

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented results and analysis of data. This chapter is about using those results to discuss findings of the study along with contribution of the study and managerial implications. Moreover, limitations of the study and suggestions for future study are presented in this chapter.

### **6.1 Discussion of the research results**

In this section research questions that were forwarded in the first chapter will lead the discussion.

#### **I. How do consumer's personality characteristics influence their attitudes towards word of mouth in offline compared to online environment?**

In this study, the researcher used Pearson correlation and Regression analysis in order to determine the relationship, and its strength, among personality characteristics and attitude towards WOM. Table 6.1 summarizes the results. As presented in this table, five alternative hypotheses were supported and seven alternative hypotheses were rejected.

#### ***Self-Confidence and Attitude towards WOM***

Self confidence was hypothesized to be related to the attitude towards WOM in online environments and in conventional method. According to the correlations matrix this variable is significantly correlated with attitude of conventional WOM. However there is no significant relationship between self confidence and attitude towards online WOM. On the other hand regression analysis does not confirm any significant relationship between the two variables either

| <b>Hypothesis</b>  | <b>Result</b> |
|--|---------------|
| H1a<br>There is a positive relationship between Self Confidence of customer and their attitude towards online word of mouth.                     | Rejected      |
| H1b<br>There is a negative relationship between Conservativeness and customer's attitude towards online WOM.                                     | Supported     |
| H1c<br>There is a positive relationship between customer's Assertiveness and their attitude towards online word of mouth.                        | Rejected      |
| H1d<br>There is a positive relationship between customer's Risk-taking attitude and their attitude towards online word of mouth.                 | Rejected      |
| H1e<br>There is a positive relationship between customer's Sense of Justice and their attitude towards online word of mouth.                     | Supported     |
| H2a<br>There is a positive relationship between Self Confidence of customer and their attitude towards conventional word of mouth.               | Rejected      |
| H2b<br>There is a negative relationship between Conservativeness and customer's attitude towards conventional WOM                                | Rejected      |
| H2c<br>There is a positive relationship between customer's Assertiveness and their attitude towards conventional word of mouth.                  | Rejected      |
| H2d<br>There is a positive relationship between customer's Risk-taking attitude and their attitude towards conventional word of mouth.           | Rejected      |
| H2e<br>There is a positive relationship between customer's Sense of Justice and their attitude towards conventional word of mouth.               | Supported     |
| H3<br>Attitude towards online word of mouth is positively related with consumers' actual behavior of spreading online word of mouth.             | Supported     |
| H4<br>Attitude towards conventional word of mouth is positively related with consumers' actual behavior of spreading conventional word of mouth. | Supported     |

Table 6.1 Summary of Hypotheses and Results

Online or Conventional. Therefore we may conclude that in this study self-confidence is not found to be significantly related with attitude towards word of mouth. Further regression analysis was also done to investigate relationship of self confidence and behavioral side of WOM. Nevertheless no significant relation was found. All in all we can conclude that the null hypotheses of  $H_{01a}$  and  $H_{02a}$  were accepted and the alternative hypothesis was rejected.

These results are partially contradicting with results of study by Lau and Ng (2001) who state that high self-confident individuals tend to engage more in negative word of mouth behavior. One possible explanation could be that in the present study, negative and positive WOM are not discriminated and items only measure WOM attitude and behavior regardless of positivity or negativity. Therefore, in different settings, results could be dissimilar.

### ***Conservativeness and Attitude towards WOM***

Conservativeness is negatively correlated with both attitudinal variables. However only relationship of conservativeness and attitude towards online WOM are statistically significant and is validated through regression analysis. Although conservativeness is negatively correlated with attitude towards conventional WOM, this relationship is not significant. Therefore we may conclude that H1b is supported and H2b is rejected. It can be concluded that the more conservative the person the less positive attitude that person holds towards online WOM.

Further regression analysis on relationship of conservativeness and behavior of online and conventional word of mouth confirms a significant relationship between conservativeness and 'behavior of conventional WOM'. This means that conservativeness negatively affects people's behavior in spreading WOM without affecting their attitudes (refer to Appendix C). In other words although conservative people may have positive attitudes towards WOM, when it comes to actual behavior, their conservativeness might get in their way in performing word of mouth.

### ***Assertiveness and Attitude towards WOM***

According to correlations table, assertiveness has quite significant relationship with attitude towards online and conventional word of mouth. However, although this variable has higher Beta compared to three other variables, according to regression results there is no significant

relationship with attitude towards online and conventional WOM. Therefore the null hypotheses of H<sub>0</sub>1c and H<sub>0</sub>2c are accepted and the alternative is rejected.

However, further regression analysis on relationship of assertiveness and behavior of online and conventional word of mouth confirms a significant relationship between assertiveness and ‘behavior of conventional WOM’ (refer to Appendix C). In other words, the more assertiveness of a person, the higher likelihood of engaging in spreading conventional word of mouth and this is not necessarily affecting their WOM attitude. This result is in line with findings of Lau and Ng (2001) which state that customers who express their complaints, tend to be more assertive.

#### ***Risk Taking and Attitude towards WOM***

Risk taking attitude has statistically significant correlation with attitude towards online word of mouth. However, interestingly there is no significant relationship between risk taking and attitude towards conventional word of mouth. Yet, regression analysis rejects both hypotheses and supports the null hypotheses of H<sub>0</sub>1d and H<sub>0</sub>2d.

One possible explanation could be that word of mouth communications are not perceived as involving high social risks, and people usually communicate WOM within the social norms, therefore having positive attitude or showing WOM behavior is not related to risk taking attitude.

#### ***Sense of Justice and Attitude towards WOM***

Sense of Justice is the only variable which is confirmed to have significant relationship with both attitudinal variables. Correlation and regression analysis both confirm that Sense of Justice is significantly related to attitude towards online word of mouth. Meaning that the higher the persons has sense of justice and cares for other people, the more positive attitude towards online WOM they hold.

Similarly, correlation and regression analysis embody a positive relation between sense of justice and attitude towards conventional word of mouth. In other words the stronger sense of justice of an individual results in more positive attitude to conventional WOM. Therefore, H1e and H2e are both supported and the null hypotheses are rejected.

Further regression analysis verifies a significant coefficient between sense of justice and behavior of spreading online and conventional word of mouth (see appendix C). These results are in line with previous literature on relationship between social responsibility and word of mouth behavior by Lau and Ng (2001). This is also another proof for the notion of ‘people of goodwill’ by Dichter (1966) that states other-involvement or helping other people is one of the most important motivators for people to engage in word of mouth.

## **II. What is the relationship between customers’ Attitudes towards Conventional and Online word of mouth and their Behavior of Spreading WOM?**

As expected, there is a positive relationship between attitude and behavior of word of mouth. Both Pearson correlation and Sobel test confirm this significant relationship and its mediating effect between the five independent variables and ultimate dependant variable. In other words, stronger attitude towards online WOM results in higher possibility of showing behavior of spreading online WOM. Moreover, the more positive attitude towards conventional WOM, the higher possibility of spreading conventional WOM. Therefore it can be summarized that null hypotheses of H<sub>03</sub> and H<sub>04</sub> are rejected and the alternative hypotheses are supported. This result is in line with Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and result of research by Bagozzi and Yi (1989) which state that ‘attitude’ is the dominant predictor of ‘behavior’.

In addition, the correlations matrix shows that there is strong correlation among all attitudinal and behavioral variables. Meaning that individuals who hold positive attitude towards

conventional WOM are expected to have positive attitude towards online WOM as well. Moreover, attitude of online WOM is correlated with behavior of conventional WOM. Similar relationship is also true for attitude of conventional WOM and behavior of online WOM.

### **III. What is the difference between WOM in online and offline environment?**

As mentioned earlier, the correlation and regression analysis in the two frameworks differ from each other. Correlations table does not illustrate any significant correlation between self-confidence and attitude towards online WOM. However this relationship is significant the offline (conventional) method. Moreover, conservativeness is significantly related to attitude in online environment but do not significantly support this relationship for attitude towards conventional WOM. The reason could be that people do not show conservative behavior when dealing with their family and friends but when it comes to the public and the idea that is going to be published in the internet, they might be more conservative. Similar relationship is true for risk taking attitude.

On the other hand there are similarities between the two environments. Regression and correlation analysis suggest a significant correlation between sense of justice and attitude towards online and offline WOM. Moreover, the relationship of attitude and behavior is same for both environments. In addition, although assertiveness is significantly correlated with the two attitudinal variables, the regression analysis refuses this relation for the both variables.

## **6.2 Contribution of the Study**

### *a) Contribution to Theory*

The relationship between personality characteristics and attitude and behavior of word of mouth have not much been explored before. Although in this study we applied a set of characteristics which were used by Kau and Liu (1997) as the independent variables, the purpose of this study and its distinctive dependent variable, set this study apart from others. In other words this research is unique in its own way.

Moreover, the comparative nature of this study also makes it unlike any other studies. The difference of online and offline (conventional) methods of spreading word of mouth has never been explored before.

Some studies have investigated relationship of ‘concern for others’ or ‘other-involvement’, and word of mouth (Dichter, 1966; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). As mentioned earlier this concept is similar to what we characterized as ‘sense of justice’. This study is another proof for their findings. Other than that we investigated relationship of self-confidence, conservativeness, assertiveness and risk taking attitude which has never been done with such settings.

#### *b) Contribution to Methodology*

In this study, the researcher used ‘online survey’ which is relatively new and innovative method for approaching the target respondents. Although there are some limitations in this approach, this study has successfully employed the online context to reach the target and allow their contribution in responding to the questionnaire.

### **6.3 Managerial Implications**

In this section we use results of previous chapter in order to make suggestions and recommendation for managers. Since word of mouth is one of the most important factors for

marketers and managers, it is important for them to take the necessary steps in order to generate positive WOM.

This study provides fresh insights to marketers about word of mouth and its relation with personal character of individuals. One of the most important implications of this research is to assist marketers in their psychographic segmentation. Specifically marketers can apply these results while segmenting customers in relation with their potential word of mouth behavior.

Furthermore, this study provides insights for online platforms operators about personality characteristics of review writers. This could also assist them in their psychographic segmentation. Moreover they can develop programs that appeal to the basic motives and characteristics that drive e-WOM behavior. Based on that, they can create more customer-oriented services in their websites.

### *Conservativeness*

We know that conservative people are more likely to hesitate sharing opinions especially in public, in order to keep away from conflict of ideas. As our results confirm, conservativeness is negatively affecting attitude and behavior of WOM in online and offline environments respectively. This means that conservatives do not hold positive attitude towards writing a comment in online websites. They either do not trust online reviews or do not like to express their opinions in a website. Therefore, organizations are recommended to provide platforms for these people to anonymously express their opinions. These platforms must be user friendly and easy to access. Moreover, since conservative individuals are less expected to spread word of mouth, companies can provide some incentives for them to do so.



### *Assertiveness*

As mentioned in the literature review, assertive people are concerned about their and others rights, so they believe they should express their opinions and share their ideas. According to our results assertiveness is significantly related to actual behavior of spreading conventional WOM. In other words assertive people are more likely to engage in word of mouth to their family and friends. Marketers can take advantage of this behavior in their Viral Marketing activities. Using personality tests, they can choose candidates with highly assertive character for creating buzz or Viral Marketing. Moreover, companies must make sure to satisfy these customers, otherwise assertive customers are among those who might complaint or spread negative word of mouth against the company. This can be a basis for Customer Relationship Management (CRM) programs.

### *Sense of Justice*

Sense of justice is the dominant variable affecting both attitude and behavior in spreading WOM in online and conventional method. This means that the most important reason for people in engaging in WOM is the motivation to help others and feeling responsible to inform other people either friends or strangers.

People with higher sense of justice would be quite important and influential for companies. First of all, companies must make sure to satisfy these customers as much as possible, have service recovery plans in place and compensate customers were applicable. The reason is that such individuals are highly likely to inform other people about any unsatisfactory product or service. These people feel responsible to let everybody know about a poor service, because of fairness and responsibility that they have to others. Secondly, companies must notice that these people also feel responsible to spread positive word of mouth in case they are satisfied with a service.

Therefore they can be as company ambassadors. This can be a basis for Customer Relationship Management Programs to always keep these customers happy.

### *Attitude and Behavior*

As expected, our results show that there is a positive relationship between attitude and behavior in engaging in word of mouth either conventional or online. Therefore, if companies attempt to generate and enhance positive word of mouth, they must create positive approach and feelings about word of mouth. As for online WOM, companies must create trustworthy online sources for customers. In addition they must assure of avoiding any kind of manipulation of online reviews and ratings. In this way, customers feel more trust in the online review platforms. Moreover, customers must be educated and encouraged to review online sources before making purchase decisions; so that they will hold more optimistic opinions about the online word of mouth and will be more likely to spread WOM after using a product or service.

Marketers must also monitor online reviews about their company's products and services. They need to make sure that they listen to the feedback generated through online gateways. These feedbacks can be one of the best inputs for improvement to products and services. In addition, any improvements as a result of listening to customer feedback could positively affect their attitude towards word of mouth and its strength.

## **6.4 Research Limitations**

A number of limitations are associated with this study as a result of time and resources constraints:

- Time limitations forced us to cover only a few geographical areas. In Malaysia, Klang Valley was the dominant place for respondents. In the US, participants generally resided in New Jersey and California; and in Iran the study sample included residents of the capital city, Tehran. This might make it difficult to generalize the results to other cities and countries, especially to those that are less developed in terms of Internet access.
- As a result of using online surveys, there was no control on the behavior of respondents while answering the survey. Moreover, there was no control on whether the correspondent is the targeted respondent of the study.
- As with every new research field, there is lack in some of secondary data since this area is in its early stages.

## **6.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

There are some opportunities for improvement to the findings of this study that can be considered for future research:

- A major challenge for future research would be to continue to refine the measures and constructs used in this study to validate those measures; doing so also would allow for replication of the findings of this research. This replication could include a larger sample from other areas rather than the study's geographical concentration.
- More variables could be compiled in the model, since other than personality characteristics many other variables can influence attitude and behavior of word of mouth.
- The focus of the research was on Travel Industry. Replication of the study in other industries can provide some other fresh insights and opinions.

## **6.6 Summary**

This study has made major contribution to the academicians, marketers and operators of online WOM platforms. In this ultimate chapter, we discussed the findings of the study and its implications. The managerial implications presented based on the dominant variables. Three research questions which were forwarded at the beginning of the study, were answered in this chapter. Furthermore, research limitations and recommendations for future studies were presented.