Consumers' Motivations for Reading Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM): A 4-IS Typology

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Abstract

EWOM initiates more consumers' empathy and is also reliable information for a consumer. Consumers are increasingly relying on finding and reading eWOM to make purchasing decisions. Knowing why the consumers read these eWOM helps marketers provide proper information and marketing contents. This study uses the phenomenographic approach to explore consumers' motivations for reading eWOM. After interviews with thirty participants, this study constructed a 4-IS typology of eWOM motivation based on two dimensions: consumer's product familiarity and purchase intention. The study also adopts the concept of MOAB model to illustrate four categories. This study provides some useful insights for marketers to systematically analyze why consumers read eWOM. It not only helps us understand why a consumer reads eWOM also helps us figure out how the eWOM affects a consumer.

Keywords: EWOM, Motivation, Phenomenographic approach

1 Introduction

In the era of Web 2.0, users exchange ideas and experiences on social networking sites through electronic word-of-mouth [1]. The electronic word-of-mouth content generated by a large number of users has become an important source of mining consumer sentiment and consumption experience [2]. It initiates more consumers' empathy and is also reliable information for a consumer [1]. Electronic word-of-mouth includes all stages of the consumer purchase cycle [3], and provides more comprehensive consumer reference information. More and more consumers trust and use eWOM to help them to evaluate the quality and performance of the products when they consider buying [4].

Consumers chat online with different consumers around the world through eWOM, and almost all eWOMs are visible on online platforms [5]. These online platforms offer consumers the possibility to communicate with other consumers, making the collection of product and service information in traditional forms of media less and less popular [6].

Possibilities of eWOM leads to many researchers' interests from marketing and information management field [7]. Some researchers discuss the effects of eWOM on product sales and consumer buying decisions [7-8]. Other researchers discover the antecedents and consequences of eWOM [9]. Besides, researchers also have interests in difference of eWOM, including eWOM types and contents [7, 10].

Consumers are increasingly relying on eWOM to make purchasing decisions. Some consumers can influence how most other consumers view products, services and brands [11]. Therefore, it becomes important to understand what drives consumers to read eWOM. This study attempts to explore the motivations that affect consumers' participation in reading eWOM to help us more completely understand the impacts of eWOM.

This study is to combine findings from the literature and qualitative research to provide a comprehensive discussion of the motivations that influence consumers to read eWOM. This study will address the following research questions: What motivates consumers to read eWOM? By answering this question, we hope to identify the different motivations in eWOM reading.

Motivations explain why individuals read eWOM and further help us to identify different types of eWOM readers. To completely explore the impacts of eWOM on different persons, it is necessary to identify motivations that induce individuals to gain information from this source [12].

In the study, we adopt the Motivation-Opportunity-Ability-Behavior (MOAB) theoretical framework to describe the motivation and related behaviors of reading eWOM. Through the analysis of the model, this study hopes to explain what is the motivation of individuals to read eWOM, and to use the opportunity and ability as the behavioral background to explain the individual's behavior of reading eWOM.

The purpose of this study is to identify different types of consumers' motivations in reading eWOM. Firstly, we identify existing eWOM reading motivations of people. Then, the study classifies different types of eWOM reading motivations.

Unlike previous eWOM studies which used quantitative methods, such as questionnaires, scales, or surveys, to testify their arguments. In this study, we uses qualitative method to develop an understanding of motivations of consumers toward eWOM reading and its implications on their behavior. With the research having an exploratory objective, qualitative methods can be used to dig deeper into consumers' perceptions of issues and their impact on [13]. Scholars use

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qualitative research methods to explore eWOM issues such as motivation [14], service perception [15], product selection [16], and have obtained rich results.

Therefore, we use a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews to explore individuals' original motivations of reading eWOM. Through the interview, consumers also provide richer and deeper views about the issue. By a qualitative method, the study tries to complement those quantitative studies and provide more understandings about individuals' motivations of reading eWOM.

2 Literature Review

In this study, we adopt the definition of Nielsen, Reisch, and Thøgersen - motivation is the root cause of behaviors that motivate individuals to recognize and satisfy needs [17]. About consumer motivation of reading eWOM, [18] propose two motivations: self-involvement and product-involvement. Researchers further classify self-involvement motivation into risk reduction motivation [19] and searching time reduction motivation [19-20].

A risk reduction motivation results from risk-related considerations. In order to reduce risk, individuals search and read eWOM to obtain decision-related information before they purchase products or services [21]. Differently, a searching time reduction motivation results from the concept of an individual's self-perception [20]. People make efforts to reduce the time needed to get products or services through reading eWOM when they feel lack of time [22]. Therefore, people search and read eWOM to solve the situation of risk perception and information insufficiency before they adopt products or services [23].

Product-involvement also includes two detailed motivations: learning how a product is to be consumed [19] and learning what products are new in the marketplace [24]. Learning how a product is to be consumed, was supported by Granitz and Ward's empirical study [25]. With eWOM, consumers can easily search and gain other people's usage experiences and evaluations about a product before they buy the products or service. This situation strengthens the motivation of learning how to use products or service. The second motivation is learning what products are new in the marketplace. People have the desire to seek out new product information because of curiosity and novelty seeking [24]. Therefore, people learn what products are new in the marketplace by reading eWOM.

In addition to self-involvement motivation and product-involvement motivation, from opinion-leader theory, an opinion follower would have the communication motivation [26-27]. Consumers seek suggestions and opinions of products or services from opinion leaders and make their purchasing decision according to these suggestions and opinions [28-29].

Cognitive dissonance reduction is also one motivation to read eWOM. Consumers search and read eWOM to reduce their cognitive dissonance produced during a product choice or around purchase [30-31]. Consumers confirm their judgments of consumption situations or the rationality of their choices to reduce their incongruence by obtaining information [32]. Offering much information of products for a consumer, eWOM is an appropriate information source to decrease a consumer's cognitive incongruence after a purchase [20]. Hence, consumers read eWOM to reduce their cognitive dissonance.

The above-mentioned motivations are discussed in both WOM and eWOM studies. There are two distinct motivations focusing only on eWOM. One is monetary motivation. Consumer read eWOM for some rewards [33]. For example, many opinion websites provide direct or indirect rewards to encourage a consumer not only to read eWOM on their websites but also to switch to be a member of their websites from other websites.

The other motivation is belonging to a virtual community. With the motivation, a consumer makes contributions to become a member of a virtual community [34]. Consumers who put efforts in product opinions sharing are usually linked to their intrinsic motivations of becoming a member of the community [35]. For example, consumers share their consuming passions with others through interacting on an opinion website and hope to belong to the virtual community.

3 Material and Method

This study attempts to investigate and classify consumers' intrinsic motivations of reading eWOM. Therefore, accurate understanding the experience and perspective of consumers is required. To practice the exploratory goals of this study, a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews [36].

In qualitative social research methods, interview is an important and highly used method of data collection which enables individuals to think and talk about their needs, expectations, experiences, and understandings [37]. Therefore, we chose interview to collect the data and to explore individuals' motivations in reading eWOM.

3.1 The Phenomenographic Approach

In the study, we apply the phenomenographic approach to explore consumers' motivations of reading eWOM. The phenomenographic approach helps researchers to identify and describe the various ways by which people experience certain phenomena in the world around them [38].

Phenomenography has many similarities with phenomenology [39]. For example, they both focus on human experience and awareness. But there are also important differences. [39] makes a distinction between phenomenology and phenomenography. A study of what people perceive in the world is phenomenology; a study of the way people perceive the world is phenomenography. Phenomenography describe not only what people see, but also how they see and make sense of their world.

In data analysis, the phenomenographic approach has similar points with traditional content analysis in interpreting texts but some important differences remain. Content analysis depends more on counting words, sentences or any other sub-unit of a text while the phenomenographic approach relies more on making intuitive interpretations and different types of (phenomenological) reflections upon, and logical

investigations of, these interpretations [40]. We chose phenomenography rather than content analysis is because that counting words does not necessarily tell us very much about the underlying meanings of those words [41]. The phenomenographic approach is better at getting beneath the discursive level of meaning.

3.2 Subject

Participants in this study were recruited through purposeful sampling. This sampling method is appropriate when the purpose of research is to understand emerging phenomena [42]. The study used snowballing process to obtain participants. The selection criteria were that the participants should have read eWOM and visited more than two types of Internet websites or opinion platforms. All participants were voluntary and could be contacted at any time. These participants join the study for the same interests in finding out motivations of reading eWOM. Hence, with their willing to share their thoughts, they are purposeful subjects.

We firstly asked five students as volunteer participants to individually share their thoughts about motivations when they read eWOM. Then, participants were asked to nominate qualified candidates for our next interviews at the end of each interview. In order to broaden sample variety of the study, we also requested participants to avoid recommending students in our study. Through a snowballing process, 40 persons were willing to participate in this study. Considering the diversity of the sample, this study screened out 15 participants. Finally, a total sample of 30 participants joined the interview.

The sample includes 30 eWOM readers – 17 males and 13 females. Due to privacy concern, participants were labeled by their nick names. All interviewees have experiences of reading eWOM. Most of them surf different types of Internet websites or opinion platforms to read eWOM, such as Yahoo, Facebook, personal blogs and so on.

These eWOM readers come from different ages, genders, occupations, reading frequencies and living areas in Taiwan. The interviewees ranged from 17 to 47 in age. About the frequency of reading eWOM, lightest users read eWOM only one day per week, and heaviest users read eWOM every day. All detail information is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of interviewees' information

Code	Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Area	Frequency*
C1	Claudia	F	27	Graduate student	Northern Taiwan	Everyday
C2	James	M	33	Telecommunication	Northern Taiwan	One day
C3	Wind	M	35	Retail business	Southern Taiwan	Three days
C4	Petty	F	32	Information industry	Southern Taiwan	Two days
C5	Pinky	F	35	Business consultant	Middle Taiwan	Three days
C6	Calvin	M	26	Doctoral student	Northern Taiwan	Four days
C7	Fan	M	31	Information industry	Northern Taiwan	Everyday
C8	Mary	F	22	Information industry	Northern Taiwan	One day
C9	Ben	M	26	Retail business	Northern Taiwan	Everyday
C10	Steven	M	28	Information industry	Eastern Taiwan	Everyday
C11	Angel	F	29	Doctoral student	Northern Taiwan	Two days
C12	Garfield	M	32	Doctoral student	Middle Taiwan	One day
C13	Tomas	M	47	Building trade	Southern Taiwan	Three days
C14	Brady	M	27	Military	Eastern Taiwan	Two days
C15	Carol	F	52	Public office	Southern Taiwan	One day
C16	July	F	42	Public office	Middle Taiwan	Two days
C17	Crystal	F	26	Graduate student	Eastern Taiwan	Everyday
C18	Bruce	M	45	Information industry	Middle Taiwan	Two days
C19	Corwin	M	37	Education	Northern Taiwan	Everyday
C20	John	M	47	Business consultant	Middle Taiwan	Three days
C21	Avant	M	33	Retail business	Southern Taiwan	Everyday
C22	Gigi	F	30	Insurance	Middle Taiwan	Two days
C23	Sammu	M	36	Biological industry	Middle Taiwan	Three days
C24	Joan	F	37	Health care	Northern Taiwan	One day
C25	Ken	M	30	Graduate student	Eastern Taiwan	Two days
C26	Kitty	F	17	High school student	Southern Taiwan	Two days
C27	Winy	F	20	College student	Northern Taiwan	Everyday
C28	Peggy	F	27	Graduate student	Eastern Taiwan	Three days
C29	Chris	M	31	Education	Southern Taiwan	Two days
C30	Frank	M	28	Doctoral student	Northern Taiwan	One day

3.3 Data Collection

The phenomenographic approach collects data by interviewing [35]. As a result, we interviewed these participants about their motivations of reading eWOM. All participants were interviewed individually by a trained researcher to collect information about possible consumers' motivations reading eWOM.

The participants were asked by a guiding interview question, such as "For what purpose will you read eWOM?" or "Why will you read eWOM?" To obtain broad and thorough description about consumers' reading eWOM motivations, the interview question was as simple as possible to help them freely express their opinions. Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted in this study to better understand the research question [43]. We continued the interviews until participants had significantly no new idea to say.

All records of individual interviews were stored in digital content. The interviews were practiced in Chinese and all transcribed for further analyses [44]. Through the process, the verbatim transcripts of consumer's interviews formed the main data which were used for analyzing consumers' motivations of reading eWOM. In order to faithfully present the interviewees' responses, a part of verbatim transcripts was listed later in the result section. It was then checked with native English speakers.

3.4 Data Analysis

The phenomenographic analysis discovers similarities and differences from different people's statements. By using these classified statements as a basis, the conceptions are grouped into preliminary non-overlapping descriptive categories [39]. In this study, we used the phenomenographic method [45] which was revised by Tsai's research to analyze the verbatim transcripts of consumer interviews [46].

First of all, the study reviewed each consumer's ideas presented in the interview content. In the next, the researcher marked some important sentences and extracted some keywords from those sentences. By this way, the researcher characterized consumers' notions about reading eWOM motivations. These notions formed a foundation of the study.

For example, the researcher selected some sentences that were considered as the most important to describe consumers' reading eWOM motivations, such as "When I want to buy some things that I have never bought before, I like to search eWOM as my information source." "When I am free, I like to browse eWOM about foods, restaurants, clothes, and skin care to find out new or interesting things to spare my times." "Reading eWOM is an important way to accumulate my knowledge and update my information." "Although I have enough knowledge about the product, I still like to read eWOM to confirm my choice before I buy it." The researcher drew some keywords out, such as "search," "browse", "accumulate", and "confirm", to characterize the consumers' main ideas about reading eWOM motivations.

In turn, the researcher compared the sentences marked in the interview transcripts, and further explored and summarized consumers' similar and different notions. Eventually, we constructed some categories of description to classify consumers' motivations of reading eWOM. The purpose of categories developed was to exemplify the consumers' reading eWOM motivations. For refining the best description of interviewees' ideas, the study applied the process of data analysis to revise categories for several times.

3.5 Methods to Enhance Reliability and Validity

The study adopts two standardized methods, researcher's perspective and investigator triangulation, to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings.

Researcher's perspective The researcher's perspective plays an important role in interpreting the data when employing a qualitative research. In order to accurately interpret research findings, it is essential to understand how the researcher envisions the data and how the envisioning affects the analysis [47]. Hence, the researcher's perspective influences the reliability of the findings. In order to increase the reliability of the findings, each researcher who participates in characterizing consumers' notions in this study is professional in the marketing field.

The primary researcher is a 40-year-old male assistant professor at the Department of Air and Sea Logistics and Marketing, Taipei University of Marine Technology. His research interests include online consumer behavior and electronic commerce. The second researcher is a 35-year-old female assistant professor at the Tatung University within the Department of Business Management. She earned her master's degree (MBA) with an emphasis in marketing from Yuanze University in 2004.

Investigator triangulation To increase the validity of the results, in the beginning, two researchers are engaged in establishing the emergent notions from the phenomenographic approach. Each researcher first independently classifies consumers' statements for salient notions. After finishing the characterizing notions, a third researcher compares the notions for overlap and similarities.

The different notion is discussed and re-characterized by the three researchers. In order to best describe their ideas, the process is revised several times until all notions appear identical. The final triangulated notions are then being categorized and used to describe the findings of this investigation.

4 Finding

Following Tsai's research process, we constructed four categories of consumers' motivations of reading eWOM [46].

4.1 Category 1: Information Searching

Many consumers view eWOM as a product's information source. By reading eWOM, they can acquire more information to help them make a purchasing decision. Some typical responses are presented below.

Pinky: *Before buying a product, I am used to visiting Yahoo or personal blogs to read eWOM about the product and find out the suitable product.*

Garfield: *I usually search and refer to various eWOM of the product on the Internet before I make a consumption decision, especially when I have no idea in such product category.*

Frank: *I believe that consumers' usage experiences can offer me more suggestions and information of the product. Therefore, when I plan to buy certain product, I like to search its related WOM online previously.*

4.2 Category 2: Information Securing

In the second category, consumers regard eWOM as references or evidences which provide supports for their purchasing decisions. Through finding suitable eWOM, consumers use eWOM to strengthen and consolidate their purchasing decisions. For example, consumers had the following responses:

James: *I usually search for other consumers' sharing of consumption experiences or post-usage reports online to support my buying decision.*

Wind: *When I decide to buy products or services, I always have some options in my mind. But, I still like to find*

other opinions and suggestions on the Internet to confirm my options.

Tomas: *I like to use online WOM to back up my purchasing even though I have already made the decision.*

4.3 Category 3: Information Skimming

In this category, consumers considered that reading eWOM as a source of entertainment or pleasure. Consumers feel free to read all kinds of eWOM to receive and appreciate other consumers' consumption experiences. For example, they expressed that:

Fan: *When I have free time, I like to surf on the Internet and read all kinds of product evaluations and service usage experiences.*

July: *When I am free, I like to browse eWOM about foods, restaurants, clothes, and skin care to find out new or interesting things to spare my times.*

Sammu: *For me, to skim over a variety of websites and blogs is a main activity to spend idle time. Especially, I like to read eWOM of products and services in which I am interested such as cars, heavy motorcycles etc.*

4.4 Category 4: Information Storing

In the last category, eWOM can be regarded as a source of knowledge. Consumers consider that reading eWOM is a method or a way which helps them to improve their knowledge, update their information, or increase their popularity among friends. Some of their responses are shown below:

Calvin: *I am used to reading others' opinions about some products such as computers, cell phones and so on. By doing so, I can have some good friends and share our points of view. Sharing and accumulating knowledge makes me have the feeling of achievement.*

Ben: *As a retail business salesman, one of my daily jobs is to read all the WOM of our products online. I search, collect, and store related eWOM every day. The job leads me to develop a habit – reading and sharing eWOM. For example, I search and save much eWOM on foreign websites about new computer games and movies, and then post my opinions or judgment after reading them.*

Winy: *I prefer to search and read consumers' usage experiences about clothes and make-up products on personal blogs and BBS. When I find a good product evaluation or introduction, I will share it with my friends through e-mail or my blog.*

In sum, we elaborately deal with contents of four categories, and distinctively explain motivations of "Information Searching", "Information Securing", "Information Skimming" and "Information Storing" as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Four categories of consumer's motivations

Category	Motivation	Role of eWOM	Objective	Description
Category 1	Information Searching	Source of information	Forming and testing the decision	By reading eWOM, consumers acquire more product information to help them make purchase decisions.
Category 2	Information Securing	Source of evidence	Confirming the decision	Through finding the suitable eWOM, consumers use the eWOM to strengthen and consolidate their purchase decisions.
Category 3	Information Skimming	Source of pleasure	Entertainment	Consumers randomly read all kinds of eWOM to realize other consumers' product opinions and experiences.
Category 4	Information Storing	Source of knowledge	Self learning and self achievement	Consumers improve their knowledge, update their information, or increase their popularity among friends through collecting, storing and sharing eWOM.

In some categories, consumers' motivations have similar concepts with Guo and Zhou's findings [9]. However, these motivations still have some different parts after further discussion. For example, motivations of category 1 and category 2 are both similar with Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler's obtaining buying-relevant information motivation [12], but they have different purposes and processes. Just like the motivation of eWOM-giving, on review sites, consumers focus on eWOM sharing of products/services/brands, while on SNS, consumers focus on their own experience [48].

In category 1, eWOM is regarded as a source of information by a consumer. Consumers search and obtain information to help them make consumption decisions including forming and testing decisions by reading eWOM. Consumers have two steps of information process in this category. In the first step, consumers search and read much eWOM about the product type they want to purchase to form prior purchasing opinions as reference points, such as product brand, product standards, etc. This is the step of forming decision.

Then, in the second step, consumers repeat the process, searching and reading eWOM, to acquire some specific information to test these purchasing decision. This is the step of testing decisions. Please see figure 1 for this category. For example, a consumer wants to buy a computer but doesn't know which brand is better. He first searches as much as eWOM to decide which brand is the best and finds that brand A is the best. Then, the consumer searches the specific eWOM about brand A to test whether the brand is really the best.

In category 2, eWOM is considered as a source of evidence by a consumer. Consumers take eWOM as a proof to strengthen and consolidate their purchasing decisions. In Figure 1, we can see the information process of "Information Securing". In the beginning, a consumer has a purchasing decision as a reference point in his/her mind. Then, such decision drives the consumer to find fitting eWOM to confirm his/her decision. For instance, a consumer has decided to buy a certain brand of computer and he finds eWOM about the brand to confirm the decision.

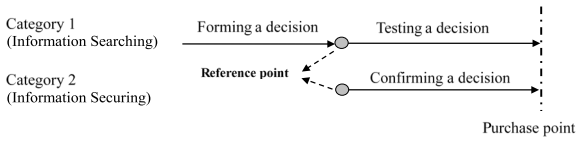

Figure 1. Information processes of Information Searching and Information Securing

Unlike findings of the previous study, the research discovers that a consumer may read eWOM with no social, psychological, communication and monetary motivations, and just for entertainment. In category 3, eWOM is regarded as a source of pleasure by a consumer. When consumers have free time, they like to surf a variety of opinion platforms to read other consumers' opinions and consumption experiences about products.

The motivation of category 4 is also similar to one of Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler's findings [12], namely, social orientation through information. EWOM is considered as a source of knowledge by a consumer in the category. Consumers collect, store and share eWOM to improve their knowledge, update their information, increase their popularity among friends, or further to become the opinion leader in a community.

According to the interviews, the study constructs four categories of consumers' motivations of reading eWOM. Although we separated motivations into four categories, it is worth noted that a consumer may have more than one motivations at the same time.

For example, Sammu's response: *"For me, to skim over a variety of websites and blogs is a main activity to spend idle time. Especially, I like to read eWOM of products and services in which I am interested. When I see the new eWOM of interesting product or service, I always repost it on my blog and mark its reference."* which can be viewed as a position across two categories, "Information Skimming" and "Information Storing". Therefore, we should note that the consumers' motivations not necessarily contains only one category at the same time.

The results of consumers' motivations of reading eWOM are showed in Table 3. As the study mentioned above, the consumers' motivation of reading eWOM may cross more than one category simultaneously. In order to confirm the result, the second researcher analyzed the verbatim interview transcripts after the first researcher finished the categorization process. Both researchers obtain identical results. Twenty seven interviewees have the "Information Searching" motivation. Six among the 30 participants have the "Information Securing" motivation. The "Information Skimming" motivation was held by ten consumers. The "Information Storing" motivation was chosen by twelve consumers.

Table 3. Classified results of consumers' motivations

Category	Number[a]	Percentage
Information Searching	27	90%
Information Securing	6	20%
Information Skimming	10	33%
Information Storing	12	40%

*[a] total number of interviewees = 30. Some interviewees have more than one type of corresponding motivations; therefore the total number is more than 30.

4.5 A Framework of 4-IS Categories

In order to clearly distinguish these different categories, this study attempts to set up a typology to identify the 4-IS categories, including "Information Searching", "Information Securing", "Information Skimming" and "Information Storing". The typology consists of two axes. The first is consumer's product familiarity. The other one indicates consumer's purchase intention.

In the product familiarity dimension, the "Low" end indicates that a consumer never gets in touch with such product, or has less knowledge about such product. On the contrary, the "High" end expresses that a consumer has a thorough understanding of such product, and might even use it before. In the purchase intention dimension, the "Low" end presents that a consumer has low intention to buy such product at the moment when he/she reads the eWOM. On the other hand, the "High" end demonstrates that a consumer wishes or has high intention to buy such product. The two axis: product familiarity and purchase intention form the four major dimensions as four different motivations as shown in Figure 2.

		Product familiarity	
		Low	High
Purchase intention	Low	Information Skimming	Information Storing
	High	Information Searching	Information Securing

Figure 2. A framework of 4-IS categories

First of all, consumers in the "Information Searching" category means that consumers have high intention to buy a product while having less or incomplete product related information. In the situation, these consumers search eWOM to complement their lack of product information and help them to form purchase decisions when deciding to buy products. EWOM may be viewed as a source of information.

Second, consumers in the "Information Securing" category are familiar with products and have high intention to buy such products. In the situation, these consumers search eWOM to confirm or to support their purchase decisions after they already decide which brand or product they want to buy. Under this situation, eWOM may be viewed as a source of

confirmation or proof to prove that the consumer's decision is right.

The category of "Information Skimming" happens when consumers have less or incomplete product related information and have low intention to consume products. In the situation, consumers read eWOM just for fun or spending free time. EWOM may be viewed as a source of fun or pleasure.

Last, consumers in the "Information Storing" category denote that they have low intention to buy products but are familiar with products. In the situation, these consumers read eWOM to improve or update their knowledge base in order to get a sense of achievement or make a connection with friends. EWOM may be viewed as a source of knowledge.

5 Conclusion

This study tries to explore the nature of consumer's motivation of reading eWOM and could be one of initial studies attempts to discuss the issue. By interviewing 30 consumers, the study finds the 4-IS categories about consumers' motivations of reading eWOM, including "Information Searching", "Information Securing", "Information Skimming" and "Information Storing".

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Information Searching

This study found that most consumers are motivated by "information search". This finding means that consumers rarely make purchasing decisions with insufficient information. Similar to previous findings, consumers seek eWOM for functional reasons [49], such as reading eWOM for product information. However, this study further found that the product information contained in eWOM has different functions in different consumption stages and situations. The aforementioned differences make for different functional motivations for the search for eWOM.

In this category, consumers may first form purchasing decisions by searching and reading eWOM as bottom-up processing [50]. Afterwards, consumers actively test the decision by searching and reading eWOM again as a hypothesis testing process [51]. The findings of this study found that the part that formed the purchasing decision was similar to the motivation to obtain information and the motivation to participate in the decision, while the part of validating the purchasing decision was similar to the motivation related to reducing or avoiding risk.

5.1.2 Information Storing

There are many consumers holding the "Information Storing" motivation. Study participants took knowledge from EWOM, contextualized it according to their specific circumstances, and then passed on this knowledge to their friends and family as their own. These actors make the knowledge gleaned from EWOM more relevant in their close ties by bridging this knowledge, which is viral and influential in its scope and impact.

Consumers with this motivation update their information or improve their knowledge base by reading eWOM [12]. Then, gain a sense of achievement or satisfaction through the opportunity to interact online with friends about products and services. That is, the motivation to read and share eWOM is because consumers want to attract the attention of others by possessing certain information or knowledge [52].

5.1.3 Information Skimming

One of the important motivations for consumers to read eWOM is "information skimming". Some study participants said they read EWOM for enjoyment, relaxation and entertainment. Consumers engage online because there is nothing better to do. In the digital age, more and more people use their spare time to surf the Internet [53]. For these consumers, browsing eWOM is one of their common activities on the Internet, and they do it for no other reason than for fun.

This study found that, in addition to functional motivations for reading eWAOM, consumers read eWOM online for hedonic reasons. That is to say, entertainment is an important motivation for consumers to read eWOM.

5.1.4 Information Securing

With the motivation of "Information Securing", consumers start with certain purchase decisions as reference points which drive them to find appropriate eWOM to confirm such decisions. These consumers act as the confirming process of Hoch and Ha's findings [54]. In such a process, consumers are guided by their experience and prior knowledge as a top-down process [50]. Next, they searched and read eWOM online to confirm their purchase decision.

Consumers go online for information as part of a consumer search process that rigorously screens and compares online products and services. Because they want to reduce purchase risk (risk motivation), ensure product quality (convenience and quality motivation) and gain economic benefits (price consciousness motivation) by finding and reading eWOM. With this motivation, consumers seek information online in a more spontaneous manner.

5.2 Theoretical and Managerial Contribution

This study contributes to a better understanding of the motivation for reading eWOM. It provides a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on motivations for reading eWOM. And propose four motivational categories for consumers to read eWOM to combine and complement past research findings.

This study further builds up a framework by two dimensions – consumer's product familiarity and purchase intention to match the 4-IS categories. These two dimensions form four major spaces which roughly match the 4-IS categories. Based on the concept of MOAB model, this study attempts to explain the motivation, ability, opportunity and behavior of consumers to read eWOM through the description of four spaces.

In practice, although marketers could choose several channels to promote their products and services, eWOM is likely to be a more effective channel when a consumer needs further information about a product offering [31]. Many researchers believe that eWOM is reliable information for consumers and causes more consumers' empathy because eWOM is individual experiences and stories [55]. Marketers should be aware of the changes that eWOM has brought the potential link between a product and a consumer [49].

The concept and taxonomy developed in the study try to improve the understanding of consumer's motivations of reading eWOM. This study provides some useful insights for marketers to systematically analyze why consumers read eWOM. This study's variability in consumer motivation to read eWOM suggests that marketers must consider a broad range of reasons that lead consumers to read eWOM. Some consumers may rely more on eWOM than others; understanding the motivations for this behavior is useful to influence their online opinion-seeking behavior. Consumers can be heterogeneous in their reading of eWOM. They may be divided into different groups based on different motivations. Armed with this knowledge, managers can design strategies that incentivize more consumers to participate in eWOM. For example, consumers can be encouraged to seek out specific products by appealing to their primary motivation for seeking eWOM.

While eWOM contents and types are important, the readers also play important roles in eWOM's influences. It is readers that eWOM tries to influence. What eWOM really impacts is the readers rather than the eWOM itself. The findings of this study provide contributions in understanding why consumers read eWOM. It not only helps us analyze a consumer's motivation of reading eWOM but also helps us to understand the role that eWOM plays in their reading process.

EWOM is one of the most important marketing tools, and platform operators and marketers need to understand why their consumers read eWOM for product or service information. Effective use of eWOM on a business website can bring advantages to both the client and the company. This study provides platform operators and marketers with insights into why consumers read eWOM on websites.

The result of this study can help businesses become more customer-oriented to create a competitive advantage and attract more people to their platforms. Marketers can use this information to understand why customers read eWOM about their product, service or brand. Armed with this information, they can develop appropriate strategies to acquire new customers and encourage existing customers to spread more eWOM.

5.3 Limitation and Future Research

The study raises some important questions for future research. First, in this study, we focus on consumer's motivations and the meaning of these eWOM in reading process. These findings may not be generalized to the traditional WOM. People involved in eWOM communication may not represent people involved in traditional WOM communication. Therefore, future research is encouraged to compare eWOM with traditional WOM with regard to the contents and participants.

Second, researchers can compare and contrast differences of the motivations with different products, for instance, functional product, hedonic service, etc. Researchers may obtain better understanding about how product characteristics influence consumers' motivations of reading eWOM.

Third, this study did not discuss the type of media of eWOM, but the study pointed out that different media have different effects on eWOM transmission [56-58]. Subsequent research can be conducted separately for different media.

Finally, this study only explores identify the typology of consumer's motivations of reading eWOM. The complicated relationships among different motivations and influences remain unknown. To carefully investigate these relationships is another important research question.

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