

AN INFLUENCE OF E-WOM AND A MODERATING ROLE OF BRAND ATTITUDE ON IT PRODUCT PURCHASE INTENTION IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

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Abstract : *In the age of digitalization, it could not be ignored that electronic Word of Mouth as a part of electronic commerce may be consistent with competitive circumstances. This research paper aims to examine the behavioral intention of Bangkokian in perceiving and processing the information through online medias before purchasing IT products. It is convinced that the research finding could be a useful guidance in the age when digitalization. 398 Bangkokians, capable in reviewing other's comments or reviews through online medias for the supportive information in evaluating the IT products, has been surveyed for this research. Convenience and snowball sampling techniques are used as the sampling methodology. The results obtained from this research have revealed that out of three quality dimensions measured (electronic Word of Mouth, brand attitude and purchase intention), electronic Word of Mouth has significant impact on brand attitude. Apart from that, both electronic Word of Mouth and brand attitude also have a significant positive relationship on purchase intention. However, there are no significant differences in willingness to purchase IT products among the two genders. The electronic Word of Mouth may be difficult to be occurred due to the fact that it is generated by real users yet it can be created from true admiration of firm's product or services and strong determination to share their reviews to potential user. In summary, eWOM is one major driver of sales performance the time when internet became mainstream.*

Keywords: *Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Brand attitude, consumer purchase intention, electronic commerce, online reviews.*

Introduction

With numerous unique features, the emergence of the worldwide web (WWW) attracts great number of organizations to engage in electronic commerce (EC). EC may allow firms to build closer relationships and access customers in a more effective manner.

During 2004, Web 2.0 became widely known to the public as new generation of WWW, this invention opens opportunities for consumers to interact with the site contents and with other online users.

Furthermore, it allows customers to exchange their insights and experiences of goods or service through online platform (Dellarocas, Zhang and Neveen, 2007). The contents generated through the mentioned features of Web 2.0 is termed user-generated content (UGC) (Toffler, 2006). It is convinced that UGC is considered a reliable source of information and has significant impact on EC. Godes and Mayzlin (2004) illustrates that a user-generated online customer review is classified as one variety of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). It is emphasized that this could carry both positive and negative statements on any products, services or firms and may have significant influencing power to customers' purchase intention (Park, Lee and Han, 2007). Less geographical and time constraints, low cost in obtaining the information, and reliability (the identity of the content provider can be reviewed) and

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practicality of the contents are believed to be useful features that help decrease consumer uncertainty about a product's quality with ease. Thus, an increasing number of online trading platforms have included the online review functions and encouraged customers, who have experiences with the products, to share their opinions as testimonial. Besides an influencing power to customers' purchase intention, this platform technology also provides firms an opportunity to monitor customers' satisfaction toward their goods and services real time and manage marketing strategies accordingly. This is believed to have a significant impact to a good management of brand attitude. The widespread of EC and the provision of online review options lure more and more consumers to voluntarily share their reviews for other potential users. The review have become a critical and informative source of data to company's competitive advantage (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012). This research aims to testify whether eWOM and brand attitude have any significant relationship to purchase intention among Bangkokians. It also examines other subjects in relation to main research topic that might be beneficial to IT products' marketers including how gender affect shopping intention of IT products and does eWOM have any relationships to brand attitude. The practical purpose of the author is to answer the question whether or not IT firms in Bangkok should involve themselves in creating eWOM during the overlapping period between traditional and modern marketing communication practices. The research is structured to start with the revision of literatures in eWOM, brand attitude, purchase intention, and other relevant subjects. The conceptual framework would, then, constructed base on the study of secondary research in methodology part along with data collection methods applied in the research. The result of statistic trial, which shows the better understanding of relationship of positive e word of mouth and brand attitude toward purchase intention of

IT products would be emphasized in result and discussion part. Lastly, the paper will conclude and provide strong recommendations for marketers and further research.

Literature Review

Social electronic word-of-mouth

or communication among consumers through social networking sites has come to be dramatically popular media of the current eWOM formats (Chu and Kim, 2011). eWOM formats for instance opinion platform, social networking give relative unbiased opinions towards specific subject with their personal online identity unlike communicating with anonymous (Ellison and Boyd, 2013). Graham and Havlena (2007) illustrates that social networking sites could be an effective eWOM sources that provide useful product-related insight among consumers. Convenience and immediacy without geographical and time constrains of reaching the product-related information and insight are convinced to be the major advantage of eWOM (Graham and Havlena, 2007). Recently, eWOM-based social network marketing has played an important role in integrated marketing communication strategies among many major organizations; thus, it is induced that the potential effects of eWOM to consumers' purchase intention should not be overlooked (Chu and Kim, 2011). In addition to an array of marketing details marketed by product manufacturers that the consumers receive during the use of social network sites, consumers also learn the feedbacks of a specific product posted by other users. It is believed that such content could be forwarded further with a strong determination to help those new users to make the right decision of their purchase (Pöyry, Parvinen and Malmivaara, 2013; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler, 2004). In the context of movie industry, Kim (2014) demonstrates that eWOM volume on Twitter and Box Office

performance/home video purchase intention have a strong positive relationship to each other. Pinterest, Hoffman and Daugherty (2013) suggest that visualized message and motion as eWOM could have a stronger impact on influencing customers' purchase intention than text-based review. Online social networking services have become more and more popular rapidly among customers and businesses recently (Kudeshia Sikdar and Mittal, 2016). Companies' fan pages have been proved to be a useful tool to achieve higher purchase intention; this digital marketing tool, as a part of Facebook social network site service, is widely affirmed by many major organizations as a promising marketing channel to convey firm's desired message to its target customers. Swani, Milne and Brown (2013) illustrates that there are likeliness that consumers who join the company's fan page have higher chance to spread positive eWOM compared to those who are not the member of company's fan page. Royo-Vela and Casamassima (2011) suggest a similar result showing that an association with company's online platforms have a significant positive relationship with customers' satisfaction and the spread of effective WOM behavior. Rui et al (2013) illustrate a similar result in movie industry explaining that negative WOM has a significant relationship with lower movie purchase intention. Although eWOM could be a powerful tool to enhance customers' purchase intention, it is worth noticing that eWOM does carry risks of spreading negative comments on products, which could lower the consumers' purchase intention. Noble, Noble and Adjei (2012) categorized those who deliberately spread negative WOM to damage a firm or community image as "trolls". To deal with the trolls, it is suggested that the information posted as eWOM on social media sites as related to the organization should be monitored and managed closely (Noble *et al.*, 2012). Thus, it should be noticed that the social

network platform not only could provide customers to share the experience and insight of the brand, but also gives an opportunity for firms, and other members of the supply chain to speak on their behalf (Yaylı and Bayram, 2012). Hence, Yaylı and Bayram (2012) emphasize that understanding the motivations behind eWOM and be able to manage them could be a valuable skill for marketers.

Brand Attitude

Bridge between customers' background characteristics and the consumption to fulfill their psychological needs can be described as brand attitudes (Armstrong and Kotler, 2000). Armstrong and Kotler (2000) emphasize that attitudes act like a mechanism that put people into a frame of mind for liking or disliking things, It also expresses how people appraise, assess, and feel toward an object or idea. Mitchell and Olson (1981) describe that brand attitude may refer to the process that individuals evaluate value of a brand. Shimp (2010) demonstrates that attitude toward a brand may rely on customer's personal preference and are convinced to be a determiner of customers' behavior toward a brand also, consumer attitude toward a brand, also refers as brand attitude, is an important component of the value of brand's equity. Attitude could be emerged from various factors including personal experiences, learning, and experimentation (Loudon and Della Bitta, 1993). Many researchers show that brand attitude may also have significant relationship with brand image (Aaker, 1996; Faircloth, Capella and Alford, 2001; Helgeson and Supphellen, 2004). Fournier (1998) found that purchase intention may be increased brand fulfills customers' psychological needs as a part of brand attitude.

Purchase intention

Purchase intention may be referred as an engagement to one's self to seek and buy for

a specific good or service (Tariq, Nawaz, and Butt, 2013). Miniard, Obermiller and Page (1983) demonstrates that purchase intention regards as attitude and actual behavior that occurred from various psychological variables. Service quality, equity and value, customer satisfaction, past loyalty, expected switching cost and brand preference are a list of variables that considered as components of customer purchase intention (Hellier, Geursen, Carr and Rickard, 2003).

It is suggested that purchase intention and action are significantly influenced by online review as a reliable sources of recommendation (Park et al., 2007). Priyanka (2013) argues that purchase intention is strongly influenced by eWOM as a form of social communications. Nevertheless, eWOM may affect the purchase intention differently in each shopping environment and industry (Forman, Ghose and Wiesenfeld, 2008). Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) illustrates that Negative reviews are concurred to have negative relationship to product sales. It is argued by Ghose and Ipeiritis (2010) that although the online reviews could be appeared in both positive and negative forms, the product sales could be triggered with a clear outline of the advantages and disadvantages with concrete supporting reasons for their viewpoints.

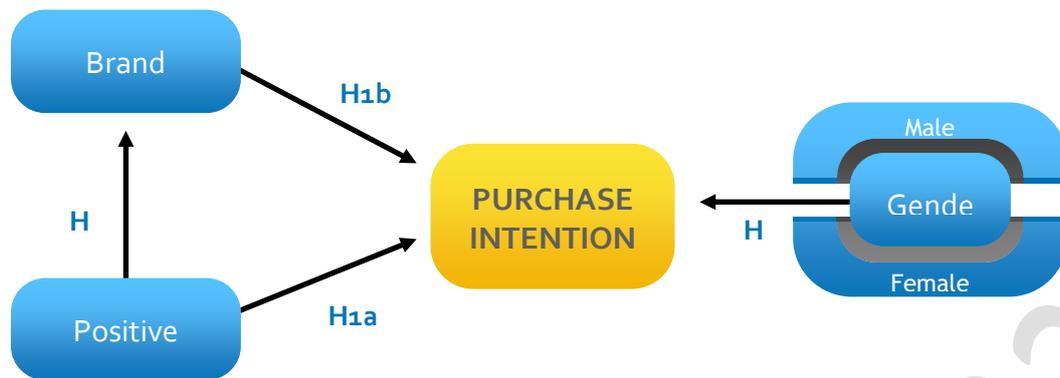
Gender

Demographic characteristics is could be allude as innate stable characteristics of a consumer's life (Wells and Prensky, 1996). It is proposed that information processing in general is diverged significantly between males and females (Holbrook, 1986).

Meyers-Levy (1989) suggest that the two genders usually react to the stimulus in different manners.

Research Framework and Methodology

Conceptual Framework



Research Hypotheses

H1a. There is a significant impact from positive social eWOM to intention to purchase IT products.

H1b. There is a significant impact by brand attitude to intention to purchase IT products.

H2. There is a significant impact of positive social eWOM to brand attitude toward IT products.

H3. There is a significant mean different in purchase intention characteristic of IT products between Male and Female.

Research Methodology

This research applies convenience sampling, and snowball sampling techniques. Paper and online based surveys have been used for this study. A 5-point likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), was applied to examine the hypotheses in this research.

Measurement of Variables

The target respondents of this survey were Bangkokian who used to find information from social media before purchasing IT products.

Population and Sample

The target population was verified by screening questions to filter only Bangkokian, who used to find information from social media before purchasing IT products.

Questionnaires were distributed to 400 respondents by applying convenience and snowball sampling method.

Reliability Test

The reliability test has been used when the number of target respondents have accumulated up to 30 people. The test was conducted by using Cronbach's alpha Coefficient. If the Cronbach' Alpha is higher than 0.6, it implies that this research is reliable (Cronbach, 1951). The table1 show that, all of variables have the Cronbach's Alpha greater than 0.7. Therefore, it is acceptable to apply in determining the reliability of this research.

Table 1 Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Word of Mouth	0.890	4
Brand Attitude	0.735	4
Purchase Intention	0.784	3

Result and Discussion

For the result and discussion, statistic application is used to examine the raw data to determine the relationships between variables and mean differentiate of sample groups. To measure the impact of the independent variable (Positive eWOM) and semi-intermediate variable (Brand Attitude) on the dependent variable (Purchase Intention), it is convinced that the multiple regression model is fit for the case.

Demographic Information

Demographic Information is conducted to illustrate the respondents' characteristic. The table 2 shows the descriptive statistic result of the respondents. The sample size of the data is 398 samples, which accounted as 100 percentile. All the respondents are Bangkokian, where the majority are female which accounted for 53.8%. For the age distribution, it is seen that the majority of the respondents are aged between 26-35, which accounted for 82.2%, while 16.1%, 1.3%, and 0.5% are aged between 18-25, 36-45, and more than 55 respectively. For the average income 46%, which is the highest proportion, are expected to earn 25,001-35,000 THB, while 21.8%, 14.1%, 13.8%, and 4.2% are expected to earn 35,001- 45,000 THB, 15,001- 25,000 THB, more than 45,000 and lower than 15,000 THB per month respectively. For the educational level, it can be described that 66.6% have Bachelor degree, 32.4% have master degree, and 1% have high school diploma or equivalence.

Inferential Analysis

The Linear Regression Model is used to analyze the impact of the independent variable (Positive eWOM) and semi intermediate variable (Brand Attitude) toward dependent variable (PI).

Refer to the strength of correlation (Evans, 1996), table 3 shows the correlation analysis illustrates that all the three variables have a positive relationship to each other while the level of relationship can be seen as moderate positive relationship between purchase

Table 2 Demographic Information of respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Bangkokian Respondents	398	100
Gender		
Female	214	53.8
Male	184	46.2
Age Range		
18-25	64	16.1
26-35	327	82.1
36-45	5	1.3
46-55	2	0.5
Average Income		
Below 15,000	17	4.2
15,001-25,000	56	14.1
25,001-35,000	183	46
35,001-45,000	87	21.8
More than 45,000	55	13.8
Education Level		
High school	4	1
Bachelor's degree	265	66.6
Master's degree	129	32.4

intention (PUR_I) and Word of Mouth (WOM) at 0.447. Second, there are positive relationship between brand attitude (ATT) and WOM at 0.425. Finally, there are positive relationship between PUR_I and ATT at 0.678.

Table 3 Descriptive Analysis and Correlation Matrix

Variable	Mean	STD.	WOM	ATT	PUR_I
WOM	4.3210	0.52920	1		
ATT	4.1124	0.60624	.425**	1	
PUR_I	3.9615	0.66807	.447**	.678**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Table 4 Result of Multiple Linear Regression

Variable	Beta Coefficient	P-value	VIF
WOM	0.194	0.000	1.220
ATT	0.595	0.000	1.220
R-Square	0.490		
Adjusted R Square	0.488		

The Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) of table 4 illustrates that the correlation of determination (R Square) is .488. This implies that 48.8% of dependent variable (PUR_I) could be predicted by two independent variables (WOM and ATT) at 95% confident interval. The P-value of the MLR together with the independent P-Value of all variables are lower than 0.05. This indicates that H1a and H1b are supported and the MLR equation is valid. The beta coefficients illustrate that there is a positive relationship between independent variables (WOM and ATT) and dependent variable (PUR_I). Overall both WOM and ATT have a significant impact on PUR_I.

Table 5 Result of Single Linear Regression

Variable	Beta Coefficient	P-value	VIF
WOM toward ATT	0.425	0.000	1.00
R-Square	0.18		
Adjusted R Square	0.178		

The statistical evidence in the table 5 shows that the linear relationship between WOM and ATT is statistically significant at 95% confident interval. The result indicates that there is a moderate positive linear relationship between the two variables while it is expected that 18% (R Square) of the dependent variable (ATT) could be explained by the independent variable (WOM). Hence, it could be concluded from the statistical evidence that there is not enough evidences to reject the Null hypothesis. Thus it is convinced that WOM have significant impact to ATT. The result of beta coefficient is presented the positive impact to dependent variable (ATT). Overall, WOM has a significant impact on ATT.

Table 6 Result of T-Test

	Purchase Intention	
Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation
Male	3.9946	0.64770
Female	3.9330	0.68533
Equal variances not Assumed		
Levene's Test	F	3.959
	Sig	0.047
T-Test	t	-0.920
	df	392.451
	sig. (2-tailed)	0.358

The result of independent sample T-Test shown in table 6 illustrates that there is a no different in purchase intention characteristic between the two genders. The result also shows that the mean of purchase intention characteristic are very similar (3.9330, 3.9946 for male and female respectively). Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research study provides the understanding of the effects of the positive electronic Word of Mouth and Brand Attitude towards Purchase intention of IT products. The research also mentions how gender and income as demographic characteristics play role in IT purchasing decision.

The research is conducted under 398 responses from Bangkokians. The majority of the respondents are female while 66.6% and 34.7% from the total respondents have bachelor degree and earn between 25,001- 35,000 THB per month respectively.

The result of multiple linear regression analysis illustrates that brand attitude and positive electronic Word of Mouth have impact on purchase intention by 49%, while the single linear regression shows that positive electronic Word of Mouth impact the brand attitude by 17.8%. The independent sample t-test demonstrate that people with different genders have similar (no significant different) level of purchase intention towards IT products.

Based on the above conclusion, the study provides profound information explaining that electronic Word of Mouth and brand attitude could have an important role in marketing function on an organization. The positive electronic Word of Mouth not only enhance intention to purchase IT products by consumers directly, it also could create trust, good feeling, good perception, and good image (components of brand attitude) toward the brand. Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that there are opportunities that firms may experience negative electronic Word of Mouth as well as positive electronic Word of Mouth.

Base on the result of this study, it is recommended that the selective marketing techniques on genders are not convinced to provide an effective result.

It is also suggested that marketer should emphasize on giving complete and useful information about the product by using both personal selling technique at the purchasing point to communicate with the customer face to face especially for the higher price or high involvement product to create more credibility and trustworthy. A proper selling technique is convinced to be a significant source of brand attitude.

Due to electronic Word of Mouth is considered as a highly reliable source of information that impact purchase intention, a company's fan page and online marketing team should be establish as they could be useful moderator and supporter to the company's electronic Word of Mouth. Additionally, the fan page and online marketing team could also help manage the negative electronic Word of Mouth.

As electronic Word of Mouth could be spread to wide audiences without geographical and time constrains, it may be wise to involve experts or other kinds of influencer to help spread the insight of the organization. It is persuaded that this technique could strengthen the influencing power of electronic Word of Mouth.

For limitations this study, it should be noticed that all respondent are Bangkokians; the result may not be applicable to other geographical areas. The study also focuses on the effects of electronic Word of Mouth and brand attitude towards purchase intention of IT products, there result may seem different for other product categories. Lastly, the result implicate on purchase intention of IT products in general, it may not be practical under each specific sub-category of IT products.

For further study, the research may be useful to apply similar framework and methodology for other geographical areas and categories of goods and services.

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