



Sender and Receiver Perceived Expertise and its Effect on Word-of-Mouth Communication

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ABSTRACT

Word-of-mouth has long been a powerful influencer in influencing how consumers think, feel, and act. This paper analyzes the crucial importance of sender's expertise in the complex dynamics of word-of-mouth communication and then traces it back to the roots of traditional communications through individual encounters and the web of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) systems. By reviewing a wide range of academic studies that form a wide cross referencing pool, the following research investigates the theoretical basis of sender expertise including the multiple pathways of influencing, how it influences credibility and persuasion and influences their impact on information diffusion and behavior. Special attention is paid to how expertise is understood and used in the specificity of online settings, including barriers and benefits for trustworthiness analysis and the handling of data integrity in retransmission. Moreover, the paper examines potential moderating variables, including receiver expertise and message valence, that describe the influence of expertise (in other words, power of expert influencers). The overall goal would be to point to strategic applications for companies and individuals who wish to utilize word of mouth power by creating and mobilising the specialist sources, but also suggest areas for future studies that could further clarify the nuances of this vital component in consumer influence.

Keyword: Word of mouth, Expertise, Marketing

1. Introduction.

There is no doubt how powerful word-of-mouth communication is for consumers and marketing, whether that is to choose the best products or services. For centuries people have used the informal recommendations of others as their main reference point when considering products, services, or brands (Karlíček et al., 2010). This intrinsic impulse to trust the collective opinion of peers relative to institutionalized advertisements gave the use of word-of-mouth a distinctly significant, persistent influence: It is primarily due to its alleged independence and credibility (Bujac et al., 2014; Huete-Alcocer, 2017). Within WOM, the underlying view states that since non-commercial individuals are sharing stories and experiences so that their narratives resonate with the receiver, this type of communication has a specific advantage to gain in persuading the other party (Petronijević & Janičić, 2021; Selvi & Thomson, 2016). Of course, the rise of the internet and its digital cousin led to a dramatic shift in the world of word-of-mouth. Furthermore, the spread of online networks – including social media, review sites, blogs, and forums – expanded and enhanced conventional WOM channels – creating an emergent but still new and extensive, complex concept called electronic word-of-mouth (Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Rosario et al., 2019). This history requires a thorough and detailed analysis of the mechanisms of WOM and, importantly, the attributes of the message-deliver model, emphasizing their own know-how for the efficacy of this model. Out of the numerous attributes that characterize a word-of-mouth source, expertise is a dominant component impacting the level of influence. As with all such relationships, the sender expertise, which is frequently coupled with trustworthiness issues, determines the audience to receive the message, process it, and subsequently act upon it. If, as perceived or observed, there is some type of knowledge or experience in a sender's domain they tend to be more likely to comply and his/her/its recommendations are likely to have more influence over the attitudes and behaviour. The paper seeks to investigate such essential issue through an in-depth analysis of the basis of sender expertise, the role

the two play for each other, the mechanisms by which word of mouth influences the process, and the variables that influence sender status in both conventional or digital word-of-mouth. In examining those dimensions, our comprehensive investigation seeks to clarify the strategic effects for practitioners, and to advance a more contextual theoretical comprehension of the world of word of mouth communication.

2. Conceptual Background of Word-of-Mouth Communication

To recognize the importance of sender knowledge, one first lays out a strong conceptual base about word-of-mouth, going back to its humble beginnings to the present day digital version of the phenomenon. Historically, word-of-mouth communication has assumed an interpersonal, sometimes in-person, form; that is, between individuals from a set of established social backgrounds (family, friends, and community members; Kunst, 2018; Selvi & Thomson, 2016). In that time period WOM was a local and relatively ephemeral phenomenon. WOM was especially effective when communicators shared strong social ties, engendering a high level of trust and credibility. Several early studies in marketing and sociology emphasized WOM as an important aspect of consumer behavior that exceeded the impact of mass media because of its personal, perceived authenticity (Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Kunst, 2018). The information being shared in traditional WOM was generally perishable; hard to access and/or confirm post-interaction, thereby reducing its long-term impact (Selvi & Thomson, 2016). Notably, it was perceived as not commercial, arising from authentic experiences of either contentment or discontent, and diffused naturally (Basusena & Astiti, 2020; Uzunkaya, 2020). Opinion leaders (Oetting, 2009)—individuals with the perceived knowledge or social standing of these groups—were central nodes helping spread information among traditional WOM. This context was transformed dramatically by the digital revolution, which started in the late 1990s and burgeoned in the 21st century. The explosion of Web 2.0 technologies, such as social networking sites, digital review sites, blogs, forums, and other E-networks brought electronic word-of-mouth into existence (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Huete-Alcocer, 2017). This digital revolution deeply redefined the consumption, sharing and processing, of consumers and generated a new and more sophisticated type of WOM. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or firm – and made available to a wide range of people and institutions around the Internet" (Bujac et al., 2014; Rosario et al., 2019). eWOM greatly extended the scale and speed of sharing knowledge and communication, through which a comment or review in an online forum was given and can impact a wide ranging global population with potential real-time impact, transcending geographic and relational boundaries of traditional WOM (Liu et al., 2022; Loureiro & Sarmento, 2018; Lu, 2023). In addition, eWOM created persistence and retrievability, since digital communications are frequently archived, whereas spoken interactions are ephemeral. These comments and online reviews are long-lived, allowing them to be pulled back, analyzed, and referenced long after they were created (Selvi & Thomson, 2016), which adds up to a powerful impact. eWOM can come from known sources in a person's social network, but a large portion is from anonymous or pseudonymous online reviewers. Although this anonymity makes the phenomenon somewhat difficult to detect, consumers often consider eWOM to be legitimate and trustworthy based on peers, perhaps even more so than information from mainstream media as it originated from consumer peers (Antczak, 2024; Cheung & Thadani, 2012). In the case of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), eWOM platforms provide a plethora of rich information, which, by producing detailed narratives, images and videos, give consumers a view of a product experience which is often beyond the reach of traditional advertisement to allow consumers to make choices by preventing them from uncertainty (Lu, 2023). This change turned the consumer from a passive audience to an active communicator, one that both sought and gave their own opinions, reshaping consumer-retailer relationships (Grifoni et al., 2017; Selvi & Thomson, 2016). The typical influences of the traditional and electronic word-of-mouth on consumers may broadly be based on basic concepts of the human psyche and social behavior. First and foremost, credibility and trust are important. WOM, especially those transmitted by trusted sources, is viewed as more trustworthy and sincere than commercial statements, generating strong acceptance in the receivers' mind (Arif & Siregar, 2021; Jawaid & Karim, 2021). Second, social proof is highly applicable because customers use the actions and opinions of others to explain their own decisions, particularly in ambiguous circumstances (Antczak, 2024). Good reviews for a product are good proof of its quality and popularity. Finally, WOM is also an important informational resource that gives complex data and an experiential perspective that formal sources such as advertising typically fail to provide, giving valuable information that is critical to assessing an intangible product and service (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). In this broad-based framework of WOM, the attributes of the source, especially their expertise, become a key indicator of the effectiveness and argumentation of the communication.

3. The Nexus of Sender Expertise and Word-of-Mouth Effectiveness

Word-of-mouth communication effectiveness is hugely dependent on the attributes of the sender, and that comes across as vital. The credibility of the message is directly connected to the conviction that the message sender is knowledgeable, skilled, or experienced in some field and this can act as a persuasive advantage for the receiver. There are basically two ideas for describing sender expertise: Objective expertise and Perceived expertise. "Objective Expertise" is actually true knowledge, skills and experience that a sender has in that

specific area. It can be measured by professional qualifications, years experience, or academic qualifications. Yet, in the realm of word-of-mouth communication, perceived expertise takes precedence (López & Piñero, 2013). Perceived expertise has to do with the recipient's subjective conviction that the sender knows, is skillful in explaining about and providing correct and reliable information about what is being said (López & Piñero, 2013). This perception, and not what is reality, drives how messages are received and incorporated into the decision-making process a receiver has. The definition of expertise in communication theory — the extent to which a source is regarded as able to provide correct information — will therefore define this, of course (Ismagilova et al., 2019). This perception can derive from a range of clues including the sender's confidence, their in-depth knowledge of a situation, or even the sender's role and background (Packard, 2012).

3.1 Mechanisms of Influence through Expertise

Sender expertise works its way through a complex set of psychological mechanisms, most critically regarding its contribution to source credibility, and how this relates to persuasion. The credibility of one or more of the sender is one of the most important factors influencing the effectiveness of a message, and sender expertise is one of the most basic components of this broader concept (Ismagilova et al., 2019; López & Piñero, 2013). In other words, source credibility, which includes expertise and trustworthiness, reflects a message recipient's perception of the credibility of a message source, independent of the message content itself (López & Piñero, 2013). If the sender is considered an expert, the uncertainty of the receiver for the information sent is greatly reduced (Ismagilova et al., 2019). Consumers tend to assume that professionals know better about the product or service than novices, will accurately evaluate them, and can convey valuable insights that novices cannot. The sender's perception of providing the right information decreases uncertainty which directly increases the message's believability, and the receiver's acceptance of what is being said (Ismagilova et al., 2019). According to meta-analysis, source expertise significantly affects perceived eWOM usefulness and credibility, trustworthiness, and homophily (Ismagilova et al., 2019), and this also has an effect on information adoption and purchase intention. The persuasive power of word-of-mouth also relates closely to sender expertise. It is assumed that information delivered by an expert source is more convincing and compelling to the recipient as a receiver (Gürücü & Korkmaz, 2018). The perceived expertise of an individual is an important factor leading to a persuasive effect from eWOM communications, encouraging purchase intentions (Ismagilova et al., 2019). These experts are often seen by the audience as more objective and less likely to overstate or misuse the information, thus making them more receptive (Packard, 2012). This persuasive capability goes beyond simply disseminating information but also directly influences attitudes and behavioral intentions. The more an expert recommends a product to a receiver, the more likely the receiver is to have a positive attitude towards that product, and they will have a stronger intention to purchase it. The more critical and enthusiastic the expert sender's eWOM information, the higher its effect on purchase intention would be (Prasetio & Purnamawati, 2023). In addition to that, an expert provides the important influence for information adoption. Receivers tend to follow advice from experts, to integrate it into knowledge and to use it when taking decisions (Fan et al., 2013; Ismagilova et al., 2019). They are now accustomed to this form of information because it is perceived as reliable and can be taken advice from experts. Those buyers searching for valuable data through WOM actively seek experts with significant knowledge of the product (Prasetio & Purnamawati, 2023). Because of the conviction, knowledge gained from an expert source provides a significant advantage, and this preference can manifest in contexts where the receiver perceives themselves as less knowledgeable or skilled (Gürücü & Korkmaz, 2018).

3.2 Impact on Word-of-Mouth Effectiveness

Sender expertise directly influences the success of word-of-mouth communication on all dimensions in important ways that directly affect the effectiveness of word-of-mouth and in turn it affects multiple facets of message acceptance, dissemination, attitude, attitude change and finally, behavior such as the purchase decision. The WOM message can be much more acceptable given the origin from an expert source. Receivers will also be more likely to absorb and believe the messages of the individuals who are perceived as more knowledgeable. This increased acceptance directly results into the chance that the content is further amplified or that the information has a direct impact on actions. Sources' expertise, when combined with trustworthiness and homophily, can positively influence perceived eWOM usefulness and credibility (which then result into buyer intention and information adoption), for example, the studies shown that in (Ismagilova et al., 2019). Specifically, expert sources have been shown to influence intention to buy (Ismagilova et al., 2019). Sender expertise itself drives the spread of word-of-mouth information. The information of message from either experts or non-experts can be influential if valence is positive where expert messages also become critical to distinguish from the negative valence of information. Research shows that positive WOM from experts (e.g. experts) and non-experts may have an equal effect to stimulate retransmission, but the negative WOM from experts influences retransmission positively compared to negative WOM from non-experts (Radighieri & Mulder, 2014). This indicates that expert-negative comments have a greater weight, potentially on the grounds that the expert's criticism might be well-founded and accurate. This differential effect shows that managing perceived expertise is a strategic issue in response to bad word-of-mouth. In addition, sender expertise is a strong factor for attitude change. When someone with a

very good knowledge pushes for the product or service, those receivers tend to do the right action and change their attitudes to fit into that expert's recommended stance. This is especially the case when the matter is complicated or the recipient has limited training in the matter. The conviction of an expert will get beyond prior biases or uncertainties, making the recommended item more favorable in future. The greatest impact of sender expertise on behavior, particularly purchase intentions and decisions, is seen in reality. The better the sender's understanding, the more likely that people will receive the eWOM information and follow up with action accordingly (Prasetio & Purnamawati, 2023). A growing body of research has consistently shown that source expertise significantly affects consumers' intention to buy (Ismagilova, Slade, Rana, & Dwivedi, 2019; Ismagilova, Slade, Rana, Dwivedi, et al., 2019). In fact, it is because expert recommendations decrease the perception of risk while offering a higher rationale for purchase, thus leading directly into increased conversion and greater sales. This link is why businesses are commonly aiming to develop and nurture expert spokespersons for their products and services.

4 Sender Expertise in the Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) Landscape

The unique structural and interactional characteristics of the digital space have transformed the way sender expertise is formed and manifested in word-of-mouth communication. So, while the basic fundamentals of expertise driving credibility and persuasion endure, the basis of how expertise is identified and its effect on power is transformed in the context of the electronic world of word of mouth become different.

4.1 Identification of Expertise in Digital Environments

One of the key challenges and opportunities in eWOM involves identifying which individuals are experts in a digital universe where traditional markers such as in-person interaction or formal credentials may be absent or less readily apparent. In contrast to a face-to-face meeting when we might make inferences about expertise through tone, language or open-ended questions, the evaluation of expertise online is dependent on digital indicators. While many platforms have transitioned to offer multiple tools for receivers to assess the expertise of sources, not all websites provide explicit information on whether a source is an expert at their field (López & Piñero, 2013). Some of these digital cues may be in terms of the amount of reviews the user left, the length of time the user has been signed onto a platform, badges or levels of worth noting about the user, or how broad and specific the content in question is (Ismagilova et al., 2019). A reviewer who consistently writes detailed, nuanced, and technically correct product reviews, for example, may be viewed as more expert than one providing only surface-level comments. This perceived expertise adds to the overall credibility of eWOM (Fan et al., 2013), along with the perceived expertise itself. So does the context of the review and the platform itself. On niche forums focused on a specific hobby or technical products, users might be more sceptical of the expertise of contributors, looking for members with deep domain knowledge and depth of knowledge to their group members. On the other hand, on larger social networks, one might infer knowledge from what one says about others or the following or endorsement they receive from these perceived experts. That consumers are now able to access relevant information from experienced and credible individuals whom they themselves have not had direct contact with, as before, is evidence of how eWOM promotes expert discovery (Moran & Muzellec, 2014). Nonetheless, the challenges of evaluating source characteristics in computer-mediated communication imply that while expertise and trustworthiness may be seen as the most important aspect of source credibility, these remain challenging aspects to investigate entirely in eWOM terms (López & Piñero, 2013).

4.2 Influence of eWOM Sender Expertise on Consumer Trust and Purchase Decisions

The effect experienced by sender's expertise on eWOM on consumer trust and purchase intention is significant and well studied. Research findings: When consumers are exposed to eWOM from a source deemed expert, the trust for the information increases, which in turn affects behavioral intentions. Meta-analyses have consistently demonstrated that source expertise with trustworthiness significantly influences perceived usefulness and credibility of eWOM to a considerable extent, directly influencing the adoption of information and purchase intentions (Ismagilova et al., 2019). For example, studies which used online surveys have found that source expertise has a significant influence on the intention to book a hotel room. This emphasizes that a person's level of expert position is the key factor behind making eWOM communications more persuasive, and therefore, influencing the intention to purchase (Ismagilova et al., 2019). The perceived credibility of eWOM, which is largely influenced by source expertise, directly increases a consumer's desire for eWOM usage on online recommendations. It also motivates repeat visits to others' recommendations (Fan et al., 2013). The influence of expert reviews on eWOM platforms is considerable, determining consumers' purchase intentions within virtual communities (Naujoks & Benkenstein, 2020). Moreover, even within complex marketing ecosystems such as Instagram, eWOM valence is linked with positive attitudes towards brands or perceived quality of the brand, so that this in turn influences what people do online and how they decide whether to make purchases. This effect also receives critical moderating role from eWOM credibility and influencer familiarity, which implies that, when an expert (or more broadly, as well as a familiar influencer) relays a message, its influence is much higher (Haq et al., 2024). The more the

sender is learned, the more likely the consumer perceives that eWOM message is valuable and accurate, and thus, the higher their adoption of information and purchase probability (Prasetio & Purnamawati, 2023).

4.3 Information Distortion in eWOM Retransmission

WOM also makes information fidelity & distorted information retention in retransmission in its evolution into eWOM. Since information passes over various digital nodes, there is an inherent risk of changing or losing content derived from the original information. Sender experience has a critical role to play in attenuating or exacerbating such distortion. It has been shown that information is distorted as it is distributed with WOM retransmission distorting the information (Jun et al., 2023). However, the distortion is selectively impacted by retransmitter intention and source knowledge. Research has shown that a retransmitter's persuasive (not informative) intent can lead to more information distortion, such as content exaggeration. More importantly, the distortion of information sources is exacerbated when the original source carries less expertise (Jun et al., 2023). This, in turn, implies that messages from non-experts may be less resistant to misunderstanding, exaggeration or manipulation, as they are transmitted across digital networks. Instead, messages from authoritative and expert sources may hold a higher level of fidelity, perhaps because retransmitters are more careful when transmitting information attributed to the expert, or because the original expert message is naturally more resilient and less susceptible to ambiguity. The link to this point points out a key consideration for viral marketing strategies: whether the original source is an expert can enable the message to preserve its authenticity regardless of how widely spread digitally (Jun et al., 2023).

5. Moderating Factors on the Effect of Sender Expertise

Sender expertise can exert a significant impact on WOM as a predictor for effectiveness, but its influence cannot be said that will always be absolute in the way of a consistent type of WOM. Some of its impact is moderated by factors, both contextual and individual that impact the receiver in ways that shape how expert messages are received and treated.

5.1. Receiver Expertise.

It seems significant to mention, that the expert status of receiver significantly affects their dependency on the sender knowledge. Consumers' dependence on WOM diminishes as they become familiar with products or services on their own as they are exposed to them (Moran & Muzellec, 2014). In a receiver with high product knowledge, receivers are less at a loss with respect to knowledge obtained from outside individuals, such as experts, considering the belief that knowledge is important, as they seek to make decisions on their knowledge basis (Fan et al., 2013). These are the people who might scrutinise their own experts' words, push back against assumptions or go beyond just taking them at face value. In contrast, receivers with weak expertise are vulnerable to expert influence and will search for information from more knowledgeable individuals to reduce uncertainty and perceived risk to a greater extent (Gürücü & Korkmaz, 2018). They search for information at a higher need and tend to process more complex information more rapidly when it comes through expert source (Abdennadher, 2014). Therefore, when word-of-mouth knowledge is received, the influence on receivers will be less or more strong depending on the knowledge of the receiver being high vs low in level (Gürücü & Korkmaz, 2018). Nevertheless, receiver expertise is not necessarily related to reliance on expert WOM. Some research has found that higher levels of consumer expertise can serve an increased access to certain eWOM messages, especially those that imply it takes a certain level of effort to decode (Moran & Muzellec, 2014). Theories such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model suggest this, the more involved individuals generally have greater expertise, more likely to be central route processors and are scrutinizing experts' arguments more carefully because they may not accept their authority to make a rational argument (Moran & Muzellec, 2014). For instance, subjects who possess average knowledge may have a greater demand for information than those with high knowledge, while extensive knowledge allows complex ideas to be processed by individuals more quickly (Abdennadher, 2014). Thus, the better knowledge the consumer has about a product category, the easier it becomes to judge eWOM messages, and their credibility (Abdennadher, 2014).

5.2 Message Valence.

The positive or negative valence of the word-of-mouth message can have differential interaction with sender expertise in improving effectiveness. WOM sender experts and message valence significantly affect the intention of consumers to retransmit messages in studies to a very interesting end. Research indicates that strong valence (positive) messages can persuade audiences the same as information from the experts (Radighieri & Mulder, 2014). That is, a good review, or a recommendation, the source of which can be expert, can stimulate retransmission. But a big part of this changes when WOM goes negative. When the valence is low, negative messages of experts are able to exert a stronger influence as compared to messages of non-experts (Radighieri & Mulder, 2014). This means that consumers attach more importance (and credence) to negative feedback from authoritative sources; perhaps because an expert's negative assessment is taken into consideration and considered more well. This differential effect underscores the increased risk of negative

eWOM coming from expert sources and the strategic interest in preventing and avoiding such critical evaluations.

5.3. The complexity of the product or service is also a moderator of the effects of sender expertise.

For specialized products, such as electronics, financial services, and medical treatments, consumers are often even more dependent on expert expertise because they themselves do not have a technical knowledge of such things. In this case, the sender's knowledge is particularly important – their insight can help simplify complex information, validate the choice, and lower the level of perceived risk. For typical low-involvement products compared to complex, advanced products, (e.g. everyday consumables), a recommendation from a friend without expertise may prove adequate, as the potential risk of a poor selection is small, and specialized knowledge is low.

5.4. Tie Strength.

The type of connection, "tie strength" between the sender and receiver is yet another very significant moderator. Strong relationships (e.g., close relations, close family), i.e., relationships characterized by repeated contact and emotional intensity, trust, and confiding, and high levels of openness (that is, trust and influence, even if the sender of the strong-tie is not an expert in that it's not objective), and the effectivity, or affect power that it wields, is one thing. While weak ties (i.e., acquaintances) would have much lower influence as a person, in rare situations they can yield new knowledge and wider networks. While in situations that demand technical knowledge, expertise tends to triumph over tie strength, personal connections may amplify the role of expertise only when a strong tie exists because the receiver trusts the person and their expertise. In contrast however, an expert from a weak tie may still wield tremendous persuasive power given their recognized expertise, though there is no strong bond on the basis of relationship between them.

5.5. Communication Channel.

The way in which word-of-mouth communication occurs can also play a role in modulating the effect of sender expertise. Face-to-face interaction affords instant feedback, gestures of non-verbal behavior, and dynamic interchange, all potentially reinforcing perceived knowledge. That is the content rich context online is going to not come in with you. But that expertise can be expressed through very different channels online. Some niche forums might feature users profile or badges providing a professional background, in the context of expertise while others could use follower count or engagement as proxies for influence (and that with respect to perceived expertise) on social media. It has been previously found that the WOM speakers' trustworthiness, experience, and evidence (WOM speaker) and the WOM listener (self-perceived knowledge and purchase involvement (WOM listener) characteristics both influence the WOM usage of WOM and whether WOM is in a face-to-face or on the online basis (Martin & Lueg, 2011). Also, varied communication channels may influence the message, such as written communication allows people to more fully think through things that are relevant to the message and write it down at a slower pace (Berger & Iyengar, 2013) and motives for improvement of oneself may cause personal interests to lead people to say more interesting things. This suggests that the medium can influence the perception and presentation of Sender expertise (Berger & Iyengar, 2013).

6. Strategic Implications for Marketing and Practice

Recognizing the multifaceted influences of sender expertise on word-of-mouth communication leads to important strategic implications for organizations and practitioners. Understanding this helps marketing strategies to be more effective, brand perception to be improved, and consumer actions to be more prominent. A primary implication is the strategic identification and development of expert advocates. Businesses must look for and identify staff that have experience, knowledge, or specialized knowledge about their goods or service. They could be professionals from the industries, loyal users for the service or even simply employees that understand their product. When they are identified, these industry experts can be activated by creating a range of channels for communication such as by introducing a product, testing out early beta products, access to expert product feedback by contacting the product to share their opinions. This is a move away from seeking out "influencers" only for the number of followers they have on the site, and towards instead prioritizing true expertise that gives endorsements credibility. (Lanz et al., 2023). In addition, in the eWOM context, structuring the online platforms and communication plan to showcase sender expertise is critical. For user-review sites or online customer communities, however, it can still be effective to visibly signal expertise—as illustrated by tag codes for "verified buyer", badges for ongoing helpfulness by the company, detailed profiles displaying relevant experience or peer-based endorsements of expertise (López & Piñero, 2013). Businesses must also incentivise experts to write multi-faceted reviews that go behind the superficial praise, because a strong depth of information is a signal of expertise in a context and it increases the persuasiveness of a message. Clear information related to the source can help receivers to judge expertise (López & Piñero, 2013). Maintaining the correct spread of information is another very important issue,

especially over this period of rapid retransmission. Because less expert message is prone to distortion and negative WOM, which come from experts, has disproportionately larger weight, companies need to ensure accurate initial communication for the authoritative source. This requires that you make marketing messages crystal clear, factual, and consistent, and you give existing experts the facts they need to spread the word. Monitoring and responding quickly to misinformation, particularly if it is attributed to someone perceived as an expert, is essential to protecting brand value (Fong et al., 2021). Customizing messages for sender and receiver expertise is another sophisticated tactical necessity. When it comes to very technical products, communications for expert senders need to be detailed and accurate, so they have the ability to offer you specific information. When communicating with receivers, the businesses should consider their likely levels of expertise. So for beginners, expert-type messages should reduce complicated information and spell out clearly advantages. For those who know more the sources of knowledge should be deep and novel; not only respecting their existing skills but also introducing new ideas and features. The ability of an organization to ensure that messages shared by those considered experts are understood better compared to other sources is evident in various contexts (Chary et al., 2023). Lastly, the differential effect of message valence and on the rise negative expert WOM highlights the significance of good product quality and good service levels. It is important to avoid the development of negative feedback by expert users, because their concerns can spread and have a devastating impact. Making efforts to engage proactively with expert customers, ask for their feedback, and solve those problems quickly leads potential critiques to advocates, and utilizes their expertise for good. This creates parallels in the way branding leaders should be reaching out to experts in order for successful training sessions, which is based on an accurate understanding of what exactly effective coaches and consultants do (Sheridan et al., 2009). These powerful men and women, if the goals of brand advocacy are to be achieved, and could possibly have positive and iterative influence on the effects of marketing, need to be approached positively and constructively (Sheridan et al., 2009).

7. Future Research Directions

Although the effect of sender expertise on word of mouth is well established, a few avenues merit additional in-depth examination to enhance our understanding of this important phenomenon. A promising avenue may be focused around better understanding how objective versus perceived expertise interact, especially across a range of cultural and platform contexts. How do various digital cues (like follower numbers, review history and technical terminology) shape perceptions of expertise differently across cultures? This ongoing research could explore how users develop perceived expertise in the course of time using individual platforms, and how this evolving perception affects their impact on others. Moreover, investigating whether, and by what means, platforms may prioritize or de-emphasize various expertise signals in their algorithms could be an important follow-up research. It is also interesting to investigate the psychology behind differences in effect of positive versus negative expert WOM. What cognitive biases or emotive responses are triggered upon receiving negative feedback from an expert versus a non-expert? Which products or contexts would be more likely to display this asymmetry? An examination of the process by which expert negative WOM promotes increased attitude change or behavior avoidance would be more theoretically enlightening. Experimental designs in this field could help better isolate these variables. Artificial intelligence and automated content generation is another area that looms large as a force behind the dynamics of professional "expertization". With their ever-more-complex versions of AI-generated content, how will consumers distinguish between human expertise and algorithmic 'expertise'? What are the ethical and potential manipulation implications of the mimicry and manipulation by AI-enabled systems when they take expert opinions as their input, and how could these affect the faithfulness to eWOM? This newer field is an important void in established evidence. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the moderation role of receiver characteristics should be studied in more detail beyond mere expertise. How do personality characteristics, vulnerability to normative and informational influence or, just one's style of cognitive processing, influence the propensity to be receptive to expert WOM? Such as, people with a higher cognitive need may act on expert messages more along the route of the central processing of them, whereas low involvement would lead to more reliance on expert cues in the form of heuristics. A fruitful area of enquiry (Sheridan et al., 2009) is to understand the cascading effects of such initial responses on the extent to which such initial impressions impact the action process of adopting the information to reach out to expert information and its impact and effectiveness (i.e., the first response to experience-based understanding) in the first place. Finally, delving into expertise within niche communities and niche domains in the eWOM landscape brings with it a multitude of opportunities. For instance, how is the definition and value of expertise established within specific communities (e.g., professional forums, hobbyist groups), and what impact does this have on the use of expert WOM relative to online consumer-facing communities more broadly? Researching the factors associated with effective coaches and consultants, their communication and collaborative attitudes, and expertise can help us understand how the brands in these particular sectors are leveraging their characteristics and expertise to generate desirable traits and competencies in their learners in ways that are translatable (Sheridan et al., 2009). The research is in need of determining how effective coaches and consultants act, and why it matters to design effective learning activities, which may provoke lasting change,

similar to the research effort to understand who and how expert WOM causes changes to consumer behavior (Sheridan et al., 2009).

8. Conclusion

Word-of-mouth marketing began in conversations between people through the years it was a simple idea of conversation but has since morphed into a world-spanning digital service that shows this, one fundamental and powerful thread, a consistent and vital one: the impact of sender expertise. This in depth inquiry has confirmed that sender expertise as perceived by the receiver is an extremely influential factor affecting the WOM communication that determine its credibility, persuasiveness and general effectiveness. Whether conveyed through a personal story or an online review, a message from someone well-versed in something has more trust, less uncertainty and much higher probability of impacting adoption and behavior changes. Although the digital evolution has significantly widened the reach and legacy of WOM, it has additionally presented opportunities and challenges in the identification and use of expertise. Within the eWOM terrain, perceived expertise has traditionally been inferred from digital signals, and we know this phenomenon influences trust in digital channels as well as, subsequently, purchase intentions. However, information integrity during retransmission is a hurdle that many organizations face when the number of expert sources decreasing exacerbates distortion issues, highlighting the critical importance of confirming the source of expert information originates from a highly credible originator. In addition, the influence of sender expertise is not homogeneous and it is highly mediated by the recipient's own knowledge, the valence of a message, complexity of the product, the strength of social ties, the channel used and so forth. A negative message from an expert, for example, can be unfairly weighted compared to the same message from non-expert sources, thereby illustrating the strategic risks of expert dissatisfaction. The consequences are obvious and can be acted upon. Developing and harnessing expert advocates, building platforms that show expertise in a transparent way in the digital age, closely controlling flow of data to prevent any distortions and accommodating sender/receiver different levels of expertise are not optional but essential. As we navigate this changing digital landscape, human dependence on credible, educated sources to inform our decisions will become more entrenched. Future studies should keep unpacking the complexities of perceived expertise amidst an increasingly intricate digital landscape and investigate the issues, for example AI-generated content and psychology-based expert influence, that may need resolving. the mediums of communication change, but the fact is that the true force that influences consumers to make a good choice is informed opinion, gracefully and credibly delivered.

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