CHAPTER FIVE

TRADITIONAL WORD OF MOUTH VERSUS ONLINE WORD OF MOUTH

This chapter offers insights as to which medium of word of mouth has a relatively better influence on consumer purchase behaviour.

CHAPTER V:

TRADITIONAL WORD OF MOUTH VERSUS ONLINE WORD OF MOUTH

This chapter deals with the second objective of the study, i.e. to find out which medium of word of mouth fares better performance-wise: Traditional word of mouth or Electronic word of mouth. Traditional word of mouth entails the personal face-to-face exchange of product related information between two or more consumers whereas online word of mouth refers to the same exchange but conducted in online settings. Through varied online mediums, consumers can easily share their views and experiences about products with everyone (Leskovec et al., 2007). The prime mediums of online word of mouth include: Email accounts, Blogs, Vlogs, Social networks, Web based forums, Media sharing sites and Instant messenger services.

The potential of traditional WoM communication has been given a lot of attention by earlier researchers and practitioners. However, over time, with the advent of social networks, there has been a noticeable shift in consumers' engagement from personal conversations towards electronic information sources as its effects are more widespread and not just restricted to the inner circle of friends, family and acquaintances. Therefore, it is argued that there is a greater need to study the influence of online word of mouth on consumers and see which medium fares better in terms of performance. Therefore, the research question that we are trying to answer here is that is electronic WoM more persuasive to consumers than traditional WoM towards their decision-making.

As described earlier in section 3.6.3, a diary panel design involving 300 respondents across five urban centres of Assam, i.e. Guwahati, Silchar, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tezpur is carried out as a part of the study. Asking people to keep an updated record of their experiences helps capture rich data on personal motives, feelings, and beliefs in an easy way (Jacelon & Imperio, 2005; Lee, 2000). Using the diary method has several advantages of its own. Firstly, respondents are encouraged to record thoughts and feelings as soon as they occur, which helps eliminate memory errors. Secondly, people using this method can report their stuff in their own way, on their own time, according to their convenience which adds to the quality of the information. The basic criteria laid down for inclusion of respondents in the sample are:

a) The respondent must be an active internet user;

b) The respondent must not be aged less than 18;

c) The respondent must at-least have completed high school education.

d) The respondent must be a resident of that city for at-least the last three years;

e) No two members of the same house will be selected to avoid duplicity of opinions.

For the purpose of the study, the diary entry method is structured as paper-pencil method so as to ensure more sampling control. Electronic diaries require maintenance of devices which may break or need replacement. The respondents wrote down about the word of mouth recommendations they received recently. Before embarking on the study, the consent of the respondents is taken and assurance is given to them about keeping their private information safe to meet ethical standards. Incomplete diary entries are discarded from the pool of total answers. Data obtained is then analysed using descriptive statistics, and thematic analysis. The various activities that take place throughout the diary study happen in a phased manner, as follows:

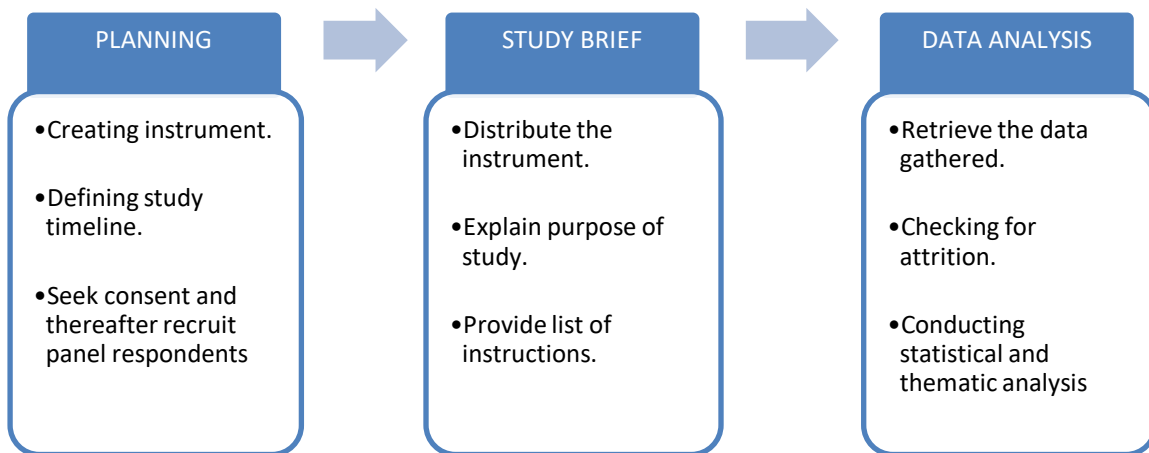| PLANNING	STUDY BRIEF	DATA ANALYSIS
• Creating instrument. • Defining study timeline. • Seek consent and thereafter recruit panel respondents	• Distribute the instrument. • Explain purpose of study. • Provide list of instructions.	• Retrieve the data gathered. • Checking for attrition. • Conducting statistical and thematic analysis

Fig 5.1: Phases of Diary Study

For each consumer, data is received pertaining to their identity characteristics, preferred values, internet usage patterns, product recommended, the platform used, the conversation details and eventually its impact on consumer purchase behaviour.

This chapter is divided into four main sections:

I) In the first section, we discuss the demographic, psychographic and netnographic profile of the respondents.

II) In the second section, we study the products talked about, the industries covered and how effectiveness differs there.

III) In the third section, a quantitative analysis of the effectiveness of word of mouth across both mediums is carried out.

IV) In the last section, a thematic analysis of the WoM conversations is carried out to understanding of WoM effectiveness across different platforms.

5.1: Respondent Profile

5.1.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents:

The demographic data concerning the respondents is graphically represented in the following section. This is necessary to check whether or not the sample has an adequate representation from different groups. Only then, the inferences drawn from the results would add more meaning to the research. The sample shows a domination of male respondents, with the male female ratio coming to 57:43. This unequal distribution is caused by the fact that more men than women were positive and willing to accept the invitation to be a part of the survey.
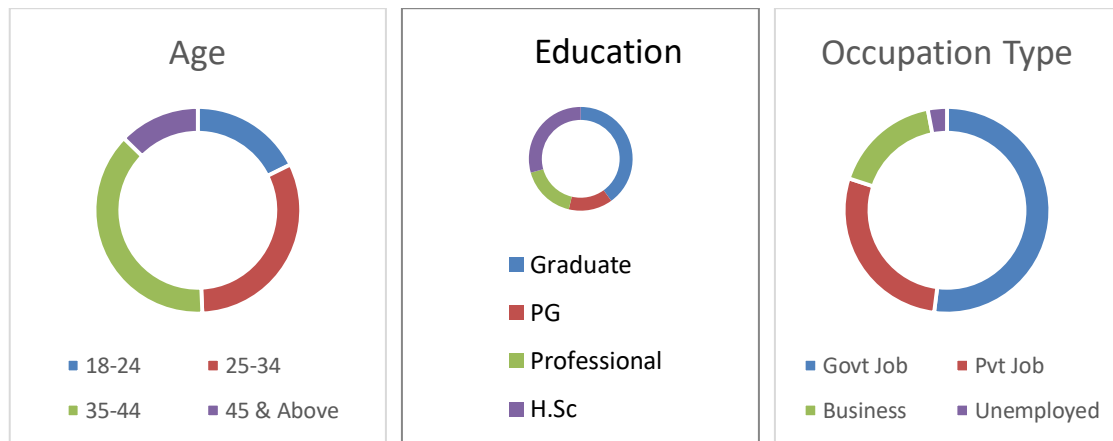

Fig 5.2: Age Group   Fig: 5.3: Educational Level   Fig 5.4: Occupation Type

Most of the respondents (38 percent) were in the age bracket of 35-44 followed by around 31.6 percent of respondents in the 25-34 age brackets. In terms of educational background, about 40 percent of the respondents were graduates, followed by 29.3 percent of the respondents who have completed their high school credentials. About 17 percent of the respondents were professional degree holders and 13.7 percent had completed their post-graduation. As far as occupation is concerned, a majority of the

respondents (52 percent) are engaged in government jobs, 28 percent are engaged in the private sector, while 17 percent are engaged in business.
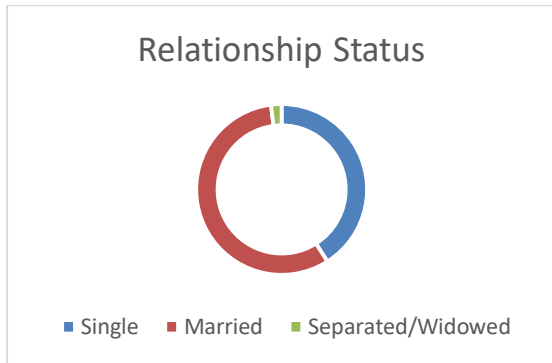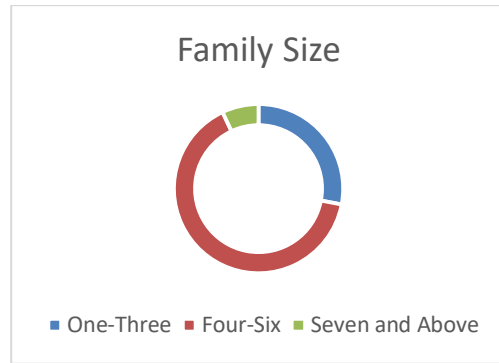

Fig 5.5: Relationship Status

Fig 5.6: Family Size

Of the respondents surveyed, 57 percent of the respondents were married, 41 percent were single, and the remaining 2 percent were separated and/ or widowed. If we talk about family size, about 65 pc of the respondents belong to the 4-6 family size segment, followed by 28 percent of the respondents in the 1-3 segment.
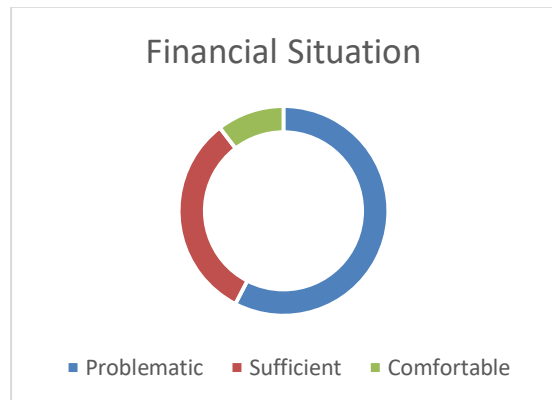

Fig 5.7: Income distribution
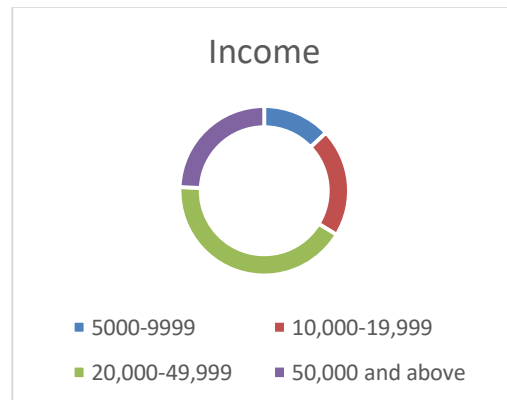
Fig 5.8: Financial wellbeing

In terms of monthly earnings, about 42 percent of the respondents fall in the INR 20,000-49,999 income group, followed by 24.3 percent in the INR 50,000 and above income group. When further quizzed about their financial situation, 57.60 percent of the respondents said it was difficult and they faced financial problems. Around 32 percent of the respondents said their earnings were sufficient and just enough to cover the expenses.

5.1.2: Psychographic Profile of Respondents

Psychographics evaluate and categorize people based on common characteristics such as values and attitudes. Over the years, psychographic segmentation emerged as an

alternative method that aims to fill the gaps left by other types of segmentation like demographic segmentation. For this study, only the list of values (LOV) is considered. The *List of values* is a scale developed by Kahle (1983) that serves as a key value measurement instrument in the study of consumer behaviour. It is based on the elements of Maslow's need hierarchy theory and social adaptation theory.

This variable helps in determining people's affinity for different value aspects like Sense of belonging, Excitement in life, Warm relationships with others, Self-fulfilment, Being well respected, Fun and enjoyment, Security, Self-respect, Sense of accomplishment. The participants were asked to indicate their preference in the LOV scale in terms of Very Unimportant, Moderately Important and Very Important. A frequency analysis of the list of values reveals which values are considered more important by the respondents and which are not.

Table 5A: Importance of List of Values

List of Values	Very unimportant		Moderately important		Very important	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sense of belonging	-	-	17	5.7	283	94.3
Excitement	-	-	6	2.0	294	98.0
Warm relationship with others	-	-	3	1.0	297	99.0
Self-fulfilment in life	-	-	4	1.3	296	98.7
Being well respected	-	-	7	2.3	293	97.7
Fun and Enjoyment in life	-	-	11	3.7	289	96.3
Security	-	-	45	14.6	255	85.4
Self-respect	-	-	22	7.3	278	92.7
Sense of accomplishment	-	-	29	9.7	271	90.3

The findings show most consumers value warm relationship with others (99 pc), self-fulfilment in life (98.7 pc), excitement (98 pc) and being well respected (97.7 pc) over the other mentioned values. On the other hand, values like security (85.4 pc) and sense of accomplishment (90.3 pc) are relatively less important values for them.

5.1.3: Netnographic Profile of Respondents:

Netnography is a unique method devised specifically to investigate the behaviour of consumers active on the internet. It encompasses online social interactions and involves

portrayals of the people's real online behaviour, providing key insights about how people conduct themselves online. As a part of the study, data is collected about the internet usage behaviour of the respondents through direct questions asked to them in a structured format. Based on the information gathered, the netnographic profile of the respondents is created as under:

Table 5B: Netnographic Profile

Netnographic Factors (N=300)		Number	Percentage
TYPE OF INTERNET CONNECTION	Mobile Data/Hotspot	158	52.70
	Modem connection	92	30.63
	Broadband connection	50	16.67
TYPE OF DEVICE USED	Mobile/Tablet	158	52.70
	Laptop/PC	72	24.00
	Multiple Devices	70	23.30
PRIOR EXPERIENCE	New User	09	03.00
	User since 1 year	64	21.30
	User since last 3 years	227	75.70
FREQUENCY OF USAGE	Daily	231	77.00
	Weekly	43	14.30
	Fortnightly	04	01.30
	Monthly	22	07.40
TIME SPENT ONLINE	0-1 hour	35	11.70
	1-2 hours	239	79.70
	2-3 hours	24	08.00
	3-4 hours	02	00.60
PRIMARY USAGE PURPOSE	Information	155	51.70
	Shopping	19	06.30
	Socializing	56	18.70
	Entertainment	70	23.30
PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE COMMUNITIES	Never	07	02.30
	Rarely	232	77.30
	Regularly	61	20.30
READ MARKETING BLOGS	Never	09	03.00
	Sometimes	190	63.33
	Regularly	101	33.67
READ PRODUCT REVIEWS	Never	18	06.00
	Sometimes	172	57.33
	Regularly	112	36.67
ONLINE TRUST	Low	36	12.00
	Medium	159	53.00
	High	105	35.00

NO. OF EMAIL ACCOUNTS	One	212	70.66
	Two	73	24.34
	More than two	15	05.00
SOCIAL NETWORK PRESENCE	Facebook	91	30.33
	Instagram	53	17.67
	Twitter	26	08.67
	Multiple Networks	130	43.33
SOCIAL NETWORK ACTIVITY	Low	25	08.40
	Medium	187	62.30
	High	88	29.30

The findings reveal that:

i) More than half of the respondents are reliant on mobile data for accessing internet while another 30 percent have opted for using a modem connection. Almost 17 percent of the respondents for a broadband connection.

ii) Around 53 percent of the respondents have said they use handheld devices like cell phones and tablets to access internet. 24 percent of the respondents use either laptop or personal computer and the remaining use multiple devices.

iii) Around 75 percent of the respondents have been using the internet actively since the past three years. 21 percent of the respondents have been internet users for at-least a year while the remaining 4 percent are new users.

iv) Around 77 percent of the respondents apparently log on to the internet on a daily basis, 14 percent on a weekly basis and 7.4 percent on a monthly basis.

v) In terms of intensity of usage, around 80 percent of respondents have revealed that once they go online, they spend between 1-2 hours online in a session.

vi) Around 52 percent of the respondents have claimed that their primary purpose behind using internet was searching for information. For another 23 percent of the respondents, the primary purpose is entertainment in the form of music and movies. A further 19 percent have said their primary purpose is using social networks.

vii) A vast majority of the respondents (77 percent) have revealed that they rarely participate in online communities.

viii) About one-third of the respondents follow and go through marketing blogs (33 percent) and read product related reviews (37 percent) regularly.

ix) More than one third of the respondents (35 percent) have stated that their trust on online sources of information is higher. 53 percent of the respondents have shown moderate trust on online mediums.

x) Around 71 percent of the respondents have reported that they have at-least one active email account. Another 29 percent report that they have two or more email accounts for work and personal purposes.

xi) Around 30 percent of the respondents have stated that they are not just present but highly active on social media networks. 62 percent of respondents have showed moderate level of social network activity.

5.2: WoM Incident and Influence across industries:

A total of 913 word of mouth conversations have been entered by all the 300 participants taken together. They have mentioned at least two recommendations and at most four of them. Attrition was noticed in the last week of the study as a vast majority of the participants have not made any entry for the fourth week of the study. Based on the products which were talked about, an industry profile is prepared that shows the numbers and percentages of word of mouth conversations cutting across different industries.

Table 5C: Industry Profile

Industry Type	Popular Products	Frequency	Percent
Electronic Goods	*Mobile, Laptop, Hard disk, USB*	564	61.80
Fashion	*Men's/Women's Clothing, Kids wear*	203	22.20
Automobile	*Cars, Bikes, Auto parts, Service Centre*	45	04.90
Publishing	*Books, Guides, Exam Prep Materials*	35	03.80
Healthcare	*Hospitals, Test Centres, Doctors*	27	03.00
Accessories	*Bags, Wallets, Watches, Jewellry*	19	02.10
Cosmetics	*Skin care products, Grooming Kit*	8	00.90
Electrical Appls	*Water Purifier, AC, Electric Kettle*	6	00.70
Miscellaneous	*Tourism, Hotels, Restaurants.*	6	00.70

On analyzing the word of mouth recommendations, it is noticed that close to 62 percent of the conversations were about electronic goods, followed closely by fashion goods that stand at 22 percent of the total conversations. Other prominent industries where word of mouth is more prevalent includes the automobile industry, the publishing industry and the healthcare sector.

On analyzing the word of mouth effectiveness scores, measured on a five point Likert scale, it is noticed that word of mouth effectiveness is highest in the healthcare sector (4.25). WoM Effectiveness is more or less the same in case of electronic goods industry (4.06) and the fashion goods industry (4.15). Additional findings reveal how WoM Effectiveness is relatively lower in the accessories segment (3.90).

5.3.1: WoM Mediums and WoM Effectiveness

This section of the study sheds light on the various word of mouth recommendations that are recalled and entered by the participants in the diary based study. Following the four week period, all the recommendations entered in the participant's diaries are digitized. In total, the participants completed 913 diary entries that contained word of mouth reviews or recommendations. Efforts are then made to classify the recommendations across different platforms via which they were received and then study the effectiveness of the same.

The effectiveness of a recommendation is measured by computing the mean of the scores assigned by the respondent on eight key marketing outcomes – awareness, interest, preference level, product enquiry, product trial, organizational image, purchase intent and actual purchase, all measured on a five point Likert scale.

Earlier research by Li and Du (2017) has shown that offline social networks are more effective than online social networks when it comes to promoting products. Bayraktar and Erdogan (2015) echoed the same view stating consumers trust offline WoM more than online WoM as the later restricts emotional exchanges. Rosario et al (2016) reveal in their study that the effectiveness of electronic word of mouth differs across platform, product, and metric factors. This study seeks to understand which of the two mediums is more effective performance-wise and further analyse if this effectiveness differs across multiple online platforms. For this purpose, the following hypothesis is set - H_A: WoM

Effectiveness remains the same irrespective of the medium through which word of mouth message is released.

Firstly, the Independent sample *t* test is carried out to see whether or not there are any differences in the impact levels of online word of mouth versus offline word of mouth. Before carrying out the test, the assumption of normality is tested. In order to check for normality of the dependent variable, i.e. WoM Effectiveness, Q-Q plot method is adopted. The plot reveals that a majority of the data points are close to the diagonal line which means the data are normally distributed and there are no outliers. Once the conditions have been proven to be met, the test is conducted.

Table 5D: Descriptive Statistics – WoM Medium

WoM Mediums	N	Mean	SD
Online	409	4.04	.532
Offline	504	4.14	.449
Total	913	4.10	.490

Table 5E: Independent Samples T Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	SE Diff	95% CI	
									Lower	Upper
Eff Mean	Equal variances assumed	7.764	.005	-3.008	911	.003	-.0977	.0325	-.1616	-.03399
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.95	798.6	.003	-.0977	.0330	-.1627	-.03284

Mean scores suggest that although marginal, WoM Effectiveness is higher in case of offline or traditional medium rather than online medium. SD values of less than one imply lesser variability in scores. However, in offline word of mouth, the variation is lower than that of online word of mouth. The Independent Sample *t* test reveals results as t = -3.008, *p* = .003 which is less than the chosen significance level $\alpha = 0.05$.

Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis, and conclude that word of mouth effectiveness differs for both the mediums.

5.3.2: WoM Effectiveness across online WoM Platforms

To understand the specifics, online word of mouth is broken down into different internet based platforms and their numbers are analysed so as to find out which platforms are comparatively more effective. Word of mouth is communicated through different social networks, blogs, email accounts, video streaming sites and messaging applications.

Table 5F: Descriptive Statistics – WoM Platforms

WoM Platforms	N	Percent	Mean	SD
Social networks	306	74.81	4.07	.449
Email Accounts	35	8.55	3.62	1.00
Q&A websites	30	7.33	4.10	.536
Video Streaming sites	23	5.62	4.24	.289
Messaging apps	15	3.69	4.04	.532
Total	**409**	**100**	**4.04**	**.490**

Table 5G: ANOVA Table

Effectiveness	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.414	4	1.854	6.902	.000
Within Groups	108.492	404	.269		
Total	115.906	408			

In order to study if WoM Effectiveness differs across different online platforms, hypothesis is set – **H$_B$**: WoM Effectiveness remains the same across all internet platforms. One way ANOVA is conducted for testing of this hypothesis.

The ANOVA test presents results as F = 6.90, *p* = .000 and the null hypothesis is therefore appropriately rejected. This shows that word of mouth effectiveness does differ across different internet platforms. Close to 75 percent of the online word of mouth conversations happened via social networks, followed by another 8.55 percent through email accounts and another 7.33 percent via Q&A websites like Quora and Reddit. Only 3.69 percent have reported receiving a review or recommendation through instant messaging sites.

The mean scores give a clear picture as to which platform is the most effective out of the various word of mouth platforms. Video streaming sites like YouTube have been found to be the most effective platform (4.24) in terms of its impact on buyer behaviour. Q&A

websites have also been found to be quite effective (4.10) as they provide detailed reviews and answers to consumers' queries by top writers. When it comes to the biggest platform of them all, i.e. social networks, WoM Effectiveness is found to be considerably high (4.07). WoM Effectiveness is lower in case of email accounts as people have a tendency to check emails after long intervals and many reviews that are sent via emails either by marketers or influencers are believed to be spam as they are too good to be true and deleted.

For a better understanding of inter group differences, post hoc test (LSD) is performed. The findings from the post hoc test reveal that there is no statistical difference between the following pairs: Social Networks and Video Streaming sites (.124), Social Networks and Q&A sites (.746), Social Networks and Messaging Apps (.850), Video streaming sites and Q&A sites (.328), Video streaming sites and Messaging Apps (.249) and Q&A sites and Messaging Apps (.724).

5.3.3: WoM Effectiveness and Trust on Online Medium

In order to study the effect of online trust on WoM Effectiveness, one way ANOVA method is used. In line with the question being chased, an appropriate hypothesis is set – H_C: WoM Effectiveness remains unaffected by online trust levels.

Table 5H: WoM Effectiveness and Online Trust

Online Trust levels	N	Percent	Mean	SD
Very Low	24	2.62	3.78	.622
Low	71	7.73	3.93	.544
Medium	484	53.01	4.07	.533
High	320	35.04	4.19	.369
Very High	14	1.59	4.33	.183
Total	**913**	**100**	**4.10**	**.490**

Table 5I: ANOVA Table

Effectiveness	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8.548	4	2.137	9.195	.000
Within Groups	211.021	908	.232		
Total	219.569	912			

125

The ANOVA test reveals results as F = 9.195, *p* = .000. Since the p value is less than the significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is understood that online trust levels do have a positive bearing on the WoM Effectiveness numbers. For a better understanding of the same, the results are interpreted through a line diagram. The mean scores show that increase in trust on online mediums will lead to a simultaneous increase in the Word of Mouth Effectiveness.
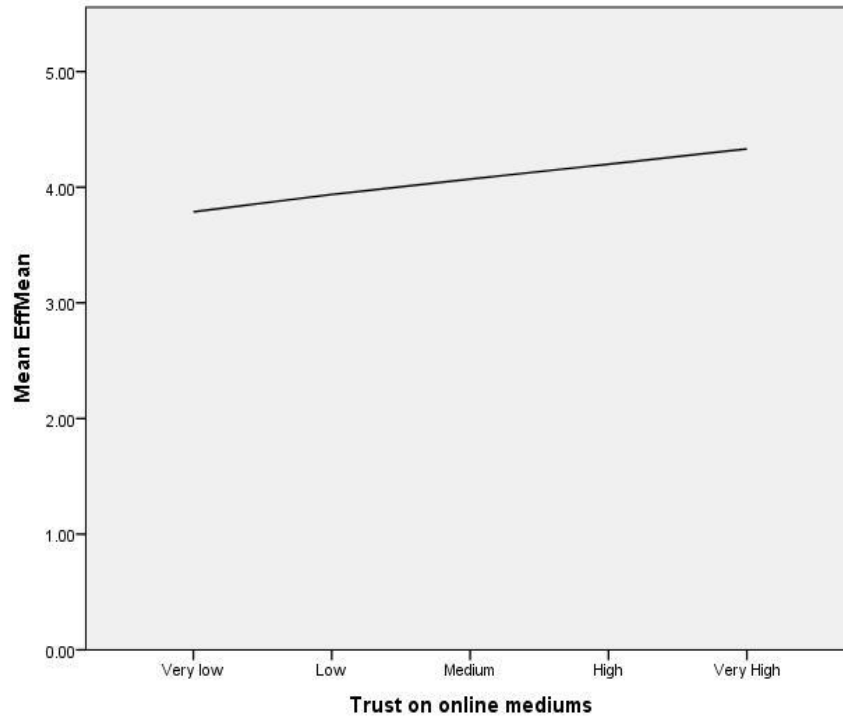

Fig 5.9: WoM Effectiveness and Online Trust

5.4: Thematic Analysis of WoM conversations

The biggest advantage of the diary method is that there is certain flexibility to it. Researchers can go for the commonly used paper-pencil diary method or the time saving electronic diary method. They can opt for a fixed interval schedule wherein participants have to make entries at a fixed point of time or go for a variable interval schedule where there are no such stringent conditions. They can give out blank diaries to the participants or structure them a little for the convenience of the participants. The objective in any case is to elicit quality information in context of the topic being studied.

In our study, the diary method was paper-pencil based, followed a variable interval schedule and was properly structured to encourage participants to provide information easily. While most of the questions asked were either multiple choice questions (dichotomous or trichotomous) or scaling based questions (five point Likert scale), there was one question that asked the respondent to recall as much information as possible review or referral or recommendation and write down the conversation details. Majority of the respondents have skipped this question as people do not devote too much time to answer subjective questions.

For an in-depth analysis of the qualitative data, the conversation details are transcribed into a document and then thematic analysis technique is used to analyse the data in hand. Thematic analysis is not that famous as a method, yet remains a widely-used qualitative technique in the field of marketing and psychology (Roulston, 2001). It helps in identifying, summarising, analysing and reporting themes within a large data set. In a way, you can draw a parallel here with factor analysis, the only difference being one technique is used to reducing quantitative data and another to summarise qualitative data in a minimal, organized way (Boyatzis, 1998).

This technique involves the following steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

Step I: *Familiarising yourself with the information.*
Firstly, the diary transcripts are read to check whether or not the concerned participant has noted down the conversation details or not. This is done so as to get familiar with the depth and breadth of the content.

Step II: *Transcribing the conversations into Word document.*
The next immediate step involves writing down all these conversation details together in a Word document.

Step III: *Labelling relevant words, phrases.*
Like all conversations, there are certain keywords and phrases that are more important than rest of the content. These words and phrases need to be marked for further textual analysis.

Step IV: *Conducting a word frequency analysis to view repetitions.*

Next, the website Online Utility which allows free textual analysis options is used to check word frequencies and percentages. You also get information about word count, character count and lexical density here.

Step V: *Categorising the various similar words and phrases.*

Based on their similarity, various such words/phrases are brought together to create a theme or a sub theme. Each theme represents a different narrative. While calculating the frequency of these words/phrases, they don't have to repeat exactly. Similar meaning words are also considered, as long as it's a permutation of the original word.

Step VI: *Creating broad themes by clubbing related categories together.*

Once all the themes have been created, you might notice that there are certain themes that are similar or related in some way. These are then clubbed together to form a broader theme and avoid overlapping.

Step VII: *Summarise the results of your findings in a presentable manner.*

The identified themes are then studied and observations are made about the study. Based on the total frequency points of each theme, a hierarchy of themes can be created. The theme with the highest frequency implies it is the most significant one. It should be noted that we analyse the qualitative data not as a whole but for each topic under discussion.

As a part of our study, once the data is collected, an overall review of the conversations is done followed by repeated readings of the same. A closer look at these conversations reveals all the words and phrases that are used repeatedly and entered into a table. The number of times a word or phrase gets repeated is the frequency of that word or phrase. Unnecessary grammatical words like prepositions, conjunctions and mono syllables are ignored and not considered.

The Table 5J depicts the words and phrases commonly appearing along with their respective frequencies.

Table 5J: Word Frequency Table

Sl No.	Repetitive Words / Phrases	Word Frequency
1	Good deal	7
2	High quality	8

3	Good clarity	4
4	Perfect fit	6
5	Very comfortable	15
6	Good performance	14
7	Acceptable quality online	22
8	Satisfactory	27
9	Best Price	16
10	Nice knowledge	18
11	Very different	11
12	Customer helpline	14
13	Budget product	03
14	Must buy	02
15	Breath-taking view	04
16	Privacy Policy	12
17	Rich in detail	05
18	Excellent service	15
19	Secure payment systems	22
20	Good testimonials	15
21	Pre-Order	12
22	Don't choose	10
23	Average product	14
24	Disappointed	10
25	Duped	11
26	Not worth it	13
27	High Pricing	12
28	High discount	17
29	Huge Cash back	06
30	Special offer	10
31	Secure checkout	11
32	Trustworthy	15
33	Trendy	13
34	Reliable	12
35	Well known	07
36	Sound delivery	04
37	Product Variety	10
38	Experience	08
39	Value for money	10
40	Risk taking	11
41	Bad choice	12
42	Very slow service	06
43	Delay in delivery	11
44	Misbehaving staff	13
45	An average buy	07
46	Positive reviews	10

47	Feel good offline	05
48	Nice things to say	06
49	Top rated product	12
50	Negative feedback	09
51	Low ratings online	11
52	Random reference	05
53	Compelling argument	06
54	Known person only	37
55	Excessive advertising	10
56	Spam mails	11
57	Tough to Trust	07
58	Online distrust	11
59	Anonymous comments	10
60	Paid reviews	13
61	Credible source	11
62	Pros and Cons on sites	17
63	Personal Experience	12
64	Personal conversations	21
65	Offline more reassuring	22
66	Phishing online	12
67	Easy to believe close people	16

Creation of themes:

These concepts have been identified and listed here because they have been repeated in several places and also the respondents explicitly stated that they were important. Also, a lot of these factors have been documented in earlier articles.

Table 5K: Web of Themes		
Sl No.	Repetitive Concepts	Brief Description
1.	*Online Trust (110)* 31) Secure checkout - 11 19) Secure payment - 22 16) Privacy Policy - 12 12) Customer helpline - 14 58) Online Distrust - 11 57) Tough to trust - 07 56) Spam mail – 11 7) Acceptable quality online - 22	The theme with the highest number of mentions is "Online Trust." Customers have narrated their own experiences in dealing with online reviews and making purchases online. Many consumers have talked about how it is tough to trust random reviews online. Reservations have also been expressed about privacy and security issues.

2.	*Offline Trust (101)* 64) Personal Conversations - 21 67) Easy to believe close - 16 65) Offline more reassuring - 22 47) Feel good factor - 5 54) Known people only - 37	A vast majority of the conversations have stresses as to how personal conversations are more engaging and more fruitful. For them, it is easy to believe the individuals that are already known to them rather than a random person on the internet. Many participants pointed out how they felt offline/personal conversations are more reassuring.
3.	*Source credibility (91)* 34) Reliable - 12 32) Trustworthy - 15 61) Credible source - 11 60) Paid reviews - 13 59) Anonymous reviews - 10 66) Phishing online – 12 10) Nice knowledge - 18	Another concept that was frequently touched upon was the referrer's credibility, i.e. how reliable the referrer was. Many of the participants highlighted how they went on to purchase products just because it came from a trustworthy person. Many participants have talked about how they have come across anonymous reviews and paid reviews online that further confused them.
4.	*Customer (Dis)Satisfaction (90)* 5) Comfortable - 15 8) Satisfactory - 27 24) Disappointed - 10 25) Duped - 11 4) Perfect fit - 6 36) Sound delivery - 4 15) Breath taking - 4 44) Misbehaving staff - 13	Some of these conversations involved statements that reflected the referrer's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the company's products. It was based purely on the referrer's post purchase experience. Extremely negative views where the referrer talked about how they felt disappointed and duped led to negative image about the brand and obviously, no purchase.
5.	*Getting a good deal(86)* 27) High pricing - 12 28) High discount - 17 9) Best price - 6 29) Huge cash back - 6 13) Budget Product - 3 30) Special offer - 10 39) Value for money – 10 18) Excellent service - 15 1) Good deal - 7	Many of the conversations touched points like prices, discounts; cash back options and special offers. Most of these conversations fall in the category of solicited word of mouth, wherein consumers seek information about what the most affordable products in a certain category are. Word of mouth effectiveness is found to be higher in case of such recommendations as the decision to purchase has already been made and referrals are only to know which the best possible choice is for them at the moment.
6.	*Message Details(79)* 63) Experience - 12 3) Good Clarity - 4 20) Good testimonials - 15	The details of the message were also highlighted as to whether it resulted from the referrer's own experience or were it just plain hearsay. Hearing too much positive feedback

	62) Pros and Cons - 17 46) Positive feedback - 10 48) Nice things to say - 6 53) Compelling Argument – 6 50) Negative feedback - 9	creates a positive image in the mind of the consumer resulting later in a purchase. If the referrer talks about his personal experience, it has a higher impact on consumers' purchase behaviour.
7.	*Product Features (73)* 33) Trendy - 13 17) Rich in detail - 5 11) Very different - 11 37) Variety available - 10 2) High quality - 8 23) Average product - 14 49) Top rated product - 12	The discussion also covered the various features and added benefits provided by the product. Frequent mentions were also made of the level of quality of the product as that's what most consumers are most bothered about. Needless to say, products with quality certifications and that were spoken of more favourably led to higher word of mouth effectiveness.
8.	*Customer Verdict (67)* 26) Not worth it. - 13 22) Don't choose it - 10 45) Average purchase - 7 14) Must buy product - 2 41) Bad choice - 12 51) Low ratings – 11 63) Personal experience - 12	Majority of these conversations involved contrasting verdicts as to whether or not one should go for a particular product. The findings reveal that in case of extreme negative review where the referrer tells the consumer not to purchase a product, word of mouth effectiveness is higher and people tend to follow that advice. The rationale here is that the word of mouth receivers understand that the referrer is venting out his frustration and does not want them to go through the same harrowing experience again.

Eight key themes have been created from word of mouth conversations – *Online trust, Offline trust, Source Credibility, Consumer (Dis)satisfaction, Getting a good deal, Message Details, Customer verdict, Product Features*. In order to decide whether one theme is more important than the others, an attempt is made to create a hierarchy among them. These themes have been listed in a hierarchical mode, according to their respective frequencies. While it would not be right to say that the themes on top are more important, it can be said that they are more dominant and more talked about and therefore matter more to the consumers.

On studying the first three themes up close (Table 5K), it can be concluded that there are a lot of issues plaguing online word of mouth and the scourge of paid reviews and

anonymous reviews have hit them really hard, leading to consumer distrust. There has been a combined 23 mentions of both the phrases. Consumers were already worried about privacy and security issues related to carrying out online transactions. This does not help them at all. On the other hand, it is found that people are more accepting and oriented towards offline word of mouth. They long for personal conversations and are more trusting of opinions received from people within their inner circle, which they can trust. It can be said that it is "highly likely" that consumers will make a purchase based on an offline word-of-mouth interaction about a brand than an online review posted by some random user.

Studying the various WoM themes has revealed a proper sequence of events, starting from WoM subject matter to WoM impact. Based purely on product experience, a customer lands into either of the two states – Customer Satisfaction or Customer Dissatisfaction. A satisfied customer spreads good word about the company's product offering within his social circle. On the other hand, a dis-satisfied customer shares negative feedback about the experience he had with the company. Depending on related factors such as message details, source credibility and online trust, these incidents have varied impact on customers' purchase behaviour. Once the WoM incident has occurred, i.e. the verdict has been passed on to others, it results in a combination of marketing outcomes, ranging from awareness to purchase.
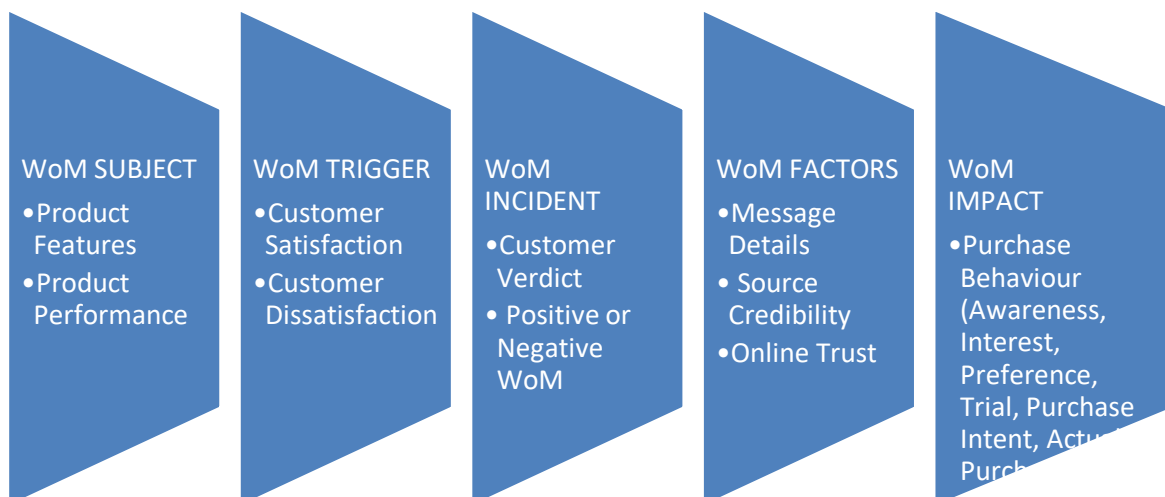

WoM SUBJECT
- Product Features
- Product Performance

WoM TRIGGER
- Customer Satisfaction
- Customer Dissatisfaction

WoM INCIDENT
- Customer Verdict
- Positive or Negative WoM

WoM FACTORS
- Message Details
- Source Credibility
- Online Trust

WoM IMPACT
- Purchase Behaviour (Awareness, Interest, Preference, Trial, Purchase Intent, Actual Purchase)

Fig 5.10: Word of mouth process

5.5: Chapter Summary

The main results and findings in this chapter are:

i) Word of mouth is more prevalent in the electronic goods industry with close to 62 percent of the conversations about it, followed closely by fashion goods that stand at 22 percent of the total conversations.

ii) Word of mouth effectiveness is highest in the healthcare sector (4.25). WoM Effectiveness is more or less the same in case of electronic goods industry (4.06) and the fashion goods industry (4.15).

iii) Results reveal that although marginal, WoM Effectiveness is higher in case of offline or traditional medium rather than online medium.

iv) Video streaming sites like YouTube have been found to be the most effective platform (4.24) in terms of its impact on buyer behaviour. Q&A websites have also been found to be quite effective (4.10). In case of social networks, WoM Effectiveness is found to be considerably high (4.07).

v) Results also show that increase in trust on online mediums will lead to a simultaneous increase in overall Word of Mouth Effectiveness.

vi) Eight key themes have been created from word of mouth conversations – *Online trust, Offline trust, Source Credibility, Consumer (Dis)satisfaction, Getting a good deal, Message Details, Customer verdict, Product Features.*

vii) Consumer distrust is the biggest issue plaguing online word of mouth and it stems from the surge in posting of paid and anonymous reviews. On the other hand, it is found that people are more accepting and oriented towards offline WoM.

The next chapter will talk about how word of mouth effectiveness differs for demographic, psychographic and netnographic segments.