ANTECEDENTS OF TRADITIONAL AND ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATION: STUDENT POPULATION-BASED STUDY

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Abstract

Word-of-mouth communication (WOM) represents a very credible form of communication exerting a great impact on the consumer/buyer behaviour. Since WOM can take place in both offline and online environment, it is important to acknowledge the potential significance of both settings. The main purpose of this research was to explore the impact of several antecedents (consumer innovativeness, need to belong and perceived source credibility) on the traditional and electronic WOM information receiving. The research was conducted on the sample of 203 students from several countries (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia). Data were analysed using a variety of statistical techniques and methods, including exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, and structural equation modelling (SEM). The results indicate that the research factors do not influence WOM and eWOM in the same way, thus exhibiting different significance and intensity of the influence. Namely, consumer innovativeness positively impacts WOM and eWOM indicating a stronger influence on WOM. The need to belong does not influence WOM or eWOM. The perceived source credibility proved to be significant for the eWOM information receiver. Besides theoretical relevance, the gained results have marketing implications for practice/marketing experts in addressing the WOM communication in both offline and online environment.

Key words: WOM; eWOM; consumer innovativeness; need to belong; source credibility

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Introduction

Word-of-mouth (WOM) communication can be defined as the activity whereby the consumers exchange the information with other consumers[1]. It can be seen as a very efficient marketing communication tool, which in its essence is not fully understood[2]. WOM strongly influences brand image, attitudes, purchase intention and purchase decisions[3] and is more influential[4], empathetic, credible and relevant[5] than other forms of communication.

Although WOM is seen as one of the most powerful factors influencing consumer behaviour, according to some authors[6] traditional models do not capture the potential of eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth), which stresses the importance of a further research. eWOM can also have positive or negative effects for businesses and thus lead to sales boost, free advertising and brand recognition[7]. Some authors[8] argue that eWOM can be less personal than traditional WOM communication, but also a more powerful tool due to its direct and trustworthy nature, availability and reach.

The existing literature reveals some contradictory results (e.g. consumer innovativeness), the lack of the research from the receiver's perspective (e.g. need to belong in both offline and online, as well as the source credibility) and the lack of research when it comes to examination of WOM antecedents simultaneously in traditional and online environments. Therefore, the main contribution of this study is to fill

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[1]   Zhijie Lin – Cheng S. Heng, "The Paradoxes of Word of Mouth in Electronic Commerce", *Journal of Management Information System*s, 32 (2015) 4, 246-284.; WOMMA, "Word of Mouth Marketing Association", (2010), www.womma.org (15. 7. 2016.)

[2]   Jermy Leeuwis, "Influence of Electronic Word-of-Mout33n Receiver's Purchase Intention", (2009), http://wom.musicremedy.com/word-of-mouth/, (2. 11. 2014.)

[3]   Mohammed Abubakar – Mustafa Ilkan – Pinar Sahin, "eWOM, eReferral and gender in the virtual community", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 34 (2016) 5, 692–710; Jason Y. C. Ho – Melanie Dempsey, "Viral marketing: Motivations to forward online content", *Journal of Business Research*, (2010), 1–7.

[4]   Silke Bambauer-Sachse – Sabrina Mangold, "Brand equity dilution through negative online word-of-mouth communication", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 18 (2011), 38–45.

[5]   Alexander Rossmann et al., "Drivers of user engagement in eWoM communication", *Journal of Services Marketing*, 30 (2016) 5, 541–553; Simon Rees, "Nielsen report finds that word-of-mouth is the most trusted source – again", (2013), http://www.idiro.com/2013/09/nielsen-report-finds-that-word-of-mouth-is-the-most-trusted-source-again/ (10. 10. 2016.)

[6]   Terry Daugherty – Ernest Hoffman, "eWOM and the importance of capturing consumer attention within social media", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 20 (2014) 1–2, 82–102.

[7]   Pedro Longart, "What drives word-of-mouth in restaurants?", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 22 (2010) 1, 121–128.

[8]   Thorsten Hennig-Thurau et al., "Electronic Word-of-Mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the Internet?", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18 (2004) 1, 38–52.

these gaps. The main purpose of this paper is to explore the influence of the researched individual characteristics on WOM information receiving in both offline and online context and to determine whether the offline and online WOM information receiving relies on the same antecedents.

In addition, past research that examined the relationships between the individual characteristics and WOM mostly dealt with the sender's perspective[9]. This research focuses on the receiver perspective offline and online. The main reason for researching the individual consumers' characteristics lies within the notion that the decision of sharing the information depends mostly on the consumer as an individual[10].

Stressing the importance of individual characteristics for WOM communication and communication strategy in general, some authors[11] suggest further research of the motives which stimulate the WOM communication. Furthermore, the researchers[12] stress the need for a better understanding of eWOM preconditions. Since, WOM communication falls within the field of consumer behaviour covering many aspects (e.g. promotion/advertising, market strategy creation) the individual characteristics of the consumer represent the central and inevitable variables.

The reason for researching the selected individual characteristics (consumer innovativeness, the need to belong and perceived source credibility) lies within the fact that, when it comes to WOM or eWOM communication, these are mostly unexplored personal factors suggested by the researchers for a further examination.

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[9] Yung M. Li – Chia H. Lin – Cheng Y. Lai, "Identifying influential reviewers for word-of-mouth marketing", *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications,* (2010), 1–11; Jason Y. C. Ho – Melanie Dempsey, op. cit.; Koeun Shin, *Factors Influencing Source Credibility of Consumer Reviews: Apparel Online Shopping*, Master thesis, Oregon State University, 2007; Tim Mazzarol – Jillian C. Sweeney – Geoffrey N. Soutar, "Conceptualizing word-of-mouth activity, triggers and conditions: an exploratory study", *European Journal of Marketing*, 41 (2007) 11/12, 1475-1494.

[10] Amar Cheema – Andrew M. Kaikati, "The Effect of Need for Uniqueness on Word of Mouth", *Journal of Marketing Research*, 67 (2010), 553–563.

[11] Jonah Berger – Raghuram Iyengar, "How interest shapes word-of-mouth over different channels", (2012), 1–40, https://www.google.hr/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved= 0ahUKEwjP_LmE5_3RAhVmG5oKHYB1Au4QFggXMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fmba. americaeconomia.com%2Fsites%2Fmba.americaeconomia.com%2Ffiles%2Fpaper_berger_ iyengar.pdf&usg=AFQjCNERAEVXMV-TnJmdCrV0aAxHogzZaw&sig2=fGYuSDkCdAFhSTQ vzaGq5A&bvm=bv.146094739,d.bGs&cad=rja, (10. 10. 2016.); Jie Feng – Purushottam Papatla, "Advertising: Stimulant or Suppressant of online word of mouth?", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 25 (2011), 75–84; Amar Cheema – Andrew M. Kaikati, op. cit.; Koeun Shin, op. cit.; Cindy M. Y. Chung – Peter R. Darke, "The consumer as advocate: self-relevance, culture, and word-of-mouth", *Market Lett*, 17 (2006), 269 – 279, a http://www.sba.oakland.edu/Faculty/kim/2010/readings%20 for%20winter%202010/wom%20self-concept%20versus%20utilitrian%20products.pdf, (10. 10. 2016.)

[12] Alexander Rossmann et al., op. cit.

Moreover, they represent the psychological constructs, i.e. personality, motivation and perception features united into individual difference variables.

Regardless of the high WOM importance for science and businesses, the number of studies examining the antecedents of both offline and online WOM communication simultaneously is scarce. This represents a strong stimulus for researching the individual consumers' characteristics as predictors of WOM information receiving in traditional and electronic environment. This research contributes to the WOM communication and consumer behaviour theory, thus exhibiting the implications for both science and practice. Besides enriching the existing WOM knowledge with new findings, the research results can also be useful for marketing experts in terms of the marketing strategy development, especially marketing communication creation and the overall better understanding of WOM motives.

This paper consists of five chapters. The second chapter deals with the literature review with respect to the research variables and develops the hypotheses, as well as the conceptual model. The next chapter offers insights into the used methodology and performed analyses. The fourth chapter discusses the findings. Finally, conclusions along with the implications and some future research directions can be found in the fifth chapter.

1. Literature review

This paper examines the influence of the consumer's characteristics on both traditional and electronic WOM communication focusing on the receiver's perspective (seeking information). The conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Conceptual model of traditional and electronic WOM antecedents*
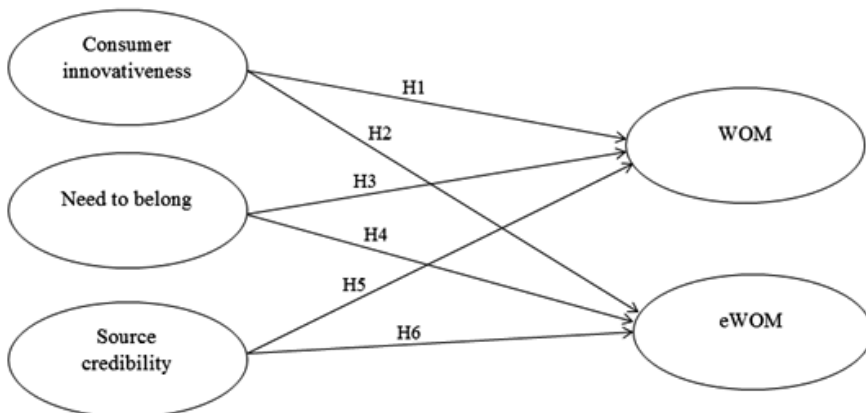
1.1 Word-of-mouth communication (WOM)

In general, WOM communication can be divided into traditional (offline) and electronic (online) communication[13]. Traditional word-of-mouth communication refers to face-to-face communication between the sender and receiver and influences the attitudes and behaviours of consumers, new product adoption[14], consumer's loyalty and product switch[15]. It is seen as a more persuasive type of communication since the information origins from the personal source and, as such, is perceived more credible than those from media or business sources[16].

Electronic WOM takes place virtually, i.e. online, within forums, blogs and web sites. Online channels facilitating eWOM make it faster and more practical, while having the high reach and thus eliminating the face-to-face pressure[17]. Despite important role of WOM, todays' usage of social media and online tools, WOM's occurrence within both offline and online context, rare researchers studied the antecedents and influences of WOM in offline and online context simultaneously[18]. The strength and impact of WOM and eWOM on consumers and businesses suggest the importance of researching the WOM communication concept from the offline and online perspectives with respect to the variety of predictors.

1.2 Consumer innovativeness

Although there is no general agreement on consumer innovativeness definition, it can be described as the level at which the individuals seek for novelty and desire to search for the new product information and experiences[19]. The past research revealed

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[13] Ed Keller – Brad Fay, "Comparing online and offline word of mouth", (2011), 1–14, http://www.kellerfay.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/KellerFayOnline-OfflinePaperforWOMMAFinal1.pdf, (10. 10. 2016.)

[14] Philip Kotler et al. *Osnove marketinga*, 4th European ed. Mate d.o.o., Zagreb, 2006.

[15] Florian Wangenheim – Tomas Bayon, "The effect of word of mouth on services switching. Measurement and moderating variables", *European Journal of Marketing*, 38 (2004) 9/10, 1173–1185.

[16] Barbara Bickart – Robert M. Schindler, "Internet forums as influential sources of consumer information", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 15 (2001) 3, 31–40.

[17] Maurits Kaptein – Dean Eckles, "Heterogeneity in the effects of online persuasion", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26 (2012) 3, 176–188; Joseph E. Phelps et al., "Viral marketing or electronic word-of-mouth advertising: Examining consumer responses and motivations to pass along email", *Journal of advertising research*, 44 (2004) 04, 333–348.

[18] Mitchell J. Lovett – Renana Peres – Ron Shachar, "On brands and word of mouth", *Journal of Marketing Research*, 50 (2013) 4, 427–444; Ed Keller – Brad Fay, op. cit.

[19] Manning et al., 1995 in William O. Bearden – Richard G. Netemeyer – Kelly L. Haws, *Handbook of marketing scales. Multi-item measures for marketing and consumer behavior research*, 3rd ed. Sage Publications, Inc., 2011.

positive association between the consumer innovativeness and information seeking in offline environment[20].

On the contrary, the researchers[21] determined the negative impact of consumer innovativeness on the information receiving. Other researchers[22] examined this relationship in online context, but from the sender's perspective. Past research results indicate contradictory findings in the offline, no findings in the online context from the receiver's perspectives and no past simultaneous research of this factor in both WOM environments, which opens the space for some new insights regarding the WOM field. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_1: *Consumer innovativeness positively influences WOM information receiving.*

H_2: *Consumer innovativeness positively influences eWOM information receiving.*

1.3 Need to belong

The need to belong represents the internal motivation and individual's desire to belong to a group or to be socially accepted[23], as well as the preference for connecting with other people and exhibiting the social affiliation[24].

Some researchers[25] confirmed the positive influence of the need to belong on the offline WOM sending information. Other scholars[26] assume that consumers participate in e-communication (e.g. social networks, blogs) because they want to strongly belong to online communities.

In addition, unlike some authors[27] who established the positive relationship between the need to belong and the eWOM sending information intention, the others[28] did not confirm this type of a relationship in online setting. Furthermore, it was found that the consumers were willing to spread information in both offline and online environment due to the desire for socialization and belongingness, whereby

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[20] Tao Sun et al., "Online word-of-mouth (or mouse): An exploration of its antecedents and consequence", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11 (2006) 4, 1104–1127.

[21] John C. Mowen – Sojin Park – Alex Zablah, "Toward a theory of motivation and personality with application to word-of-mouth communications", *Journal of Business Research*, 60 (2007), 590–596.

[22] Jason Y. C. Ho – Melanie Dempsey, op. cit.

[23] Roy F. Baumeister – Mark R. Leary, "The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation", *Psychological Bulletin,* 117 (1995), 497–529.

[24] Josée Bloemer – Gaby Odekerken-Schröder – Leen Kestens, "The impact of need for social affiliation and consumer relationship proneness on behavioural intentions: an empirical study in a haidresser's context", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 10 (2003) 4, 231 – 240.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Jermy Leeuwis, op. cit.

[27] Christy M. Cheung – Matthew K. O. Lee, "What drives consumers to spread electronic word of mouth in online consumer-opinion platforms", *Decision Support Systems*, 53 (2012), 218–225.

[28] Jason Y. C. Ho – Melanie Dempsey, op. cit.

this motive was stronger for the online context[29]. The previous study[30] indicates that the need to belong is unexplored factor from both sender's and receiver's perspective, thus suggesting further research of this factor.

The past research results indicate that the need to belong was researched in both WOM contexts, however only from the sender's perspective. No studies researching the need to belong and WOM and eWOM receiver relationships have been found so far, which might provide some new insights. Therefore, the hypotheses are suggested as follows:

H_3: *The consumer's need to belong positively influences WOM information receiving.*
H$_4$: *The consumer's need to belong positively influences eWOM information receiving.*

1.4 Perceived source credibility

Source credibility represents an important element of communication integrating several aspects, such as trust, trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise[31]. It is perceived as the major factor influencing WOM behaviour[32]. Credible information is important for building the consumer's trust and thus accepting the communicated information[33].

According to some researchers,[34] trust precedes WOM and is strongly tied to this type of communication. Another important role of trust for the consumer is in overcoming the uncertainty and risk[35]. The researchers[36] stress the significance of source credibility, trustworthiness and expertise for the WOM receiver. Other authors[37]

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[29] Mitchell J. Lovett – Renana Peres – Ron Shachar, op. cit.

[30] John C. Mowen – Sojin Park – Alex Zablah, op. cit.

[31] Koeun Shin, op. cit.; Kak Yoon – Choong H. Kim – Min S. Kim, "A cross-cultural comparison of the effects of source credibility on attitudes and behavioral intentions", *Mass Communication & Society*, 1 (1998) 3/4, 153–173.

[32] Marsha L. Richins, "Negative word-of-mouth by dissatisfied consumers: A pilot study", *The journal of marketing*, (1983), 68–78.

[33] Methaq A. A. Sallam – Nabsiah A. Wahid, "Endorser credibility effects on Yemeni male consumer's attitudes towards advertising, brand attitude and purchase intention: The mediating role of attitude toward brand", *International Business Research*, 5 (2012) 4, 55.

[34] Dwayne D. Gremler – Kevin P. Gwinner – Stephen W. Brown, "Generating positive word-of-mouth communication through customer-employee relationship", *International Journal of Service Industry Management,* 12 (2001) 1, 44–59.

[35] Paul A. Pavlou – Mendel Fygenson, "Understanding and predicting electronic commerce adoption: An extension of the theory of planned behavior", *MIS quarterly* (2006), 115–143.

[36] Jillian C. Sweeney – Geoffrey N. Soutar – Tim Mazzarol, "Factors influencing word of mouth effectiveness: receiver perspectives", *European Journal of Marketing*, 42 (2008) 3/4, 344–364.

[37] Manuela Lopez – Maria Sicilia, "eWOM as source of influence: The impact of participation in eWOM and perceived source trustworthiness on decision making", *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 14 (2014) 2, 86–97.

note that opinion-seeking and opinion-giving behaviour positively impact source trustworthiness in eWOM setting. Source expertise is seen as relevant factor when it comes to seeking the opinion for a particular product category[38]. Source attractiveness can motivate the consumer's identification with a source and perception of the similarity[39].

The lack of studies dealing with the simultaneous impact of source credibility on WOM in online and offline settings encourage further research of this relationship, assessing the source credibility as a factor integrating trust, attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise, which might contribute to novel findings. Thus, it can be hypothesized as follows:

H_5: *Source credibility positively influences WOM information receiving.*
H_6: *Source credibility positively influences eWOM information receiving.*

2. Methodology

2.1 Data collection, sample and measurement scales

The survey was on-line questionnaire conducted from August until October 2016. The final sample for analysis included student population of 203 respondents covering Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. With respect to gender the sample included 80% of female and 20% of male students. The age range was from 19 to 29, whereby the majority of students were at the age of 22 (30.5%) and 21 (26.1%). Furthermore, the majority of respondents were from Croatia (83%) followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina (11%) and Serbia (6%). The measurement scales were used and adapted from a variety of authors. WOM information receiving items were used from the existing scale[40], while eWOM items were developed by the authors. Consumer innovativeness [41] and the need to belong[42] were adapted from the existing scales. Source credibility items were developed by the authors. For assessing agreements and disagreements the Likert scale was employed. Namely, for each measurement of scale's items the respondents were asked to choose the grade from to 1 to 5 (1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree).

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[38] Manny C. Gilly et al., "A dyadic study of interpersonal information search", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 26 (1998) 2, 83–100.
[39] Florian Wangenheim – Tomas Bayon, op. cit.
[40] John C. Mowen – Sojin Park – Alex Zablah, op. cit.
[41] William O. Bearden – Richard G. Netemeyer – Kelly L. Haws, op. cit.
[42] Mark R. Leary et al., *Individual differences in the need to belong: Mapping the nomological network*, Unpublished manuscript, Duke University, 2007, http://www.duke.edu/~leary/scales.htm, (12. 3. 2014.)

2.2 Data analysis

The exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses and structural equation modelling were used to analyse the empirical data. For this purpose, SPSS and AMOS 23 software packages were employed. First, data were assessed for the sample adequacy in order to conduct the exploratory factor analysis using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) indicator and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The results indicate that data are adequate for the exploratory factor analysis conduction. Namely, KMO indicator is 0.785, while the Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant.

The exploratory factor analysis was performed applying the principal component analysis and Varimax raw rotation method (Eigenvalue was set to as >1 and factor loadings as >0.4). Five factors were extracted (consumer innovativeness, need to belong, source credibility, WOM and eWOM) with 62% of the explained variance. Furthermore, the factors were analysed for reliability, validity and unidimensionality using the confirmatory factor analysis, following the parsimonious approach and considering the thresholds suggested by the relevant authors[43].

For this purpose, the measurement model was created, whereby each latent variable (factor) had its own metric and consisted of minimally two manifest variables (indicators/items). In addition, the measurement errors were independent and the factors were correlated. Beside this, the correlations among factors were <0.85 and factor loadings high and significant[44]. The confirmatory factor analysis results are shown in Table 1. and discriminant validity information in Table 2.

Table 1. *Confirmatory factor analysis results*

Factor/items	β	α	CR	AVE
Consumer innovativeness		**0.85**	**0.85**	**0.65**
I frequently search for new products/services.	0.80	0.70		
I always search for new experiences.	0.82	0.73		
I will use the first possible opportunity to find out something about the new or different products.	0.82	0.73		
Need to belong		**0.65**	**0.67**	**0.51**
I do not like to be alone.	0.61	0.50		
It is hard for me if I am away from my friends for a longer period of time.	0.81	0.50		

43 Joseph Hair et al., *Multivariate data analysis*. 7th ed., Prentice-Hall, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New York, 2010.

44 Rex B. Kline, *Principles and Practice of Structural Equation Modeling*. 3rd ed., The Guilford Press, New York, 2011.

	β		α	CR	AVE
Source credibility			**0.75**	**0.76**	**0.53**
I think I can trust the information from others, which I use for my purchases.	0.84	0.64			
I believe that other people as a source of information for my purchases are sincere and truthful.	0.78	0.64			
Information sources (other people) used for my purchases have enough expertise.	0.53	0.50			
WOM			**0.76**	**0.77**	**0.53**
I like when others (family, friends…) inform me about different products.	0.58	0.50			
I often ask others (family, friends…) about products, stores or sales.	0.82	0.70			
I frequently seek the information/advice from others (family, friends…) about new products or brands.	0.76	0.60			
eWOM			**0.79**	**0.79**	**0.57**
Online comments from others are a good source of information regarding the products, stores or sales.	0.62	0.60			
I always read online reviews posted by others.	0.91	0.72			
I like to inform myself online regarding different products (comments from others, blogs, forums…).	0.72	0.63			

Note: *β – refers to factor loading from confirmatory analysis, α – Cronbach alpha of the scale with item–total correlations beneath, CR – composite reliability, AVE – average extracted variance*

Source: Research

Table 2. *Discriminant validity*

		1	2	3	4	5
1	Consumer innovativeness	**0.81**				
2	Need to belong	0.16	**0.71**			
3	Source credibility	0.22	0.24	**0.73**		
4	WOM	0.44	-0.01	0.25	**0.73**	
5	eWOM	0.34	-0.10	0.28	0.26	**0.75**

Source: Research

Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the measurement model fits data well (Table 3.). In addition, all items loaded on the corresponding factors and are high and statistically significant.

Table 3. *Measurement model fit*

Index	Value
GFI	0.95
AGFI	0.91
NFI	0.91
CFI	0.97
RMSEA	0.04

Source: Research

Composite reliability (CR) and average extracted variance (AVE) indicate that the factors exhibit the characteristics of reliability and convergent validity, i.e. latent variables are well explained by the observed variables. Discriminant validity was assessed using the correlation analysis and square roots of AVE values, which are higher than the inter-construct correlations confirming the discriminant validity of the used constructs.

Confirmatory factor analysis shows that the used measurement scales are characterised by the reliability, validity and unidimensionality, and thus data are suitable for structural equation modelling (SEM). Prior to SEM analysis, data were checked for the outliers, normality of distribution (skewness, kurtosis, Tolerance, VIF), colinearity (correlation analysis, multiple regression analyses) and homoscedasticity (Levene's test, correction test). All tests/values were adequate and thus appropriate for SEM analysis.

Structural model was developed based on the measurement model. The structural parameters were estimated using the maximum likelihood (ML) method and were covariance based. The goodness-of-fit of the structural model shows that the model fits data well.

Table 4. *Structural model fit*

Index	Value
GFI	0.94
AGFI	0.91
NFI	0.90
CFI	0.97
RMSEA	0.05

Source: Research

Standardized structural coefficient values for testing the proposed hypotheses can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. *Standardized structural coefficients*

Hypothesis	Coefficient	Status
H1: Consumer innovativeness à WOM	**0.523***	**Supported**
H2: Consumer innovativeness à eWOM	**0.408***	**Supported**
H3: Need to belong à WOM	-0.060	Rejected
H4: Need to belong à eWOM	-0.193	Rejected
H5: Source credibility à WOM	0.048	Rejected
H6: Source credibility à eWOM	**0.211****	**Supported**

*Note: * significant at p<0.001, ** significant at p<0.05*

Source: Research

Furthermore, in order to check for potential differences among the subsamples (age, gender, country) in terms of the researched characteristics (consumer innovativeness, need to belong, source credibility, WOM and eWOM) ANOVA and regression analysis were performed. The results show that there are no differences among these variables except in the case of the country and eWOM indicating that the Croatian students tend to be more prone to seeking WOM information in electronic setting than the students from other countries.

3. Findings/discussion

The main purpose of this research was to explore the impact of several antecedents (consumer innovativeness, need to belong and perceived source credibility) on the traditional and electronic WOM information receiving. The results indicate that the researched factors do not influence WOM and eWOM in the same way, thus exhibiting different significance and intensity of the influence.

Consumer innovativeness positively impacts both WOM and eWOM, whereby this factor poses a stronger influence on WOM than on eWOM. Therefore, the hypotheses H1 and H2 are supported. These results are in accordance with some previous studies[45] in terms of the offline WOM, and represent the novel findin-

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[45] Tao Sun et al., op. cit.

gs when it comes to traditional WOM. Consumer's need to belong unexpectedly showed to be non-significant for students in both settings (traditional and electronic WOM context), thus hypotheses H3 and H4 were rejected. The reasons for such results can be searched within the students' perceptions. Namely, the majority of the students belong to the senior years of study and possibly perceive themselves as self-esteemed or self-actualized and in that sense "rejecting" the notion of needing to belong somewhere, especially when it comes to WOM information receiving. Also, the explanation for such results can be sought within some prior research results[46] that suggest that the susceptibility to interpersonal influence declines with age. Namely, age can be connected with the highest levels of susceptibility to interpersonal influence during the teens and early adult years, whereby the influence of others increases with advancing age only as a source of information. Although the corresponding hypotheses were rejected, this non-significance can be seen as a novel finding when it comes to the youth population and need to belong and WOM/eWOM information receiving relationships.

Perceived source credibility positively influences eWOM unlike the traditional WOM setting. Therefore, the hypothesis H5 is rejected, while H6 is supported. These results are surprisingly not in accordance with some previous theory notions respecting the traditional WOM, but do represent novel findings when it comes to eWOM information receiving. The explanation for non-significance of the source credibility in offline WOM context might be connected with demographic aspect. Namely, it seems that young population attaches greater importance to source credibility in online environment, which might be more familiar or common to them in their everyday activities. The framework, which employed researched antecedents in WOM and eWOM setting simultaneously, contributes to novel finding, as well.

Conclusion/implications

In addition to scientific contributions, these research results offer some practical marketing implications. Marketing experts can benefit from a better understanding of WOM predictors in both offline and online context.

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[46] Ronald A. Clark – Ronald E. Goldsmith, "Interpersonal influence and consumer innovativeness", *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 30 (2006) 1, 34–43; William O. Bearden – Richard G. Netemeyer – Jesse E. Teel, "Further Validation of the Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence Scal", *in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 17, eds. Marvin E. Goldberg, Gerald Gorn, and Richard W. Pollay, Provo, UT : Association for Consumer Research*, (1990), 770–776.

Moreover, this can serve as an important orientation for segmenting and positioning the market when it comes to young population, as well as for creating the persuasive and creative marketing strategy. Explicitly, WOM seeker is an innovative young individual relying on both offline and online WOM when searching for information regarding the product, service or place.

When it comes to online WOM, this individual also pays attention to source, i.e. needs to perceive the source of information as credible, trustworthy and knowledgeable. This suggests the marketing experts several things. Namely, in order to stimulate the positive WOM, marketing managers need to develop creative advertising strategy adapted to both offline and online environment. The creative strategy, in this case, needs to stress the innovativeness of the consumer; therefore it would be advisable to use the innovativeness appeals in the messages aimed toward the young individuals. Furthermore, some new and original products, services or places can be offered, as well.

Moreover, when creating an online campaign or posting any form of a message, the "proof" of source credibility should be visible. This might be feasible by stressing the identity of the message sender (e.g. regular consumer or celebrity), employing a peer endorser that would communicate credibility, carefully editing or creating the message that would communicate the expertise; provide reassurance, offer solutions and recommendations. This all ads to developing a creative marketing strategy with a purpose of stimulating the positive WOM information search in traditional and online context.

The limitation of this research could be seen within the sample population. Namely, this research captured the WOM behaviour and antecedents on the student population. Although the youth's insights are important, especially when it comes to online channels, the inclusion of all representative age groups might reveal different significance of the researched WOM predictors and thus provide broader picture of their impact on WOM and eWOM. Therefore, this limitation can also serve as a future research direction.

In addition, future research can include more categories of factors (e.g. interpersonal, situational, cultural), and/or more countries (cross-cultural approach) or even assess the possible moderating role of some factors (e.g. demographic and/or socioeconomic).

ČIMBENICI OD UTJECAJA NA TRADICIONALNU I ELEKTRONSKU USMENU KOMUNIKACIJU: ISTRAŽIVANJE NA UZORKU STUDENATA

Sažetak

Usmena komunikacija (engl. WOM) predstavlja uvjerljiv oblik komunikacije koji ima veliku važnost za ponašanje potrošača. Budući da se usmena komunikacija može odvijati i u tradicionalnom (offline) i elektroničkom (online) okružju, od iznimne je važnosti utvrditi njezino značenje za oba okružja. Glavna svrha ovog rada jest istražiti utjecaj nekoliko čimbenika (inovativnost potrošača, potreba za pripadanjem te percipirana kredibilnost izvora) na primanje informacija u kontekstu tradicionalne i elektronske usmene komunikacije. Istraživanje je provedeno na uzorku od 203 studenta iz nekoliko zemalja (Hrvatska, Bosna i Hercegovina te Srbija). Podatci su analizirani korištenjem više statističkih tehnika i metoda, uključujući eksplorativnu i konfirmativnu faktorsku analizu te strukturno modeliranje (SEM). Rezultati pokazuju da istraživani čimbenici imaju različito značenje te različit intenzitet utjecaja na tradicionalnu i elektroničku usmenu komunikaciju. Naime, inovativnost potrošača pozitivno utječe na tradicionalnu i elektroničku usmenu komunikaciju, pri čemu jače značenje ima za tradicionalnu usmenu komunikaciju. Potreba za pripadanjem nije se pokazala važnom za primanje informacija usmenom komunikacijom u tradicionalnom i elektroničkom okružju. Percipirana kredibilnost izvora bitno utječe na primatelja informacija elektroničkom usmenom komunikacijom. Pored teorijske relevantnosti, dobiveni rezultati imaju marketinške implikacije za praksu, odnosno marketinške stručnjake pri upravljanju usmenom komunikacijom u tradicionalnom i elektroničkom okružju.

Ključne riječi: *tradicionalna usmena komunikacija; WOM; elektronička usmena komunikacija; eWOM; inovativnost potrošača; potreba za pripadanjem; kredibilnost izvora*