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# Fun In A Trustworthy Environment? The Effects Of Message Source Credibility And Message Appeal On EWOM Responses In Facebook

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# **FUN IN A TRUSTWORTHY ENVIRONMENT? THE EFFECTS OF MESSAGE SOURCE CREDIBILITY AND MESSAGE APPEAL ON EWOM RESPONSES IN FACEBOOK**

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## **Abstract**

*Online social media is playing an important role in marketing. Word-of-mouth is one of the concepts that companies made use of. The gigantic social network in social networking sites helps companies disseminate promotional messages in a cost-effective and efficient way. Two of the antecedents of eWOM response in Facebook are discussed in this study, message source credibility and message appeal. A conceptual framework including these two eWOM antecedents in Facebook was developed and tested. 203 questionnaires were collected for verifying the conceptual framework. Data collected were then tested using structural equation modeling. As the concepts of message source credibility, message appeal and eWOM response are latent, a total of 8 measurement items were defined before the commencement of data collection. The findings show that message source credibility and message appeal have a positive impact on users' intention to give eWOM response, in which the former has a greater impact on eWOM response.*

**Keywords:** Social media, eWOM, Message source credibility, Message Appeal, trust, Facebook

## **1.0 Introduction**

The socialization of various internet applications has enabled many traditional customer behaviors to be observed online. Marketing and branding over the social media platforms such as twitter (Jansen et al., 2009), Facebook , Microblogs (Li and Shiu, 2012), consumer-based virtual communities (Luo et al., 2013, Yeh and Choi, 2011) has been gained attentions from both organizations and researchers (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008). Word of Mouth (WOM), a traditionally important concept hard to be traced offline could now be well studied due to consumer data generated by social media. Electronic WOM (eWOM) referred to the communication of product information by customers over the internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) through like, share, and comments. eWOM has been reported to be effective in improving customers' knowledge about the products and the firm, leading to the better understanding of the overall value the firm offers and thus strengthening customer loyalty (Gruen et al., 2006). However, eWOM could also bring negative impact if not managed properly by the company (Bae and Kim, 2013, Sussan et al., 2006). For example, Cheol and Lee (2009) reported that eWOM is greater in spreading negative effects of products than for positive effects and the eWOM has greater effects for experience products than search products.

It is thus very important for companies to manage the eWOM process so that it will bring positive rather than negative impacts to the products as discussed above. Many papers have investigated factors influencing eWOM response including social relationship perspectives (Chu and Kim, 2011), personal traits (Chen et al., 2013) and multiple perspectives such as self-interest, social benefits, etc (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Another strand of literature looks at how behavior intentional of eWOM is influenced and factors identified are satisfaction, adoption of electronic communication technology, and subjective norms (Liang et al., 2013), and social network analysis (Sohn, 2009). A third school of researchers found message source credibility plays an important role in hotel booking reviews (Miao et al., 2011) and brand attitude (Wu and

Wang, 2011). However, the impact of message source credibility hasn't been explored very much, especially in the Facebook environment. This paper aims at exploring the role of message source credibility and message appeal on eWOM responses in the Facebook environment. It is proposed that message source credibility and message appeal complement each other in eliciting eWOM responses in Facebook, i.e., like, share, and comment behavior.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 WOM and eWOM**

Traditionally word-of-mouth has been defined as the communication involving a sender and a receiver, discussing about a product or a company, in which the content could be extended to organization-related content (Arndt, 1967). Katz & Lazarsfeld (1970) defined traditional word-of-mouth as the exchange of market-related information between users, which influences the attitude and behavior other customers have towards a product and the decision on the purchase of the product. The main reason receivers consider WOM as a more credible source of information (Kunz et al., 2011, Brown and Reingen, 1987) lies in the fact that the exchanged messages are not created by the company out the commercial interest rather than by consumers who have commented and given opinions on the product after experiences. WOM is thus considered as more effective than traditional advertising (Bickart and Schindler, 2001, Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006, Feick and Price, 1987, Feldman and Spencer, 1965).

It is for this reason that the expenses of advertising on SNS is growing (Chu and Kim, 2011). Exchange of eWOM in SNS has thus become an important strategy to achieve the business competitive advantages (Coulter and Roggeveen, 2012). Chu and Kim (2011) classified eWOM in SNS into three types, opinion-seeking, opinion-giving and opinion-passing. Opinion-seeking refers to the behavior of searching product reviews or recommendations from other connected users before purchasing a product (Feick and Price, 1987, Flynn et al., 1996). Opinion-giving refers to the act of providing product information and recommendations disseminated into the

extensive social network (Cardwell, 2002, Smith et al., 2007). Opinion-passing refers to the act of forwarding the received eWOM (Sun et al., 2006, Norman and Russell, 2006), which is a salient characteristics facilitated by SNS. Like, Share and Comment could be considered as eWOM in Facebook. According to Chauhan and Pillai (2013), Likes given by users could be considered as their appreciations towards the content. People having the intention to share their own opinion towards the content would post Comments. People Share a message on Facebook when they feel relevant to the content and would like to spread the information to other friends. José-Cabezudo and Camarero-Izquierdo (2012) has also highlighted that message forwarding action requires message senders' voluntary exposure, given that the action of giving Likes, Shares and Comments are visible to others. While like could be classified as opinion-giving behavior and share could be classified as opinion-passing behavior but comment might involve all three types of eWOM activities.

eWOM studies have been based on different online social media, such as online opinion forums blogs and social networking sites (Lee and Youn, 2009, Riegner, 2007, Park et al., 2007). Other eWOM studies have focused on the impact of eWOM on purchase intention (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004, Park et al., 2007, Gupta and Harris, 2010) and the impact of positive and negative comment on eWOM effectiveness (Purnawirawan et al., 2012). Some studies reported a series of factors influencing eWOM activities including tie strength (Mittal et al., 2008), the role of visuals on eWOM (Lin et al., 2012), social cognitive factors (Cheung and Thadani, 2012), homophily (Brown et al., 2007), and source credibility (Pigg and Crank, 2004, Ohanian, 1990).

## **2.2 Message source credibility and message appeal**

The focus of social relationship development featured SNS as the suitable application for eWOM (Chu and Kim, 2011, Coulter and Roggeveen, 2012). Under the SNS context, consumers feel secure in sharing information. Thus, message source credibility and message content (message appeal) are identified by several researchers as important factors influencing eWOM activities

(José-Cabezudo and Camarero-Izquierdo, 2012, Wu and Wang, 2011). Message source credibility refers to the degree of believability the message receiver ascribes to the message sender. The persuasiveness of a message would be enhanced by the positive attitude developed towards the message source credibility (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). Source credibility is associated with informational influence (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). The informational value of a message is affected by two dimensions of source credibility, trustworthiness and expertise (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). Source credibility could be indicated by the utilitarian value of the message, i.e. the extent to which the message could satisfy message recipients' need. Internalization of message is more likely to occur when recipients have a positive attitude towards the credibility of the message. Product-related decision is more likely to be made, e.g. product preference (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993) when recipients consider the message source to be credible. Message source credibility focused on the message sender, which could be classified as the communicator in traditional communication process. Message appeal refers to the content of the message, i.e., whether the content of message is attractive and interesting. It's normally classified as rational appeal and emotional appeal (Kotler, 2009) and has been reported to influence eWOM activities in different degrees (Wu and Wang, 2011).

Source expertise is defined as the perceived competence the message sender has on a particular knowledge area, especially that related to products or services (Gotlieb and Sarel, 1991). Source expertise could be indicated through one's status, for example, occupation and social experience (Schiffman and Wisenblit, 2014). As mentioned previously, eWOM is important in reducing the risk involved before product purchase (Gershoff and Johar, 2006, Still et al., 1984). Experience sharing provided by expertise is considered credible and reliable to mitigate their purchasing risk (Wangenheim and Bayon, 2004). Trustworthiness is defined as the extent that a message receiver accepts and confides in the message sender (Ohanian, 1990). If a message sender is trustworthy, others are more likely to internalize his suggestions (Moorman et al., 1993), as the

suggestions are considered to have lesser bias or compensations (Schiffman and Wisenblit, 2014). It was suggested that message from a source of stronger-tie is more influential in terms of trustworthiness (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008). People having stronger tie-strength with the message recipient are usually their close friends.

### 3.0 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

Following the previous study, we proposed that eWOM responses are influenced by the trustworthy dimension of message source credibility and emotional message appeal as in Figure 1. We choose the trustworthy dimension and the emotional message appeal because in SNS environment, the main purpose for people to stay there is to build relationships and enjoy the time during the relationship building process.

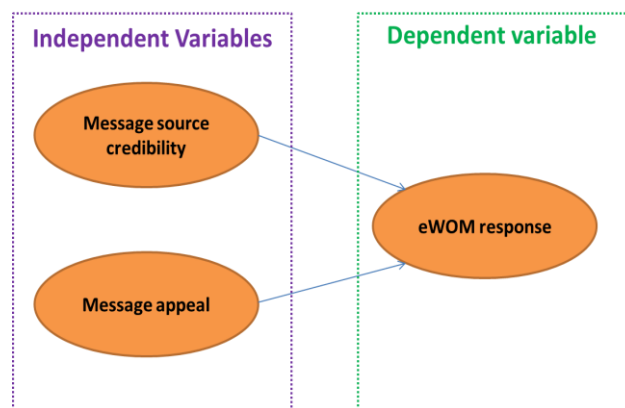


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Previously, e-mail messages are considered the most powerful eWOM advertising (Pavlov et al., 2008). With the social networks listed in the friend list, Facebook users could also spread their messages to any person. In the case of email, the message forwarding mechanism is under a relatively private condition. In contrast, Facebook allows the message forwarding action to be broadcasted to different people, even to those that you are not intended. This is because of the high visibility of users' action in Facebook. Others could observe their friends' interactions in the Newsfeed section. Secondly, the two methods faced the same challenges in their advertising mechanisms. Message recipients may receive unsolicited messages from commercial. It may be

in the form of spam in the email context, and sponsored advertising banner in Facebook. These similarities infer that findings related to the email context may be applicable to that in the SNSs, like Facebook.

eWOM responses in Facebook resemble the opening and forwarding process of email messages. Though Facebook has created different interacting tools for their users, for example, inbox messages and walls, this study focuses on Facebook functions, Like, Share and Comment. These Facebook functions do not appear in the private inbox message context. Therefore, this study defines the message forwarding action to those that are done between users' wall. Unlike email messages, Facebook users do not need to open a message to view the message content. However, users might choose to ignore or pay less attention to the message due to different reasons. Again, contributed by the high visibility of Facebook, different eWOM responses could be viewed as similar to the email message forwarding process.

eWOM in some social media platforms, for example, discussion forum, is usually provided from unfamiliar site users, in which the identity of these people are unknown. However, in the context of social networking site, one's identity could be viewed from the profile page of users. Messages are usually sent from people who have connected to the same network. Therefore, it is considered more trustworthy (Chu and Kim, 2011). It is reported that the average number of friends a Facebook user have normally overs a hundred (Anatomy of Facebook, 2012). Relationships in social network can be classified into strong-tie and weak-tie. It is therefore reasonable to apply trustworthiness into the social network of the Facebook friend-list (Coulter and Roggeveen, 2012). When individuals are not actively requesting an advertising message, they have low involvement towards the message, as they are passively receiving the promotional messages (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989). Message source increases receiver attention towards the message and intention to forward the advertising messages to others (José-Cabezudo and Camarero-Izquierdo, 2012).



H1: When receiving promotional messages sent from close friends, intention to give eWOM response is enhanced.

Messages created from companies could be classified into recreational and utilitarian (Chandon et al., 2000); emotional and rational (Kotler, 2009); transformational or informational (Golan and Zaidner, 2008). These classifications are similar, in which they are based on the value created for the message recipient. Messages classified as recreational, emotional or transformational relates to the emotional issues, for example, the provision of entertaining features or pleasant feelings (Chandon et al., 2000, Voss et al., 2003). Messages classified as utilitarian, rational or informational provides information related to product, for example, specifications, functions (Chandon et al., 2000, Voss et al., 2003).

The alignment of message type and the customer needs could elicit different effects of the WOM messages (Kotler, 2009). Messages intended to focus more on the customer emotions are more effective in increasing awareness from people, for example, by eliciting discussion (Baker and Churchill Jr, 1977). Messages mainly focus on product attributes are more effective in eliciting purchase intentions (Lloyd and Clancy, 1991). Marketers could consider about the nature of their promotional messages in order to achieve different goals. For example, they use non-monetized rewards or lucky draw in emotional messages. Short descriptions of product features are used in rational messages (Yang, 2012). In the case of Facebook, it is found out that coupons and discounts increases message recipients' to give a Like (Vorvoreanu, 2009). We thus proposed that:

H2: When receiving recreational-type promotional messages, intention to give eWOM response is enhanced.

#### **4.0 Research Methodology**

This study used a scenario design which has been discussed by Yang (2012) . The questionnaire was scheduled to distribute within the campus, such as the lecture room. Introduction of the

research purpose is briefed to the survey participants before completing the questionnaire and the respondents are given information on the ethical issue of the study, which guarantee that their personal information won't be disclosed. Before study, they were asked whether they have the Facebook account and they are also informed that participation of the study is voluntary. The survey was conducted in the campus of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University for a month, from 25 February 2013 to 25 March 2013. Each of the survey duration is within five minutes. Each participant is required to complete a questionnaire with total 11 questions. They were given another separate sheet, which is printed with a promotional message. They were instructed to read the message before filling the questionnaire.

Various literatures were reviewed to develop measures for this study and previously used measurements were adapted to measure message source credibility, message appeal, and eWOM response. In order to measure the eWOM response, the unique Facebook functions, including Like, Share and Comment are applied as the indicators of eWOM response. This study is explanatory in nature with the intention to identify the relationship among variables when studying on a situation (Saunders et al., 2007). A self-reported questionnaire by five-point Likert is then conducted to collect the necessary data from the research respondents. Message source credibility adapted from Ohanian (1990) consists of the following three items: "I believe the sender is sincere.", "I believe the sender is trustworthy" and "I believe the sender is honest." Message appeal adopted from Yang (2011) consists of two items: "The message is interesting to me" and "The message is recreational to me." eWOM consists of the following three items: "After browsing the message, I choose " Like" as my response", " After browsing the message, I choose "Share" as my response", "After browsing the message, I choose "Comment" as my response.

In order to identify the variations in eWOM response regarding to message source credibility, research respondents are classified into two groups. One group of respondents are required to

complete the questionnaire with the assumption that the message is sent from an unfamiliar friend, while the other group of respondents are required to complete the questionnaire with the assumption that the message is sent from a close friend. These assumptions are adopted from the scenario design in the study of Yang (2012). The assumption is written as a sentence and shown on the questionnaire.

In order to reduce the ambiguity of the research respondents on the constructs, a sample message was developed and modified from message available on Facebook. Respondents were asked to read the message, which is recreational in nature, before filling in the questionnaire. The message is designed similar to a real Facebook message. The message was written in Chinese to simulate the real messaging condition on Facebook. It is designed as a promotional message for a new mobile phone. Mobile phone was selected as the message subject, based on involvement study by Yang (2012). Modification on the promotional message is made based on the suggestions from Yang (2012). He suggested that recreational message with high hedonic value contains lottery message. Therefore, sentence like “remember to ask your friend to join the lottery at 5-7pm.” is included in the message.

Convenience sampling method is adopted in this study. According to Schiffman, et al. (Schiffman and Wisenblit, 2014), convenience sampling is a continuous process to find participants for a survey, until the sample size requirement is attained. Low operation cost and time are the advantages of this sampling method. In this study, questionnaires were distributed at the campus of Hong Kong Polytechnic University. According to the study of social networking sites usage by Nielsen (2012), females are more active users of social networking sites. However, the differences were not very significant as compared with male, with a ratio of 96 male to 103 female. Therefore, both genders are considered in this study. It was revealed that the majority of female social networking site users are between the ages of 18-34. Though most of the students in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University aged between 17 and 22, people at other

age level could also be found in the campus, including those postgraduate. This serves as a large pool of participants for this study. Two questions are asked in the questionnaire to collect the demographic information of the participants, including their age, and gender. An additional question is asked concerning whether the participant has a Facebook account.

## 5.0 Data analysis

A total of 203 valid questionnaires were collected at the end of the sampling period. 107 of the research participants are females and 96 of them are males. 90 of them were at the age between 17 and 21, 113 of them were at the age between 22 and 26. All of the research participants have a Facebook account.

### 5.1 Reliability and Validity

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the measurement model. As indicated in figure 1, all the Cronbach's Alpha values are well above the recommended 0.70 for exploratory studies (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

Construct	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's alpha	Factor loading
<b>Message Appeal</b>				
(A1)The message is interesting to me.	2.93	1.04	0.87	0.90
(A2)The message is recreational to me.	2.79	0.93		0.87
<b>Message Source Credibility</b>				
(B1)I believe the sender is sincere.	2.89	1.03	0.90	0.86
(B2)I believe the sender is trustworthy.	2.83	1.00		0.90
(B3)I believe the sender is honest.	2.85	1.04		0.86
<b>eWOM response</b>				
(R1)After browsing the message, I choose "Like" as my response.	2.65	1.22	0.82	0.75
(R2)After browsing the message, I choose "Share" as my response.	2.24	1.10		0.84
(R3)After browsing the message, I choose "Comment" as my response.	2.04	1.02		0.78

**Table 1 Reliability and factor loadings of measurement items**

To assess the validity of the measurement model, convergent and discriminant validity were examined. Convergent validity refers to the extent to which the indicator variables of a construct are correlated with others as theoretically predicted. Factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) are used for assessment. As shown in Table 4.1 and 4.3, the minimum factor loading obtained is 0.753. A1 has higher factor loading than A2 (0.90 to 0.871), where B2 (0.901) and R2 (0.836) has the highest factor loading in their corresponding construct. The minimum values of AVE and construct reliability for the model are 0.622 and 0.639 respectively, which are above the corresponding threshold values of 0.5 and 0.6. To conclude, the model demonstrates convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

The fitness of the model is also tested and indicated by different values. Most of the values of the fitness indicators imply the conceptual framework and the observable data for this study exhibit good fitness ( $\frac{\chi^2}{df} = 1.988, \chi^2 = 33.802, df = 17$ ), NFI=0.965, CFI= 0.982 and RMSEA= 0.07.)

Goodness of fit index	$\chi^2/df$	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Recommended value	$2 < \chi < 5$	>0.90	>0.90	<0.1
Model estimate	1.988	0.965	0.982	0.07

**Table 2. Goodness of fit indices for the Measurement Model**

A model is considered to have good discriminant validity if the square root of average variance explained of a construct is greater than the corresponding correlation estimates of the model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Table 4.3 lists out the correlation estimates and square root of AVE of the model. The diagonal values represent the square root of average variance and the non-diagonal value represents the correlation estimates. All the diagonal values were greater than the non-diagonal value, which demonstrated a good level of discriminant validity.

Construct	AVE	CR	Construct		
			1	2	3
Message Appeal	0.79	0.64	0.87		
Message Source Credibility	0.76	0.72	0.33	0.87	
eWOM response	0.62	0.71	0.39	0.72	0.79

**Table 3. Square root of AVE and correlation coefficient**

## 5.2 Model testing results

Results of the structural equation modeling are shown in Figure 2. The standardized regression weight refers to the path coefficient in concern. Message source credibility and message appeal have significant impact on eWOM response. The coefficient of message appeal on eWOM response is 0.18, at  $p < 0.01$ , in which that for message source credibility is 0.65, at  $p < 0.001$ . Message appeal and message source credibility have a positive significant effect on eWOM response at 0.01 and 0.001 level respectively. Both Hypothesis 1 and 2 are supported. 53.2 % variance of eWOM has been explained by message appeal and message source credibility.

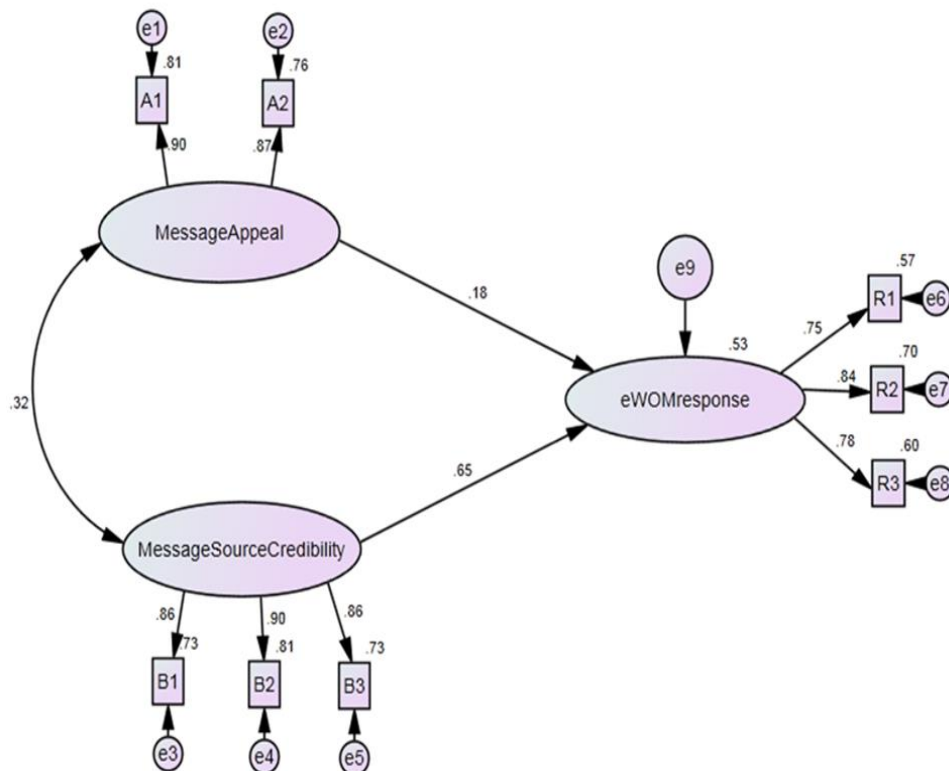


Figure 2. Structural Model Testing Results

## 6.0 Discussions, Conclusions, and Limitations

The purpose of this study is to determine whether message source credibility and message appeal affects message recipients' motives to give eWOM response in the SNS context, Facebook. Facebook has provided easy-to-use functions for users to respond to any message received. Each

of the function implies different preferences of users have towards the message content. The functions included Like, Share and Comment.

## **6.1 Discussions**

From the research findings, H1 is supported. Messages recipients' motive to give eWOM response is significantly related to message source credibility. There are many types of information available on Facebook, including those in the advertising banner, updates from brand profile page, or status updates from friends. It is difficult to grasp attention from Facebook users. Users login Facebook to view status of their friends. Therefore, any recommendation or message directly sent to one's inbox or posted on the wall by one's friend probably gains greater attention than the sponsoring banner at the page border.

The friend list of a Facebook user usually consists of close friends and acquaintances. Due to security reasons or personal preferences, a Facebook user may choose to disclose part of his profile information. Trust among acquaintances may be lower as they do not know much about each other, either in the online context or real life. In contrast, trust is developed between close friends, as they have more interactions. Trust is also enhanced as they know more about the profile or personality of close friends.

Facebook users perceive information sent from close friends is trustworthy in nature, as they may believe that their close friends would not forward any harmful or no value messages to them. Rather, the message sender may have an experience on the activity mentioned in the messages. The message recipients then perceived the chance of receiving false message to be low. They, therefore, is more likely to response to the message, including viewing the content of the message and forwarding of the message to friends. In addition, altruism is more likely to be found between close friends. Altruism refers to any act that aimed at increasing the welfare of other people, as compared to that owned by one (Batson, 1994). When people find something entertaining or containing economic benefits, they have higher tendency to share their findings

with close friends. Message recipients then perceived the message-forwarding action of the message senders, whom are their close friends, to be sincere in nature. They believe that the actions of their close friends are not as commercial as the message updated in the brand profile page.

They believe that their close friends are sincerely sharing some value-containing message to them. Therefore, the message recipients are more willing to read the message and developed a positive attitude towards the message content. The message recipients may also further forward the message to other friends within their friend network in Facebook.

From the research findings, H2 is supported. Messages recipients' motive to give eWOM response is significantly related to message appeal. Messages appeal could be divided into recreational and utilitarian. Recreational message is used in this study. Numerous advertising messages on Facebook have applied recreating elements in delivering their content and attracting users' attention. For example, sponsored advertising messages use simple text and photo to attract Facebook users, in which they elicit customer emotions by stating the opportunities to win a prize. Newsfeed updates from brand profile page adopt a similar approach. However, as the layout design of the Newsfeed section is much larger than the sponsoring section, brand profile page could try to use visual elements to enhance the extent of amusement provided to the customer. With attractive photos and engaging statement, it is much easier to elicit customer emotions.

Most Facebook users login to Facebook to spend their leisure time by viewing others' status. They are not intentionally looking for any product information in Facebook. Rather, they prefer to collect product information from other online discussion forums. Therefore, utilitarian messages may not be suitable in this study of effect of message appeal on eWOM response. As the purpose of people login to Facebook is recreational in nature, they are searching something relaxing and interesting. Recreational message, therefore, is more suitable in gaining awareness



from Facebook users. Messages containing wording, like lottery, could catch the attention from the message recipient as these wordings imply something interesting to them, in which they may have the opportunity to gain benefits by responding to the message.

Relatively speaking, message source credibility has a higher impact on eWOM response, as compared with message appeal in Facebook context. The path coefficient related to message source credibility (0.65) is higher than that related to message appeal (0.185). Two possible reasons might contribute to this finding. Firstly, boredom arose from similar type of message. Nowadays, many brands have made use of Facebook to promote themselves. In order to enhance user engagement and catch their attentions, brands use similar approaches in creating recreational messages. The most typical one normally states the opportunity of winning certain price. Some message recipients may have past experience in responding to such messages, in which they did not win any price. They were upset and bored by this kind of message, some may even question on the purpose of these messages. They may worry about the privacy issues and less willing to respond to these messages.

Secondly, it may due to the inability of the message to enhance users' involvement to the promotional message. Involvement could be classified into three categories, product involvement, advertisement involvement and purchase decision involvement. Advertising involvement is the one that could be applied in this study, and refers to the degree of relevance a person perceived he has toward the advertisement (Batra and Ray, 1986, Goldsmith and Emmert, 1991). There are three types of antecedents that predict one's involvement, personal factors, stimulus factors and situational factors. Personal factors, such as the extent of personal relevance, play an important role in predicting one's involvement and the resulting attitudes and behaviors.

It was found out that the message content would have effect on customer involvement, thus, affecting the resulting attitude and behavior. Yang (Yang, 2012) has studied this relationship in

the Facebook context, and concluded that involvement from users will mediate the effect of the recreational messages on attitude. As this type of recreation message is not fulfilling the needs of customers, whom are either at high involvement or low involvement, the likelihood of gaining eWOM response may be reduced.

In addition to trust developed within the relationship among individuals, interpersonal influences may be one of the reasons contributing to the findings. Interpersonal influence can be divided into informational influence and normative influence. Normative influence is defined as the willingness of an individual to gain identity from others (Bearden et al., 1989, Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). Informational influence refers to the individual preference to gain information from expertise (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). A study of antecedents of eWOM behavior found out that normative influence has higher impact on opinion passing behavior than informational influence. When a promotional message is sent from a close friend, people would show a higher preference in passing the message to others in the Facebook friend list. One of the reasons for this passing action is for social relationship development. In addition to leisure-time spending, Facebook users would like to establish and maintain their social relationship with others, particularly their close friends. The eWOM responding activity, therefore, serve this purpose.

Response to the message means that the message recipient agrees with the message content to certain extent and appreciates their friends, the message source, in sending the message to them. In order to show goodwill to their friends, they would respond to the message. They would have a greater chance to read the message and forward the message to other friends.

## **6.2 Conclusions**

In this study, it is found that both message source credibility and message appeal have positive impact on the eWOM response. When a person receives a message from their close friends, the intention to provide eWOM response is enhanced. When a person receives a message which has recreational value, the intention to provide eWOM response would also enhance. The effect of

message source credibility is relatively higher than message appeal on eWOM response. Using an exploratory approach, it is found that the relationship the eWOM antecedents and that between Like is greater than that for Share and Comment. Message source credibility and message appeal have medium relationship with Like, where they have little relationship with Share and Comment respectively.

In this study, both the factors related to individual psychological state, message source credibility and message attributes, message appeal are taken into considerations. Most eWOM studies in the past focused on one category at a time. This study attempts to incorporate two categorical antecedents to investigate the eWOM antecedents. This study provides an insight to the academic area that, though unique functions are provided by social networking sites, they shared some similarities with other online social media, in terms of the eWOM antecedents. Most brand profile pages receive few responses from Facebook users. This study provides an insight for the administrators regarding the determinants for driving more customer responses towards a message. Message source credibility and message appeal are identified as the antecedents for eWOM responses in Facebook. Companies could make use of this finding to improve their marketing communication strategy in Facebook. The findings remind administrators on the importance to focus on both customers' psychological state and message attribute during the dissemination of promotional messages, in which the efficiency of the promotional effort could be improved. Companies aimed at receiving different types of eWOM response in Facebook, i.e. Like, Share and Comment, may need to consider other factors in creating their promotional messages, for example, ways for creating customer resonance. Future study could try to identify the same eWOM determinants with different Facebook functions, for example, the inbox message function. Within the inbox message condition, people could communicate as they were in face-to-face contact. Similarly, Facebook users are allowed to use both text and pictures to disseminate the promotional message. However, they are unable to exhibit the interaction to

others. The research findings would be significant in identifying where differences exist between an open environment (Facebook Wall) and a private environment (Facebook inbox).

This study could be repeated by using different research subjects in the survey. Currently, tangible good is used as the research subject. As WOM covers both tangible goods and intangible services, future study could use intangible service as the research subject, for example, content related to travel experience. This is to investigate if the antecedents for eWOM are affected by the product type. An exploratory attempt is adopted in assessing the strengths of relationships between the determinants and each type of eWOM response. Based on the findings reviewed in this report, future study could try to assess the strength of relationship in a deductive approach.

## **6.2 Limitations**

Although the hypotheses in this study are broadly supported by the findings, several limitations are recognized. The target age group of the survey participants is set between 17 and 36, which is the most active Facebook user group found from Nielsen (2011). In this study, only students from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University participated in the survey. The participants might only represent a small segment of the population. This might affect the ability of the result to generalize about the population. One recreational testing message sample is used to study the relationship between message appeal and message source credibility. However, in the Facebook context, users may be exposed to different types of recreational message. More recreational-type of messages should be designed into the survey. An average of three measurement items is used in measuring the latent construct. More items should be suggested to each latent construct at the survey instrument development stage. This is to ensure that the most appropriate items were extracted for measuring each latent construct. In this study, mobile phone is used as the research subject in the survey. Mobile phone is a kind of physical goods. People could mitigate their risk of purchase by evaluating the product specifications provided by companies. However, non-

physical services, travel product is difficult for people to evaluate (Litvin et al., 2008). People may more easily be affected by WOM discussing about the intangible services than the tangible goods. This study focused on the exchange of eWOM on Facebook Wall. However, Facebook provides various interacting tools for users to communicate with their friends, for example, inbox messages. Even though exchange of eWOM through inbox messages would not be exhibited to a wide range of people, people may be more willing to respond to the eWOM messages from friends due to the private communication environment.

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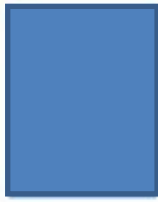
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## Appendix III---Sample message



**Hello**

全新智能手機「Celfone 6」，每日免費送出2部

經典系列「Celfone」針對Celfone5弱點改革提高手機效能，相當吸引!文中和大家介紹新版的要點，及送出由Celfone Limited 贊助的10部Celfone6，越多人參加獎品越豐富!  
想免費贏取Celfone 6, 每日5-

讚好· 回應· 分享

ne大抽獎!