

Why consumers engage in e-WOM? : Literature Review

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EDITORIAL BOARD EXCERPT

Initially at the Time of Submission (ToS) the paper had 23% plagiarism and after rectification it was reduced to 18%, which is an acceptable percentage for publication. The editorial board has observed that the authors (Manpreet & Subodh) have carefully investigated the literature understanding the **motivational aspects of e-wom users** over a decade. Their work presents interesting similarities and differences between the traditional word of mouth communication and e-wom. This study presents interesting implications for the marketers to enhance brand value, loyalty and influencing consumer choices using e-wom. However, the study could be further enriched by conducting survey on the internet users, substantiating it with empirical findings. By and large all the editorial and reviewer's comments have been incorporated in this paper and further the manuscript has been earmarked and decided under "Review of Literature" category.

ABSTRACT In recent years, a large number of consumers engage in word of mouth communication by sharing their product or service experience on the Internet. Such online word-of-mouth exchanges may be contained in consumer reviews, blogs, forums, or threaded discussion boards where marketers interact with the consumers, or where consumers interact with each other. Recognizing that many online exchanges occur between people who have no prior relationship, it is important to understand why these exchanges take place. This extended form of word of mouth known as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has received greater attention from researchers. Most research scholars have studied the effectiveness of e-WOM communication and examined the process by which such e-WOM communication influences consumer purchasing decisions. However, the issue of consumers' engagement in e-WOM has received limited attention. We still do not fully understand what motivates consumers to participate in e-WOM in online platforms. The purpose of this paper is to get an insight into their motivations by reviewing the relevant literature

KEYWORDS Electronic word of mouth | Online word of mouth | e-WOM

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Introduction

The advancements in internet technologies have changed many industries but few have changed as drastically as marketing. From a marketing perspective, gaining a better understanding of how these technological advances impact our lives and our online behaviors is important considering that consumers often use other marketing managers and consumers as sources of information. Historically, marketers have recognized the power of WOM communication to inform, motivate, and influence opinions, purchases, and recommendations for products and services. In the era of the digitalized world, the traditional word-of-mouth communication has been extended to various electronic platforms, such as review sites, social networking sites, blogs, online discussion forums, etc. Everyone can share their opinion and experience related to products with complete strangers who are socially and geographically dispersed. Gaining a better understanding of these online word-of-mouth communications is increasingly important as consumers shift their reliance to online information for decision-making (Dellarocas et al., 2003). This extended form of word of mouth(WOM), also known as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) or online word of mouth, has become an important factor in shaping the buying behavior of the consumer.

Although the expansion in the number of websites where consumers can read and write online product reviews, and vent their grievance and opinions about a variety of goods and services, is considered one of the main developments on the Internet from a consumer behavior view. Yet relatively few people contribute such relevant online information; the majority of them simply consume it. Nielsen (2006) proposed a '90-9-1' rule: 90% of users are silent lurkers i.e., they read or observe but don't contribute, 9% users are occasional contributors, and only 1% of users account for most contributions. Although passive users thus make up the vast majority of people using the Internet, the easy transmission of e-WOM often enables it to spread far further than

offline, verbal customer conversations, particularly because online communications may be accessible to unlimited numbers of potential readers.

Due to a large number of websites, consumers have access to information resources, before, and even after, making different buying decisions. The level to which consumers rely on such websites for information has been the focus of previous research. WOM can be negative or positive and comes from a range of sources. This huge amount of information has proved to influence consumer behavior generally. Other research showed e-WOM to be a significant power that affects consumer loyalty and purchase decisions. Most of these different research approaches explore the impact of e-WOM communication. However, research on what motivate consumers to engage in e-WOM remains relatively limited. These studies provide a reasonable start to exploring further the motives behind e-WOM communication in a way that does not necessarily approach e-WOM behavior as an individual rational phenomenon.

In our study, we attempt to identify the key factors motivating consumers to engage in e-WOM. The paper is structured as follows. First, we define e-WOM communication and compare the concept with the traditional WOM. Second, we describe the research procedure. Third, we present a review of the literature along with a summary of prior research on motivating factors for e-WOM engagement. Finally, we provide implications and scope for future research into the factors affecting e-WOM engagement.

Conceptual Background

Electronic Word of Mouth

The technological revolution has changed the way consumers search for products and services related information, they seek reviews from both current as well as past consumers, and then decide whether to purchase or not. Thus, electronic word of mouth communication is nowadays considered as an important part of the consumer decision-making process (Moran et al.,2014). According to Moran



& Muzellec (2017) emergence of various social networking sites and microblogs has significantly increased consumers ability to discuss brands, offer advice and share their own experiences with their friends or strangers through electronic WOM (e-WOM). According to Cheung et al. (2009) consumers exchange their product or services related experiences with their friends mainly to endorse or express disapproval of the products or services which they have experienced and from the users' point of view, e-WOM provides them a balanced and truthful assessment of the brands.

Many authors have defined the term e-WOM. Henning-Thurau, T. et al. (2004) defined e-WOM as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions over the Internet". Litvin et al. (2008) termed e-WOM as "all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers" (p. 461).

According to Lee et al. (2013), e-WOM is a "WOM system that exists in virtual space in which messages are sent or received related to products or services, and which users experience through chatting or online boards". Noh et al. (2013) defined e-WOM as "interpersonal communication among consumers regarding a company, product, or service through Internet-based technology".

Ho & Dempsey (2010) termed e-WOM as the act of forwarding electronic content and e-mavens as the Internet users, who are more ready to engage in e-WOM. The similarity between e-mavens and market mavens, a term introduced by (Feick & Price, 1987) can be easily observed. Market mavens are people who constantly acquire and spread general marketplace information. E-mavens, on the other hand, are people who acquire and spread information via electronic platforms such as email (Phelps et al.,

2004). According to Moran & Muzellec (2017), Digital consumers who proffer advice on brands are not anymore much the same as 'market mavens' with a plentitude of marketplace knowledge but anyone having access to the social media websites.

WOM and e-WOM

WOM

Word of mouth is one of the most established ways of conveying information (Dellarocas, 2003), and early scholars have defined it in many ways. Arndt (1967, p. 3) defined it as an "oral, person to person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product or a service". Westbrook (1987, p. 261) defined it as "all informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers". Harrison-Walker (2001, p. 63) defined it as an "informal, person-to-person communication between a perceived noncommercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organization, or a service". Similarly, (Litvin et al., 2008) described WOM as communication between consumers about a product, service, or company in which the sources are considered independent of commercial influence. Such interpersonal communication provides the individual access to information related to the consumption of the product or service that goes beyond the information provided by the companies through advertising and thus involuntarily influences the decision-making of the individual (Brown et al., 2007).

Truly, WOM has been perceived as a standout amongst the most influential sources of information transmission. The significance of WOM in marketing theory and practice is undisputed. The impact of the intensity of WOM on consumer decision making is well established in the academic literature (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Alluding to past literature, WOM is considered more effective than many other marketing tools and conventional advertising media

(Cheung et al., 2008). Previous research shows that consumers regard WOM more reliable medium than other traditional media (e.g., radio, television, print advertisements, etc.) (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). As a result, it is considered one of the most persuasive sources of information about products and services. Therefore, it is considered an essential area for marketing research.

Traditionally, WOM communications occurred between individuals or small shared groups who exhibited strong tie connections for e.g. between close friends, family members or relatives. In traditional word of mouth communication the message emanates from credible sources who share their personal experiences with products or brands and thus it was considered as important, truthful, and reliable (Wirtz & Chew 2002). However, today's world of digital technology driven by ease of accessibility and virtual interconnection is giving it new significances. Traditional WOM has been joined by electronic WOM (e-WOM), also known as Internet WOM or online WOM. e-WOM communication can take place in various settings. Consumers can post their reviews, opinions, recommendations, and comments about products and brands on consumer discussion forums, review websites, social networking sites, retail websites, e-bulletin board systems etc. The opinions and recommendations of others still constitute one of the most influential and persuasive means of shaping consumer preferences and buying

behaviors, yet the ease of accessibility, popularity, growth, influence, and pervasiveness of the online medium exponentially multiply the power of WOM. Undoubtedly WOM, in its new diffusion in the digital context, is experiencing a renaissance.

Similarities

Similar to WOM, e-WOM has more relevance, greater empathy and higher credibility for consumers than the sources of information which are induced by the marketers and several websites have been launched to facilitate it (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Gruen et al., 2006). Numerous online companies have additionally included e-WOM as a supplementary component on their sites. These companies also use e-WOM as a cost-effective and convenient alternative to advertising. For e.g. online retailer Amazon.com does not advertise through customary methods but instead uses e-WOM because of its apparent lack of bias among consumers (Sen & Lerman, 2007). e-WOM is also used by consumers for similar reasons as traditional WOM, including information gathering to reduce risks, information storing to compare with other information sources and information sharing in order to influence others. Electronic word-of-mouth is therefore viewed as an extension of traditional WOM.

Differences

e-WOM differs from traditional WOM in many ways.

Basis	WOM	e-WOM	Source
Speed	Diffusion speed is low compared to e-WOM	Diffusion speed is very high because of large number of electronic mediums availability.	Sun et al. (2006), Cheung & Lee (2012) Li & Hitt (2008), Dellarocas (2003); Steffes & Burgee, (2009)
Convenience	Less convenient	More convenient	Sun et al. (2006), Schindler & Bickart (2003).
Reach	Reach is limited to small shared groups.	It has unlimited reach as there is no geographical or time restriction.	Cheung & Thadani (2012), Kiecker & Cowles (2001), Gelb & Sundaram (2002), O'Reilly & Marx (2011),
Medium	Person to Person or Face to Face	Electronic or Digital formats	Hennig-Thurau, T. et al (2004), Stauss, B (2000), Park and Kim (2008)
Influence	Less influential	More influential	Sun et al. (2006), O'Reilly & Marx (2011), Park & Kim (2008)
Accessibility	Not easily accessible and cannot be archived.	Easily accessible in much large quantity and can be archived for a longer period of time	Chatterjee (2001), Park & Kim (2008), Hennig-Thurau et. al., (2004), Park & Lee, (2009), Lee et. al(2008)
Anonymity	There is self-disclosure and thus less anonymity	It offers greater anonymity	Sun et al. (2006), Bronner & de Hoog (2011), Kiecker & Cowles (2001), Gelb & Sundaram (2002)



Participation in E-Wom

Review Procedure

Relevant academic and peer-reviewed journals that are related to motives for engaging in e-WOM are identified by using two methods. Firstly, we conducted a systematic electronic search using the keywords 'electronic word of mouth', 'online word of mouth' and 'e-WOM'. Secondly, only those Journals were selected which are listed in the Journal Quality List, Sixty-second Edition. The scope of the study is limited to the timeframe of 2008-2018.

Review of Literature

Cheung & Lee (2012) identified egoism, collectivism, altruism, and moral obligation as the four perspectives that explain why consumers engage in e-WOM on online consumer-opinion platforms. The authors believed that if a consumer wants to gain a reputation in an online consumer-opinion platform, he has a higher propensity to spread e-WOM. Another egoistic motivator found by them is reciprocity, which is likewise considered as a benefit for individuals to participate in the social exchange. Also, committed electronic network members participate in information sharing because they think that such behavior is best for the community. Altruism goals also motivate consumers to volunteer themselves to contribute their knowledge to online consumer reviews without expecting direct rewards in return. Sense of Moral obligation was also suggested as a motivating factor. Lastly, they discussed knowledge self-efficacy as a self-motivator for knowledge contribution in online platforms. Their findings suggest that sense of belonging to the community, reputation, and enjoyment of helping others are the most critical factors that encourage consumers to share their experiences with others in the context of online consumer-opinion platforms.

Hornik et al. (2015) provided a theoretical framework and empirical evidence based on Dynamic Social Impact Theory and related concepts from rumor literature. Drawing from existing literature,

the basic motives summarized by them are:

- The tendency to undermine the "top dogs"
- Malicious joy
- Jealousy
- Draw attention
- Dissatisfaction
- Even a minor negative rumor will find consumers' justification without clear evidence.

They suggest that consumers are assumed to be selective transmitters of WOM i.e., they disseminate negative information faster and to more recipients compared to positive information. Also, as research in psychology suggests, negative information is pondered upon for longer time spans than positive or neutral information and is subject to more distortion along the diffusion process.

Moran & Muzellec (2017) proposed a framework to describe how consumers evaluate e-WOM credibility. The 4Cs of e-WOM Credibility proposed by them are 1) Community (Tie Strength, Receiver Characteristics), 2) Competence (Prior Expertise, Product/Service Characteristics), 3) Content (Message Clarity, Message Valence), and 4) Consensus (Receiver Judgement, Review Consistency). According to the authors, e-WOM source and e-WOM message credibility each consists of two different components, which when taken together leads to the 4Cs of Credibility. They suggest that source credibility is determined by the connection amongst sender and recipient (community) combined with their individual experience levels (competence), while message credibility depends on the substance of the communication (content) and how it influences the recipient (consensus). The eight credibility factors of e-WOM suggested in this study are related to e-WOM shared among SNS.

Lee et al. (2013) their interview results show that a large number of people share information on

products or services with others in the open-market context, to satisfy their information sharing desire. They proposed self-presentation desire as another antecedent of e-WOM. Their findings indicate that people want to receive economic or psychological rewards related to their e-WOM activities. They also proposed that an individual's open-market satisfaction is another antecedent of e-WOM. According to the interviews in their qualitative study, both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with transactions are factors of e-WOM activities in the open-market context. The last antecedent discussed by them was Open-market loyalty which indicates an individual's psychological attachment to an open market of interest (i.e., open-market provider). The results indicate that information-sharing desire, self-presentation desire, open-market reward and open-market loyalty have a positive effect on e-WOM activity. They did not find any significant effect of open-market satisfaction on e-WOM activity.

Reichelt et al. (2014) their study offers an empirical and theoretical validation of how specific usage and social functions of e-WOM affect attitudes toward and intentions to read e-WOM. They used a covariance-based structural equation model (LISREL) with data compiled from German readers of online brand community content, in the context of an automotive market. According to them, Consumers' attitudes toward reading e-WOM content have strong, significant effects on their intentions to read e-WOM, also the attitude toward e-WOM reading increases with improved beliefs about the usage and social functions that e-WOM aims to fulfill. Their results indicate that the utilitarian functions that individuals seek to satisfy through e-WOM depend on different dimensions of credibility. Of the three credibility dimensions, trustworthiness was emerged as a predominant dimension, having a positive impact on both the usage and the social function of e-WOM. Conversely, the expertise of e-WOM contributors had a slightly positive impact on the utilitarian function. Expertise alone cannot serve any social function. However,

the perceived similarity between e-WOM readers and e-WOM sources helps meet the social function, whereas similarity cannot affect the utilitarian function of e-WOM.

Khammash & Griffiths (2011) they presented the 4 existing motives i.e., Decision-involvement motives (Risk reduction, Reduction of search time, Dissonance reduction), Product-involvement motives (Learning how a product is to be consumed, Learning what products are new in the marketplace), Social-involvement motives (Determining social position, Belonging to a virtual community) and Economic-involvement motive and the 4 new motives for reading online customer reviews. i.e., Self-involvement motives (Fun and enjoyment, Curiosity and broadening of horizons, Compulsive habit and boredom, Improving writing style and language skills), Consumer empowerment motives (Trusted opinions, Non-expert opinions, Unique experiences), New social-involvement motives (Preferred authors, Mediated advisor, Understanding people, Reading responsively) and lastly Site administration motives (Examining review accuracy and availability, Offering general help to the site management team). Their findings indicate that members of online opinion portals are motivated to read consumer reviews to find unique customer experiences, to reduce risk in their buying decision, to learn about new products in the marketplace and those products that require a higher level of involvement. In addition, they aim to reduce their searching time to find products they intend to buy. Finally, portal users read online reviews to seek enjoyment and have fun.

Zhang et al. (2010) examined the effects of e-WOM valence on e-WOM persuasiveness. The results of this research show that consumers do not give equal weights to positive and negative product reviews. Based on Regulatory focus theory, this study suggests that the consumption goals that consumers associate with the reviewed product lead to bias in consumers' evaluations of positively and negatively valenced product reviews. Consumers



show a positivity bias for products associated with promotion consumption goals, whereby they rate positive reviews as more persuasive than negative ones. On the other hand, they show a negativity bias for products associated with prevention consumption goals.

Park & Kim (2008) they conducted an experiment to explore how consumer's process online consumer reviews depending on ability related factor i.e. the level of expertise. Specifically, focusing on the positive online consumer reviews, they examined the effect of review structure – the type and the number of reviews – on consumer decision making. This study examined how an ability-related factor (the level of expertise) affects the processing of different types of messages. Integrating the cognitive fit theory and ELM, the authors examined that consumers with different levels of expertise prefer different types of review messages (based on cognitive fit theory), and the effect of cognitive fit on purchase intention is stronger for experts than for novices (based on ELM). This study shows that the number of reviews is a more important factor for novices than for experts.

O'Reilly & Marx (2011) In addition to relying on customer reviews and the advice of others online, this study identified three other factors affecting the acceptance of online WOM: (1) enhancing their self-worth; (2) avoiding risk; and (3) negativity bias. According to the authors, online consumers have confidence in the validity of consumer-provided information online, enjoy interacting with other consumers online, and rely on a network of consumers with marketplace knowledge or expertise to guide their purchase decisions. Further, their study suggests four factors that affect online WOM credibility: 1) polarity of posts and their quantity, 2) logic and articulation of posts, 3) corroborating sources, and 4) participants' previous experience with the seller.

Bronner & de Hogg (2011) suggested five main categories of motivations for contributing: (1) self-directed, (2) helping other vacationers, (3) social

benefits, (4) consumer empowerment, and (5) helping companies. Their study suggests that motivation influences the type of site chosen by vacationers and the way in which they express themselves on review sites. According to the authors, Vacationers who post and are having a largely other-directed motivation prefer consumer-generated sites, comment on more aspects of a vacation, post mainly positive reviews, are more inclined to express themselves by a combined use of text and ratings and contribute more to sites accessible to other vacationers. Vacationers who post and are having a largely self-directed motivation, prefer marketer-generated sites, comment mainly on a limited number of aspects of a vacation, post more negative reviews, and contribute more to sites not accessible to other vacationers.

Munzel & Kunz (2014) based on the literature about social capital, social exchange theory, and transformative consumer research, the authors carried out a study of 693 contributors on a hotel review site. They expanded the categorization proposed by Sundaram et al. (1998) and proposed in a division of motives into four groups: positive consumption experience, negative consumption experience, social bonding, and individual benefit. Through the integration of various customer-to-customer interactions, the results reveal a three-class structure of contributors on review sites: - Lurkers, Creators, and Multipliers. These three groups of individuals show distinct patterns in their preferred interaction activities and the underlying motives. The lurkers are significantly less interested in most of the activities. They are primarily first-time writers. The creators are individuals who articulate themselves after an experience via online reviews. They are mainly driven by altruistic motives. The multipliers are a group of contributors who engage in first-order e-WOM via online reviews, and who amplify the scope of e-WOM by retransmitting these reviews throughout their social network. Their research shows that individuals who are reading other people's contributions perceive a social debt and feel obliged to give something back to the community.

Ho & Dempsey (2010) based on a three dimensional theory of interpersonal behavior FIRO (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation) proposed by Schutz, the authors identified four motivating factors: Inclusion-the need to belong, the need to be different; Altruistic-the need to be altruistic, and Control - the need for personal growth. The results showed that the interpersonal need for inclusion and affection were key motivators for engaging in online WOM communication (forwarding online information). The only exception was the control motivation, which although significant did not positively affect the online forwarding of information. First, of the two motivations underlying the concept of inclusion,

only individuation was positively related to the forwarding of online content. The motivation of the need to belong did not significantly influence the forwarding of online content. This study identified a positive relationship between altruism and e-WOM. The results also suggest that individuals who spend more time online, forward more information to others in their social network. The authors believe that people with high trait curiosity enjoy the experience of learning and therefore are more likely to consume online content.

Summary of Motivating factors for Participating in e-WOM

Authors	Motivators
Cheung & Lee (2012)	Egoism (Reputation, Reciprocity), Collectivism (Sense of Belonging), Altruism (Enjoyment of Helping), Principlism (Moral Obligation) and, Knowledge Self-Efficacy.
Lee et al. (2013)	Information-sharing Desire, Open-market Satisfaction, Self-presentation Desire, Open-market reward Open-market loyalty
Khammash & Griffiths (2011)	Decision-Involvement, Product Involvement, Social-Involvement, Economic-Involvement, Self-Involvement , Consumer-Empowerment, New Social Involvement and Site-Administration Motives.
O'Reilly & Marx (2011)	Enhancing Self-Worth, Avoiding Risk, Negativity Bias.
Bronner & de Hoog (2011)	Self-Directed, Helping Others, Social Benefits, Consumer Empowerment, Helping Companies.
Ho & Dempsey (2010)	Inclusion (need to belong, individuation), Control (personal growth initiative), Affection (altruism), Curiosity, Content forwarding, Content consumption



Conclusion

In our review of the e-WOM literature, we have seen that e-WOM is an extension of the historically established concept of Word-of-mouth on the Internet platform. The traditional marketing approach is being amended and changed to use the intensity of the Internet. The proliferation of internet forums, social media, and web-based communities have given more power to consumers; as a result, many consumers make use of e-WOM either directly or indirectly before making their final purchase decision. They also use e-WOM in the post-purchase process to share their personal experience with the product or brand and to voice their sentiments. Consumers have different motivations when they engage in e-WOM creation.

Emotional factors are considered one of the most important reasons for consumers' participation in e-WOM. Previous scholars have found that e-WOM creates a feeling of inclusion or need to belong, particularly when sharing positive content. Similarly, self-presentation and social involvement desire play a key role in the generation of e-WOM. Further, e-WOM participants can be grouped into 2 categories i.e. e-WOM readers (recipients) and e-WOM writers (senders) on the basis of factors that motivate their behavior. Writers post e-WOM basically to share their own experiences and opinions about the products or brands, thus information sharing desire plays an important role in e-WOM creation whereas readers seek e-WOM because they need information to avoid any risk or uncertainty associated with their purchase. Both readers and writers are motivated to engage in e-WOM due to social ties. In this manner, consumers show a greater tendency to engage in e-WOM when they can recognize themselves with other members of the group and share similar attributes. Other motivating factors found by previous scholars are altruism, desire for personal growth, avoidance of risk, and the desire to enhance their own self-worth. Consequently, monetary rewards play a minor role in e-WOM communications. Nevertheless,

in this context, it can be stated that these Internet-based word-of-mouth experiences will increase the likelihood of users searching for information and their total time spent on information search.

Implications

e-WOM acts as a direct feedback to marketers. They can utilize e-WOM for creating awareness about their product or services, improving sales and other performance parameters to strengthen their brand value, and build customer loyalty. They can use both positive and negative e-WOM to improve their product and service and address consumer grievances. Technological advancements and innovations of smart devices and new ways of communication, such as instant messaging apps on smartphones, are the emerging trends that will have an impact on how consumers and marketers will manage e-WOM.

Scope for Future Research

This study presents a review of literature in the field of factors that motivate consumers to engage in e-WOM. We conducted a comprehensive literature analysis and determined the most relevant publications in the field on the basis of journals mentioned in the Journal Quality List, 62nd edition. The results provided may serve as a framework for further research. In addition, relevant gaps are identified for exploration in future research projects. The majority of existing papers in the field concentrate on the sender of e-WOM communications thus future research needs to further explore e-WOM seekers' motivations. Among other alternatives, research could focus on how contributions by paid reviewers affect the trust level of e-WOM recipients. Further investigation is recommended into the unique phenomenon of negative reactions to positive commercial information. Investigating whether novices or experts are more sensitive to negative reviews will be an interesting future research area. Also, how the dissemination influences actual behavior of consumers could be examined. Another future research direction is to examine the

characteristics of online content which are more readily forwarded by Internet users to others.

As a limitation of this study, it must be stated that analysis is confined to the timeframe of 2008 to 2018 of relevant literature databases using three keywords. However, most of the relevant research papers are covered in these databases and were taken into consideration.

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Annexure 1

Why consumers engage in e-WOM? : Literature Review

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