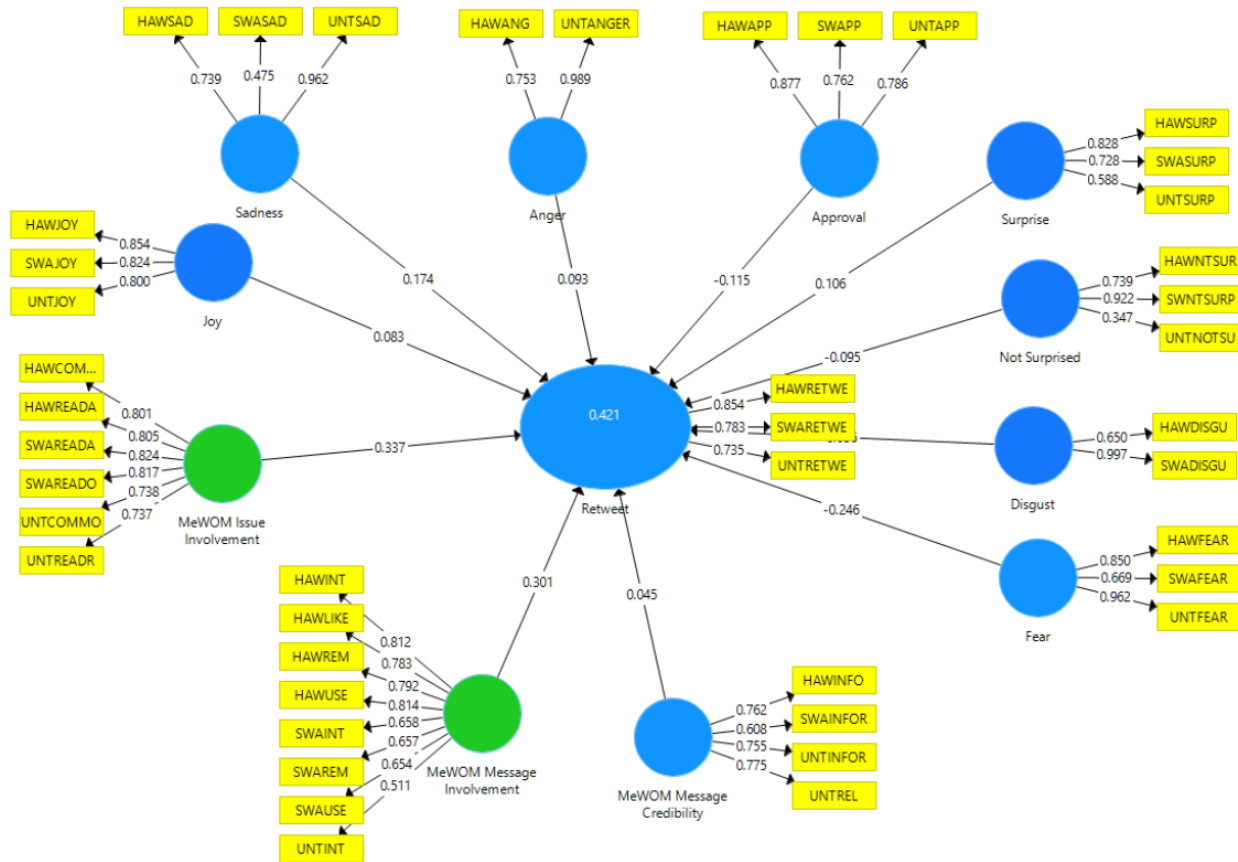
Figure 2 - Positive Valence MeWOM Brand Image Disruption Retweet Model

REFERENCES

Barhorst, J. (2017). Reputation Interrupted: eWOM Brand Image Disruptions in a Shareworthy World. University of Strathclyde (forthcoming).

Chakravarty, A., Liu, Y., & Mazumdar, T. (2010). The differential effects of online word-of-mouth and critics' reviews on pre-release movie evaluation. Journal of Interactive Marketing, 24(3), 185-197.

Cheung, M. Y., Luo, C., Sia, C. L., & Chen, H. (2009). Credibility of electronic word-of-mouth: Informational and normative determinants of on-line consumer recommendations. International Journal of Electronic Commerce, 13(4), 9-38.

Cheung, C. M., & Thadani, D. R. (2012). The impact of electronic word-of-mouth communication: A literature analysis and integrative model. Decision Support Systems, 54(1), 461-470.

Chevalier, J. A., & Mayzlin, D. (2006). The effect of word of mouth on sales: Online book reviews. Journal of Marketing Research, 43(3), 345-354.

Daugherty, T., & Hoffman, E. (2013). eWOM and the importance of capturing consumer attention within social media. Journal of Marketing Communications, (ahead-of-print), 1-21.

Doh, S. J., & Hwang, J. S. (2009). How consumers evaluate eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) messages. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 12(2), 193-197.

Duan, W., Gu, B., & Whinston, A. B. (2008). Do online reviews matter? An empirical investigation of panel data. Decision Support Systems, 45(4), 1007-1016.

Hair, J. F., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2011). PLS-SEM: Indeed a silver bullet. Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 19(2), 139-152.

Hair Jr, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C., & Sarstedt, M. (2016). A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) Sage Publications.

Hobica, G. (2013). Have an airline complaint? tweet away. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-hobica/have-an-airline-complaint_b_2902529.html

Kim, J., & Gupta, P. (2012). Emotional expressions in online user reviews: How they influence consumers' product evaluations. Journal of Business Research, 65(7), 985-992.

Luo, Q., & Zhong, D. (2015). Using social network analysis to explain communication characteristics of travel-related electronic word-of-mouth on social networking sites. Tourism Management, 46, 274-282.

Park, D. H., Lee, J., & Han, I. (2007). The effect of on-line consumer reviews on consumer purchasing intention: The moderating role of involvement. International Journal of Electronic Commerce, 11(4), 125-148.

Park, D., & Lee, J. (2008). eWOM overload and its effect on consumer behavioral intention depending on consumer involvement. Electronic Commerce Research and Applications, 7(4), 386-398.

Lee, J., Park, D. H., & Han, I. (2008). The effect of negative online consumer reviews on product attitude: An information processing view. Electronic commerce research and applications, 7(3), 341-352.

Liu, Y. (2006). Word of mouth for movies: Its dynamics and impact on box office revenue. Journal of Marketing, 70(3), 74-89.

Maheswaran, D., & Meyers-Levy, J. (1990). The influence of message framing and issue involvement. Journal of Marketing research, 361-367.

McKnight, H., & Kacmar, C. (2006, January). Factors of information credibility for an internet advice site. In Proceedings of the 39th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS'06) (Vol. 6, pp. 113b-113b). IEEE.

Ng, D. (2014). Violinists' protest against US airways becomes an online hit. Retrieved from http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-et-cm-violinists-protest-tarmac-20140528-story.html

Park, C., Wang, Y., Yao, Y., & Kang, Y. R. (2011). Factors influencing eWOM effects: Using experience, credibility, and susceptibility. International Journal of Social Science and Humanity, 1(1), 74.

Park, D. H., & Lee, J. (2009). eWOM overload and its effect on consumer behavioral intention depending on consumer involvement. Electronic Commerce Research and Applications, 7(4), 386-398.

Plutchik, R. (2001). The nature of emotions human emotions have deep evolutionary roots, a fact that may explain their complexity and provide tools for clinical practice. American Scientist, 89(4), 344-350.

Richins, M. L. (1984). Word of mouth communication as negative information. NA-Advances in Consumer Research Volume 11.

Sharman, T. (2016). Emirates landed a viral hit with reactive influencer marketing. Retrieved from https://medium.com/twelveam/emirates-landed-a-viral-hit-with-reactive-influencer-marketing-b17e24135400#.7baq4by7f

Sweeney, J. C., Soutar, G. N., & Mazzarol, T. (2008). Factors influencing word of mouth effectiveness: receiver perspectives. European Journal of Marketing, 42(3/4), 344-364.

Wong, K. K. (2013). Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) techniques using SmartPLS. Marketing Bulletin, 24(1), 1-32.

Zaichkowsky, J. L. (1994). The personal involvement inventory: Reduction, revision, and application to advertising. Journal of Advertising, 23(4), 59-70.

Zhang, W., & Watts, S. A. (2008). Capitalizing on content: Information adoption in two online communities. Journal of the Association for Information Systems, 9(2), 73.

_____

For further information contact:
Jennifer B. Barhorst
College of Business, Lander University
(864) 388-8355
jbarhorst@lander.edu