To what degree is online word-of-mouth representative of offline word-of-mouth?

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Honours in Business (Marketing)

Ehrenberg Bass Institute for Marketing Science
University of South Australia

- June 2009-

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much of the credit for completing my Honours must go to my mentor, Associate Professor Jenni Romaniuk, who I am most indebted to. Thank you for agreeing to supervise me, for guiding me and for remaining graciously patient with me. I am so fortunate to have had your ongoing support throughout the year, and I could not have hoped for a better source of inspiration.

Thank you to my colleagues and friends at the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for your advice and consideration, in particular those with whom I share my office. I would also like to give acknowledgements to Jackson and Katherine M. for assisting me with data coding; and Ann, Bryony, Katherine A., Nicole and Steven for subjecting yourselves to last minute editing and refinement of the finished document. A special thanks must go to the marvelous Carl, for helping me construct this thesis in its' final hours.

My gratitude also goes out to my parents and siblings for their unconditional love and continuous encouragement. I'd like to especially thank my niece, little Alexandra, who makes me smile, for providing me with the most delightful distraction at times when I felt my thesis had gotten the better of me.

Finally to Ilia, who spent the year motivating me and believing in me, thank you.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any University and that to the best of knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Cathy Nguyen   22nd June, 2009

ABSTRACT

Word-of-mouth (WOM) can be transmitted within two environments: offline and online. Offline WOM refers to any informal discussion about products and services, taking place either face-to-face, over the telephone or through written letters (Charlett, Garland, & Marr, 1995; Eubank & Fay, 2008). In an online environment, these same conversations occur over the Internet. Despite a substantial increase in Internet usage rates in recent years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008), there is currently a limited body of knowledge on WOM and its effects in an electronic context. This study examines how representative online WOM is of offline WOM through investigation into two key areas: the reasons for giving WOM and the impact that WOM has on those receiving.

In total, 383 respondents participated in an Internet questionnaire, where they each reported on the last instance of WOM given and received about a television show or a movie. Participants were asked to indicate the medium in which the advice was transmitted in or acquired (i.e., offline or online). Those who reported having given WOM were required to specify the reason that prompted them to articulate the advice. These responses were then coded into themes based on prior studies in this area. Respondents who had received WOM were asked to indicate how their viewing probability changed as a result of being exposed to the advice. The shift in probability before receiving the advice and after determined the overall impact of WOM.

The results from this study reveal that, despite mode of transmission, *Satisfaction* or *Dissatisfaction, Coincidental Conversation* and *Program/Movie Content* are the main drivers of WOM. There were no significant differences between the reasons for giving positive WOM offline and the reasons for giving positive WOM online. The same result could not be determined for negative advice due to the low reported incidence of given negative WOM, especially in an online environment. There was no statistical difference between the impact of offline WOM and online WOM (both positive and negative), across the two categories studied.

The overall findings from this study imply that WOM in an online environment *is* representative of offline WOM. This is important as it means that insights obtained through decades of research on offline WOM are applicable within the online domain.

This thesis has expanded the limited knowledge on online WOM. The findings obtained contribute to further understanding the reasons behind a consumer's decision to engage in WOM within different mediums. Additionally, this research aids in improving WOM measures by reiterating the methodological importance of separating consumer's prior-probability of purchase when analysing the impact of WOM, as was initially proposed by East, Hammond and Lomax (2008a). The key implications arising from this study are outlined in the thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1   INTRODUCTION

Word-of-mouth (WOM hereafter) refers to the sharing of experiences or passing of advice between consumers about products, services and brands (Charlett et al., 1995; East et al., 2008a). In recent years, WOM has received an increasing level of attention in both academic research and management practice. Marketing interest in the WOM phenomenon is partially attributed to its high incidence rate in the marketplace (Fitzgerald Bone, 1995). According to PQ media, the volume of interpersonal communication between consumers is expanding at around 30% annually, making it the fastest growing segment in marketing (Eubank & Fay, 2008). As well as this, WOM is regarded one of the strongest influencers of consumer purchase behaviour (Charlett et al., 1995; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Of all the countless and diverse channels in which a consumer can attain information, not one is considered to carry the perceived credibility and significance associated with WOM (Godes et al., 2004).

WOM between consumers can be transmitted within two environments: offline and online. Before the days of the World-Wide-Web, the options for WOM communication were limited mainly to face-to-face dialogue, telephone discussion and through written letters (Eubank & Fay, 2008). Conversations of such nature can be referred to as 'offline WOM'. These days, modern advances driven by technology have allowed for WOM to also take place online, over the Internet.

The introduction of the Internet has advanced traditional WOM in two ways. Firstly, it has extended the avenues for which consumers can spread and seek product-related advice (Sultana, 2008). The existence of a diverse mosaic of online platforms (e.g., discussion groups, chartrooms) allows consumers to overcome both time and geographic boundaries and to interact with others based on mutual interests (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Mayzlin, 2006). As well as changing the way individuals communicate and exchange advice, the Internet has also provided marketers with an alternative means for measuring WOM.

In the past, WOM research has been quite problematic due to the limited methods available for capturing offline communication (Romaniuk & East, 2007). The majority of WOM in an offline environment occurs spontaneously, infrequently and within socially private settings (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Direct observations of such behaviour by marketers have been costly and very difficult to implement. Over the Internet, many of these recommendations are publicly available and easily accessible (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). The Internet's potential to substantially improve the measurability of WOM has made online WOM a very desirable area for research. However, despite reports showing that there are more people using the Internet (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008), research on customer knowledge sharing in an online environment remains at its early and formative stages. Without knowing if online WOM is representative of offline WOM behaviour, marketers are unable to determine whether research findings obtained online are truly generalisable to all WOM.

This study entails a direct comparison between online WOM and offline WOM. Drawing on prior knowledge from existing literature, this comparison will be achieved through: 1) exploring the reasons why people give offline and online WOM and 2) examining the relative impact of offline and online WOM on those receiving advice. The outputs of this study will allow for conclusions to be drawn on the generalisability of online WOM. Such knowledge will provide valuable insights for marketing practice, as well as contribute to and extend on existing marketing theory.

The specific research questions for this thesis are as follows:

RQ1a: Do the reasons for giving positive WOM online differ from the reasons for giving positive WOM offline?
RQ1b: Do the reasons for giving negative WOM online differ from the reasons for giving negative WOM offline?

RQ2a: Does the impact of positive WOM differ when received in an online environment compared with an offline environment?
RQ2b: Does the impact of negative WOM differ when received in an online environment compared with an offline environment?

Thesis structure

Chapter 2 begins by exploring the nature and characteristics of WOM. Here, the two mediums whereby WOM can occur are also introduced. The literature pertinent to the drivers and the impact of WOM are then presented in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. After these introductory chapters, an overview of the research methodology is detailed in Chapter 5. The major results of this study are presented in two separate chapters: one relevant to the reasons behind giving offline/online WOM (Chapter 6), the other relevant to offline/online WOM impact (Chapter 7). An overview of the results and a discussion on how such findings align with prior literature then follows in Chapter 8. In the final chapter, the implications for marketing research and industry, an overview of the limitations, as well as the avenues for future research are presented.

CHAPTER 2   THE NATURE OF WOM

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to introduce the phenomenon that is WOM. This chapter is broken down into three main sections. In the first section, I examine the key definitions of WOM drawn from prior literature. Following this, the fundamental elements and characteristics of WOM are outlined. The final section of this chapter focuses on how WOM can be transmitted, and how offline and online WOM differ.

2.1   Defining WOM

Johan Arndt (1967b), was one of the first academics to explore the WOM concept within marketing literature. In an early paper, Arndt (1967b) characterises WOM very definitively as any oral, interpersonal communication between a receiver and a communicator known personally to one another, about a product, service or brand. According to Westbrook (1987), WOM statements can be in regards to the usage or performance of products/services, quality of offering, or the trustworthiness of the brand itself.

Arndt's (1967b) definition today, reflects a somewhat limited portrayal of WOM as it does not encompass the nature of modern communication. Nowadays, the options for WOM transmission are many and varied. Aside from spoken form, WOM can also occur via Short Messaging Services (SMS), within online forums, as part of electronic mail (E-mail) or among other platforms. Further, the emergence of online media has meant sharing of very intimate and personal opinions or experiences amongst even complete strangers is now perceived to be perfectly acceptable (Dellarocas, 2003). Hence, the element of having two individuals acquainted on a personal level, as described in Arndt's (1967b) earlier definition, is no longer a prerequisite for WOM engagement.

Later definitions of WOM within scholarly articles have become less restrictive in terms of the elements necessary for WOM engagement. For example, WOM was defined by Traylor and Mathais (1983, p.42) simply as "*hearing about a product or service from friends*", though this classification encompasses only the receiving aspect of WOM.

WOM has also been defined by Bone (1995, p.213) broadly as "*interpersonal communications in which none of the participants are marketing sources*"; and by East, Hammond and Lomax (2008a, p.215) as "*informal advice passed between consumers*". Such definitions allude to the exclusion of any formal consumer-to-organisation communication (e.g., customer complaints or enquiries) or organisation-to-customer interaction (e.g., promotions and seminars) (Mazzarol, Sweeney, & Soutar, 2007). These days, terms such as 'referral marketing', 'buzz' and 'viral marketing' are also commonly used to describe WOM (Arora, 2007).

Buttle (1998) was one of the first researchers to acknowledge the technological changes in the way WOM can be exchanged. He classifies WOM as face-to-face or *electronic* communication occurring between a receiver and a communicator regarding a product, service or brand. This definition however, like many others, does not explicitly delineate between WOM that takes place offline and WOM occurring online, *over the Internet*. Offline and online WOM will be introduced and examined in more depth later in the chapter. However, it is first important to understand the core components of WOM behaviour (i.e., the elements that remain unchanged despite *how* it is transmitted).

The following points depict the fundamental characteristics of WOM.

- The WOM process involves two participants: a giver and a receiver. A giver is the person who articulates the message or gives the advice, whereas a receiver is the person to whom the message or advice is directed (Buttle, 1998). Given the situation or setting, WOM can also be transferred from one-to-many (e.g., group discussions where one person is sharing an experience with numerous others). In such instances, the process of communication between the one giver and each receiver can be considered a separate WOM transaction.

- WOM can either be sought or unsought (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Sought WOM involves the receiver seeking, or actively asking for information about the product or service of interest (e.g., *"Do you know of a nice Thai restaurant?"*).

Unsought WOM on the other hand, occurs when advice or opinions are offered without prompting by the giver (e.g., *"I went to a great Thai restaurant last night"*) (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008).

- WOM messages have a valence. According to Buttle (1998), the valence of WOM reflects the degree of positivity or negativity of expressed messages. This allows for each statement to be classed as positive WOM (PWOM), for instance, a recommendation or advocacy, or negative WOM (NWOM), for example, advising against or expressing negative statements regarding a product, service or brand (East, Wright, & Vanhuele, 2008b). However, comments that are neither explicitly positive nor negative can also be regarded WOM.

  The effects that WOM has on purchase behaviour will vary depending on the degree of valence the message holds. It is expected that positive statements or recommendations accelerate brand acceptance and encourage purchase (Traylor & Mathais, 1983). Conversely, negative opinions or statements are likely to impede a brand's acceptance and dissuade purchase (East & Hammond, 2005; Holmes & Lett, 1977). It is possible for comments about brands that are neutral to also influence purchase. However, the effects of neutral statements on consumer behaviour have not been examined in prior research.

WOM has generated substantial interest within both management practice and academia. In the next section, I outline why WOM is important and examine the factors that separate it from traditional marketing strategies.

2.2 What makes WOM different?

There are two issues that contribute to marketing interest in WOM: the large volume of WOM activity that occurs and secondly, WOM's ability to influence consumer behaviour.

The volume of WOM that occurs amongst consumers is expanding at such a high rate it is difficult for marketers to ignore. According to PQ Media, WOM activity is expanding at approximately 30% annually, making it the fastest growing segment in marketing (Eubank & Fay, 2008). As noted by Arora (2007), information dissemination by WOM has become so fast that no other communication medium can compare. A tracking study by Keller (2007) has reported that Americans alone, are partaking in around 2.6 billion branded conversations daily. For the average U.S adult, this equates to approximately ten discussions about brands per day. As well as the high rate at which WOM takes place, marketers are also interested in the effect it has on consumer buying behaviour.

WOM is considered a highly powerful and persuasive marketing force (Richins, 1983; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998). Research has shown that WOM recommendations have the potential to substantially affect consumer purchase choices during decision-making processes (Arndt, 1967b; Engel, Kegerreis, & Blackwell, 1969; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). For example, an earlier study by Dichter (1964) revealed that WOM is involved in as many as 80% of all brand decisions. Later research by Keaveney (1995) found that approximately 50% of service provider replacements occurred primarily as a result of WOM. Furthermore, it is widely believed that WOM is *even more* effective compared to traditional tools of personal selling and conventional advertising media (East et al., 2008a; Engel et al., 1969; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Empirical support for this was provided by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), who found that PWOM is twice as effective as radio and seven times more effective than print ads. In a more recent study, Hartnett and Romaniuk (2008) reveal that PWOM has twice the influence of television advertising on an individual's likelihood of viewing new season TV programs.

There are numerous factors that separate WOM from traditional advertising strategies, leading it to exert such force on consumer purchase behaviour. A review of the literature reveals elements such as speed and interactivity, evidence based, perceived lack of commerciality, associated social risks and felt pressure to conform all contribute to WOM's influence. Each of these characteristics will be discussed in more depth now.

Speed and interactivity

WOM is instantly available and easily attainable, therefore recognised as an efficient means for securing information (Arora, Allenby, & Ginter, 1998). Furthermore, the quality of improvisation associated with human interaction makes it possible for people to immediately tailor WOM advice to suit the needs of the seeker (East, Hammond, & Wright, 2007).

Evidence based

WOM is perceived a reliable source of information as it is often based on the "tried and tested" prior experiences of others. According to Arndt (1967a), people often seek advice when considering the purchase of new products or services. In such cases, pre-purchase experience is typically limited as potential customers are unable to trial the brand before committing to buy (East et al., 2007). As such, they will commonly turn to other customers who have already tried the brand. WOM can thus be seen as an objective and proven source of information (Charlett et al., 1995).

Perceived lack of commerciality

Consumers perceive WOM to originate from an unbiased and non-commercial third party (Mizerski, 1982). As cited by Mazzarol et al (2007, p.1475), *"WOM provides a highly credible means of persuasion because the communicator is not seen as having a vested interest in selling the recommended product or service and is likely to portray the information in a meaningful way"*. The lack of commercial input associated with WOM thus enables it to be regarded as a more honest and trusted source of information compared to other paid mass media activities (Arora, 2007).

Associated social risks

The actual act of giving WOM may potentially either enhance or damage the giver's social status depending on how appropriate the WOM advice is for the receiver. In the words of Reichheld (2003, p.253), *"*[when customers give WOM] *to relatives or friends, they do more than indicate that they have received good economic value from a company, they also put their own reputations on the line".* Arora (2007) adds that the recommendation of a suitable product is capable of strengthening the relationship between a giver and a receiver, whereas a poor recommendation may potentially damage the giver's status.

The ability for WOM to have this kind of effect on social standing therefore makes it desirable to give, as well as perceived as a reputable source for information acquisition for receivers.

Felt Pressure to conform

People who receive WOM from others in their social network may feel obliged to act on the advice. According to Stafford (1966) social relationships can have substantial effect on purchasing behaviour due to the influence that one person can have on another. Such influence could lead the receiver to conform (or act towards the advice) in order to feel accepted or to be liked (e.g., receiving a recommendation from a senior authority figure such as an employer) (Wittenbrink & Henly, 1996).

The characteristics outlined make apparent the points that differentiate WOM from conventional marketing strategies. In the next section, I introduce the two mediums in which WOM communication can occur.

2.3 WOM transmission

WOM can be transmitted and exchanged within two different settings: offline and online. Offline WOM is an informal discussion between consumers about products and services, taking place through face-to-face dialogue, over the telephone or via SMS (Eubank & Fay, 2008). Much of what is currently known about WOM is attributed to the multitude of studies conducted within offline contexts (Arndt, 1967b; East & Hammond, 2006; Richins, 1984).

In recent years, the development of the Internet has meant that WOM can now also occur online. The next section of this chapter will center around the online phenomena, with detail on how the Internet has widened the scope for WOM research.

The Internet and online WOM

The Internet has become a widely accepted technological phenomenon. World Statistics (2009) have reported a 338% increase in Internet usage rates across all nations between 2000 and 2008. Closer to home, census data reveals that Australian household Internet access has increased four-fold from 16% to 64% in less than ten years (Australian Bureau of Statistics,

2008). As well as the influx of Internet adoption, people are also devoting more of their time online. Media measurement company, Nielsen (2008), report that the length of time Australians spend on the Internet has now surpassed that for television viewing; individuals currently devote 13.7 hours per week to online activities, whilst average weekly television viewing remains at 13.3 hours (Sultana, 2008).

From a marketing perspective, the online medium provides consumers with three main advantages: the ability to search products/services, the ability to purchase products/services and the ability to engage in WOM about products/services.

Firstly, the Internet enables users to quickly and conveniently obtain consumption-related information about goods and services. An initiative by Pew Internet & American Life Project found by the close of 2005, approximately 90% of Americans had used an online search engine for research before a buying decision (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006). The ability to access a variety of product choices from varying price ranges over the Internet means that consumers can save the time, effort and monetary costs associated with traditional information searching and product evaluation processes (Lee, Cheung, Lim, & Sia, 2006; Moon, 2004).

The Internet also provides consumers with an alternative outlet for direct purchase. At the click of a finger in the comfort of their own homes, consumers can become immediately exposed to a virtually unlimited selection of brands and sellers (Moon, 2004). The acceptance of online shopping is strong amongst Australians, with census data revealing online shopping to be one of the most common purposes for Internet use, alongside sending and receiving E-mails (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

As well as allowing consumers to search and directly purchase goods and services, the advent of the Internet has made it possible for consumers to participate and engage in WOM discussions via electronic mediums (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Senecal & Nantel, 2004). Consumer conversations about products and services, which take place over the Internet, can be referred to as *online WOM* (Awad, Dellarocas, & Zhang, 2004; Burmaster, 2008).

Online WOM is defined as any positive, negative or neutral statement posted via the Internet about a company or its offerings (Stauss, 2000). Such statements can be in the form of active recommendations or general opinions about products or services directed towards other online users (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Consistent with offline, online WOM occurs between consumers and hence, excludes any electronic, firm-to-consumer communication where commercial input is made by the firm, (e.g., gathering information from company websites) (Mayzlin, 2006). This is because the financial incentives involved in firm-to-consumer interactions separate it from genuine customer recommendations.

Online opinions can be transmitted via numerous platforms. Examples include: E-mail, Discussion Forums, Chat Rooms, Instant Messaging, Blogs, Brand-Communities, Product Review Sites, Boycott Sites, Guest Books, News Groups and Social Networking Sites (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006; Eubank & Fay, 2008; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003; Mayzlin, 2006). Each online system allows for unsolicited and unfiltered individual articulations to be posted, some globally and many instantly accessible by thousands of other consumers as well as institutions (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006; Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006). However despite the presence of many online platforms allowing for WOM engagement, research has found that only less than 10% of all WOM occurs online (Eubank & Fay, 2008).

There are a number of substantial differences between WOM occurring offline and WOM occurring online. In the next section, I examine and summarise the key differences between offline WOM and online WOM.

2.4   How offline WOM and online WOM differ

The core characteristics of online WOM do not substantially differ from traditional WOM. Despite how WOM is transmitted, there is always a giver and a receiver within the exchange; conversations revolve around products, services and brands, opinions can be sought or unsought and messages can be classified as positive, negative or neutral.

The variances between online and offline WOM are largely due to the situational environment in which they occur. These variations can be categorised into four main categories: audience reach, direction of interaction, strength of relationship between participants and participant's anonymity. The differences between characteristics of offline WOM and online WOM is summarised in Table 2.1. Each point is elaborated on now

Table 2.1: How offline WOM and online WOM differ

	Offline WOM	**Online WOM**
Audience reach	Small	Large
Direction of interaction	Two-way, non-verbal and verbal	One-way or two-way, mainly written
Strength of relationship	Mainly strong	Strong or weak
Participant's anonymity	Unable to be anonymous	Able to remain anonymous

Audience reach

In an offline environment, the spread of WOM is limited to the extent of a person's social circle. The Internet however, allows for potentially greater cumulative reach in terms of the proportion of audience exposed to each posted articulation (i.e., messages can remain in visual presence for a great deal longer). According to Blackshaw et al (2006), the web has eliminated the intimacy of interpersonal interaction into a broadcast-like ability to communicate with masses. WOM no longer impacts just a person's direct personal contacts, but opinions and experiences can be shared with the world (Awad et al., 2004; Mayzlin, 2006). Conversely, people who seek WOM are also not restricted to just their personal contacts as information sources.

Direction of interaction

Within an online setting, WOM can exist as two-way discussion (e.g., an ongoing conversation via chat-room or E-mail) *or* one-way feed (e.g., a single posting in a Blog or Customer Forum) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

In an offline environment however, WOM communication is likely to exist as two-way dialogue, as participant interaction is often a requirement for ongoing face-to-face and telephone conversations. Additionally, offline participants are exposed to numerous elements of non-verbal communication (e.g., facial expressions, gestures). Since information available on the Internet is mainly in written form, such facets of communication do not exist online.

Relationship strength between participants

Knowing the other participant personally is not a prerequisite for online WOM. Through the Internet, people will often give product-related advice not only to people they know (e.g., on MSN chat, where participants are likely to be acquainted) but also to people they do not know (e.g., on world-wide hotel recommendation sites) (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008). On the other hand, the majority of offline conversations occur between people who know one another on a personal level (Arndt, 1967b; Awad et al., 2004).
Thus, the sharing of personal purchase experiences with complete strangers on a day-to-day basis offline is quite rare.

Participant's anonymity

Participant anonymity is easily achieved online, but not offline. The Internet allows for people to withhold their identities and remain completely unknown to others. A consequence of this is that non-commerciality associated with WOM cannot be certain, and this may prompt a level of distrust or skepticism from the receiver (Chatterjee, 2001; Mayzlin, 2006).

The nature in which communication can differ within the two separate environments, suggests that online WOM is not representative of offline WOM. This study will examine how offline WOM and online WOM differ through investigating: 1) why people give WOM, and 2) the relative impact of WOM. The next chapter reviews the literature relating to the factors that drive the giving of WOM.

CHAPTER 3   THE DRIVERS OF WOM

Chapter 3 critically reviews the literature pertaining to offline and online WOM antecedents. This chapter begins with the background on consumer knowledge sharing. At the end of the chapter, I present my first set of research questions.

3.1   Background on consumer knowledge sharing

This section contains an overview of the literature on traditional motivation theory in the context of consumer knowledge sharing.

Traditional motivation theory for knowledge sharing

In the mid 1960s, Social Exchange Theory was developed to provide insight into human reciprocal behaviour (Blau, 1964). The theory advocates that individuals share their knowledge and experiences with the expectation that they will gain some benefit in return. Deci and Ryan (1980) posit that human behaviour can arise as a result of either extrinsic or intrinsic motives. In the context of knowledge sharing, extrinsic motivations pertain to situations where the decision to share information with others is partly influenced by a rational calculation of the external incentives expected (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). These incentives may include enhanced social image or status and reward or recognition. Conversely, intrinsic triggers prompt the performance of a behaviour where the activity itself is interesting, engaging or in some sense internally satisfying, for instance, the joy of helping others (Lee et al., 2006). This theory suggests that people will sometimes psychologically maximise their benefits whilst minimising any associated costs when planning to perform any behaviour (Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005).

Within a marketing context, individuals who regularly share knowledge about products and services with others are commonly referred to as 'market mavens' (East & Wright, 2003; Feick & Price, 1987; Gladwell, 2000). The body of literature pertaining to the idea of 'mavernism' is presented in the following section.

Market Mavens

Several academics have referred to the notion of 'mavernism' to explain the antecedents of information diffusion (East & Wright, 2003; Feick & Price, 1987; Gladwell, 2000). In 1987, Feick and Price conducted a study using Likert-type scales to measure individual's propensities to engage in discussion with others about general shopping information. Those who scored highly on the scale were identified as market mavens. Mavens were considered to be very expressive customers, who were heavily involved in the shopping experience and made it their business to initiate conversations and respond to requests from other customers (Feick & Price, 1987). Though Feick and Price (1987) advocate that market mavens do exist and are perceived as influential sources of information within their social circles, no distinct socioeconomic or demographic profile of these customers was discovered during the course of the study.

In a more recent publication, Gladwell (2000) describes market mavens as individuals who possess wide social networks, and hence have more opportunities to pass on advice that they receive. This theory became a basis for later research by East and Wright (2003), who tested whether referred customers were a more valuable asset than non-referred customers due to their increased likelihood of referring potential business to the firm. The results showed that the correlation between referred customers and likelihood of recommending the firm was weak, and any effects were likely to differ depending on the category. This result is suggestive that mavens only exist at the category level rather than the market level (i.e., individuals tend to be knowledgeable about a few different categories rather than all products in the market). A critical review of the literature relating specifically to the drivers of WOM is presented in the following section.

3.2   Why do people give WOM?

WOM can be generated through specific conditions and triggers. According to Mazzarol et al (2007), triggers are motivation factors unique to a situation. Numerous studies have attempted to determine the factors that lead people to express WOM.

Within this body of literature, there are two main schools of thought: one asserts that WOM is given mainly due to satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and the other claims WOM is primarily expressed to help the information-receiver. Empirical evidence has been provided to support each assertion, and is presented here.

WOM resulting from satisfaction or dissatisfaction

According to Anderson (1998), WOM arises when consumers' purchase or consumption expectations are disconfirmed (i.e., when expectations are exceeded or fall short). Sundram et al (1998) provide empirical support for this in an exploratory study, revealing that 33% of PWOM is driven by 'product involvement', or the giver's felt need to express advice as a result of extreme superior product performance. Conversely, findings show that 37% of NWOM is driven by 'vengeance', whereby respondents aspire to retaliate against the company associated with a negative (Sundaram et al., 1998).

A number of weaknesses are identifiable within Sundaram et al's (1998) research, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Firstly, the study did not take into account any WOM that occurred between family members, and the researchers did not explain their decision for this exclusion. Additionally, only spoken WOM about products was investigated, hence limiting the capacity to generalise results to any WOM occurring electronically, or to a services market. The respondents from Sundaram et al's (1998) study were recruited within a variety of business establishments via interception. As a result, demographic information revealed that over 70% of the sample had received college education and over 80% were in either part-time or full-time employment. This is not indicative of a representative population sample.

The role of dis/satisfaction in driving customer articulations within an *online* environment has also been examined in a few studies. There is an assertion that people write opinions in electronic form and post these on the Internet to either 'brag' or to 'moan' as a way of expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Hu, Pavlou, & Zhang, 2006). Dellarocas and Narayan (2006), measure a population's propensity to engage in post-purchase WOM by observing ranking patterns within Consumer Review Sites. The study explored consumer-generated 'buzz' levels regarding newly released blockbuster movies and how this related to box-office sales.

Their results reveal that approximately half of the 'opinions' were equal to the highest score and 18% was equal to the lowest score. The authors concluded that, consistent with prior research conducted offline (Anderson, 1998), extreme satisfaction or dissatisfaction are key motivations for expressing online WOM. Dellarocas and Narayan (2006) found that controversy, marketing efforts (especially advertising that is repetitive or unusual in nature) and product exclusivity also correlated with higher propensities to discuss movies online. The major weakness of this study was the researchers only measured observable rating scores, and thus provided little insight into underlying individual motives or true opinion content. Additionally, their findings may not be representative of all online mediums (e.g., Social Networking Sites, Chat Rooms) as only scores from Consumer Review Sites was included in the analysis.

The second stream of research within this body of literature asserts that WOM is primarily driven by the *desire to help other people*. The research to support this is presented in the next section.

WOM resulting from the felt need to help others

The second major school of thought within the body of literature on WOM drivers suggests WOM is mainly given with the intention to help the receiver of the advice (Mangold, Miller, & Brockway, 1999; Mazzarol et al., 2007; Sundaram et al., 1998). Research in 77 different service categories by Mangold et al (1999) found that in 50% of cases, the catalyst for giving WOM was the receiver's felt need for information (e.g., *"I hear Hi5 put on a great show, although I don't have any children myself"*). In 18% of cases, WOM occurred due to coincidental communication, where opinions were expressed freely during social interaction. In only 9% of cases was it the giver's satisfaction or dissatisfaction that triggered the giving of WOM. The researchers suggest that although consumption experiences may be the basis for giving advice, consumers are more likely to be influenced by the receiver's need and therefore personal satisfaction is of limited importance. However in Mangold et al's (1999) research, the drivers of WOM were as described by recipients of communication rather than by actual givers.

Contrary to the sample selected for Sundaram's et al's (1998) motivational analysis (which comprised mainly of the professional workforce), Mangold et al's (1999) study consisted only of undergraduate business students and the acquaintances of these students. Such a sample is not representative of the general population.

Mazzarol et al (2007) controlled for the weaknesses of Mangold et al's (1998) research in a semi-replicated, qualitative study. Mazzarol et al (2007) asked the *givers* of the advice about how WOM came about rather than receivers, and extended the sampling frame to represent a wider range of ages, education levels and occupations. However, the results from this study did not substantially differ from Mangold et al's (1998) initial research. A limitation of both studies was that Mangold et al (1999) and Mazzarol et al (2007) only asked respondents about spoken advice. Therefore the results may not reflect how WOM arises in an online context, where the giver may not necessarily know the receiver on a personal level, and the giving of advice to help the receiver may not be as important.

In 2004, Hennig-Thurau et al. replicated Sundaram et al's (1998) offline motivational analysis in an online WOM study. Their results supported Mangold et al (1999) and Mazzarol et al's (2007) findings, that the primary motivation for giving advice electronically was concern for other customers or altruism. Other common motives for posting online statements found in this study included desire for social interaction, desire for economic incentives and the potential to enhance own self-worth (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Researchers were, however, unable to detect any variances between the results for different types of goods and services. Further, exploration into whether the catalyst for PWOM and NWOM differed was not included.

The identified weaknesses and evident gaps within this body of literature provide a valuable basis for further research on the drivers of WOM. The first component of my thesis will examine the representativeness of online WOM through the comparison of the reasons for giving offline WOM and the reasons for giving online WOM. How such knowledge will contribute to marketing theory is detailed in the following section, along with the proposed research questions.

Outstanding issues from the literature

Research on the triggers of PWOM and NWOM, specifically in an online environment, is quite limited within marketing literature. Past studies have tended to examine WOM more so as an outcome following purchase (e.g., Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003; Wangenheim & Bayón, 2004), rather than as a precursor of behaviour. A deficient body of knowledge concerning WOM antecedents is acknowledged by Gremler and Brown (1999), who call for research exploring the conditions that enhance the occurrence of WOM.

There are several reasons to suggest why a person's motivation for expressing positive and negative WOM may vary according to the context it is given in. Factors such as online anonymity, ability to reach mass audiences and strength of relationship between participants may play a role in influencing why people give advice over the Internet as opposed to offline (Carl, 2006; De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Eubank & Fay, 2008). For example, online anonymity and the ability to instantly reach mass audiences could enable NWOM to act as a complaint towards the mass rather than the supplier (East, 2008). In an offline environment, customers do not have the power to communicate at a mass level. This circumstance could potentially affect the ability for researchers to generalise online givers to be representative of all WOM givers.

To date, there is no known research that explores the drivers of online and offline WOM in one single study. In the past, academics who have wished to test the generalisabiliy of their results have tended to do so through contrasting their research with other papers within the same stream of study. This often results in the comparison of inconsistent research methodologies, contexts and product/service categories and hence, may explain the variances in the conclusions drawn. Furthermore, many online studies have not taken into account all mediums where WOM can be exchanged electronically. For this reason, previous research that has examined reasons for giving WOM via the Internet may not be entirely representative of the whole online community.

The points outlined provide a valuable foundation for improved research. This thesis aims to identify the situations/conditions that drive knowledge sharing among consumers and to examine whether WOM participants exert the same motivations and behaviour online as offline.

As such, my first research propositions are as follows:

RQ1a: Do the reasons for giving PWOM online differ from the reasons for giving PWOM offline?

RQ1b: Do the reasons for giving NWOM online differ from the reasons for giving NWOM offline?

The purpose of this thesis is to draw comparisons between the participants (both givers and receivers) of online and offline WOM. The proposition for givers was presented in the current chapter; therefore the next chapter is concerned with exploring the impact that WOM has on those seeking and receiving the advice.

CHAPTER 4   THE IMPACT OF WOM

Chapter 4 contains a review of the literature on the impact of online versus offline WOM and PWOM versus NWOM. At the end of this chapter, the second set of research questions are presented.

4.1   Relative impact of offline versus online WOM

An understanding of what influences consumer purchase is crucial for any business manager. WOM is regarded one of the strongest drivers of buying behaviour (East et al., 2008a; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Mangold et al., 1999). The *impact* WOM has on altering purchase behaviour is said to be dependent on how credible and trustworthy a piece of information is perceived to be by the receiver (Cheung et al., 2008).

Within the WOM literature, the general consensus is that online WOM has *less* impact on consumer behaviour relative to offline WOM (East et al., 2008b; Eubank & Fay, 2008; Mayzlin, 2006). There are two main bases for this assumption: 1) strength of relationship between online participants is weaker and 2) the Internet medium itself reduces the credibility of information.

There is a theory that individuals share closer and more trust-based relationships with the people they interact with offline compared with people through the Internet (Chatterjee, 2001; Eubank & Fay, 2008). According to research conducted by Brown and Reigen (1987), information gained from strong-tie referral sources (e.g., family or close friends) are regarded more influential on receivers' decision making than information acquired through weak-tie referral sources (e.g., acquaintances or strangers). Such finding suggests that people are less likely to trust online advice due to the weaker social ties shared between online participants. Eubank and Fay (2008) challenged whether it was the mode or relationship strength that affected the credibility gap between the two environments. They conducted a study that controlled for the relationship between giver and receiver, and found that content from a spouse, best friend or family member was still more believable when received offline compared to online.

This finding suggests that the Internet medium itself is the cause of the lower impact, rather than the strength of relationship between participants. An explanation for this result may be the value of eye contact, voice and non-verbal communication affiliated with offline interaction that may boost perceived trustworthiness (Keller & Berry, 2006).

The nature of the Internet itself may also prompt receivers to question the reliability of advice acquired online. For example, the anonymity of online users may result in consumer suspicions that advice is purposely 'planted' by organisations. Some firms have been known to exploit online WOM by recruiting "Buzz Agents"[1]; people who pose as nameless consumers on the Internet and disguise brand promotions as genuine customer recommendations (Carl, 2006; Mayzlin, 2006). Buzz Agents can also exist in an offline environment (hired to casually approach shoppers in supermarkets and recommend products off the shelf), however it is much easier to conceal identity online (Carl, 2006). Although consumers may not realise they are receiving commercialised advice, the mere ability for firms to deceive without any awareness of such deception has led to a negative perception on the credibility of electronic information (Mayzlin, 2006).

Eubank and Fay (2008) were the first to perform a side-by-side comparison of the effects of offline and online WOM. Their research found that offline WOM was perceived more credible and led to slightly higher purchase intent compared to online recommendations (Eubank & Fay, 2008). Besides from this study, no other research has examined the relative impact of offline and online WOM.

In the next section, I examine the literature relating to the relative impact of PWOM and NWOM.

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[1] People affiliated with a marketing agency, and whose affiliation involves them spreading commentary recommendations about a company's brand, products and services (Carl, 2006)

4.2   Relative impact of PWOM versus NWOM

WOM statements can exist in positive, negative or neutral form. The general consensus of existing literature is in agreement that PWOM will accelerate brand acceptance and acquisition (East & Hammond, 2006; Holmes & Lett, 1977), whereas NWOM will dissuade or inhibit the likelihood of purchase (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Romaniuk, 2007; Traylor & Mathais, 1983).

Historically, WOM research mainly focused on the incidence and influence of NWOM (e.g., Charlett et al., 1995; Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001; Weinberger & Lepkowska-White, 2000), whilst less emphasis was given to PWOM. In social psychology, negative information is considered to occur more often (e.g., satisfied customers likely to tell 5 others, whilst dissatisfied customers likely to tell 11 others), and hold more weight than positive information (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1981; Hart, Heskett, & Sasser, 1990; Scott & Tybout, 1981). However in more recent years, the majority of academic studies have actually found that PWOM occurs slightly *more often*, and is considered *more influential* relative to NWOM (Charlett et al., 1995; East & Hammond, 2006; East et al., 2008a; Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003).

A parallel stream of research suggests that the impact WOM is dependent on an individual's prior-commitment or initial dedication towards purchase (Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000; East et al., 2008a). East et al (2008a) examined the impact of WOM at varying (low, medium and high) pre-WOM purchase propensities. Across a wide range of product and service categories, they found that PWOM has the most impact on purchase probability when individuals are *very unlikely* to purchase and the least impact when individuals are *very likely* to purchase the product. NWOM on the other hand, has the greatest impact on purchase probabilities when people are *very likely* to purchase and the smallest effect when individuals are *very unlikely* to purchase the product. However there is an exception to this theory, as was found by Alhuwalia (2002). Negative information exerts less impact on attitudes in familiar categories, since consumers typically discount negative data and only accept positive data on brands to which they like or are already committed (Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000). This finding was also supported by East et al (2008a), who found that NWOM could have little impact when concerning brands people are very likely to choose, and PWOM could have little impact on brands that they are very unlikely to choose.

The effects and technicality of calculating WOM impact based on prior-commitment levels is detailed in Chapter 5, when the 'Room for Movement' approach is examined in more depth.

Although there have been many studies examining the relative impact of PWOM and NWOM, studies on the impact of online versus offline WOM are not common. The majority of research on the effects of WOM over the Internet focuses on its' use as a revenue forecasting tool (Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006). For instance, Awad and Zhang (2004) found that online WOM carries important information regarding a product's quality, and the valence of online ratings is most important for predicting revenue in subsequent weeks for a movie opening. Godes and Mayzlin (2004) attempted to predict television program popularity using the Internet. Their research concluded that the dispersion of conversations (number of sites where a program was discussed) was positively correlated with the viewership numbers of each show (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). However, one limitation of their research was that other factors (e.g., exposure to advertising), which may have contributed to varying program ratings, was not factored into their analysis. The inability to account for this circumstance may have contributed to the inaccurate conclusions drawn regarding the correlation between WOM and viewing behaviour. Additionally, the categorisation of message valence by coders within this study was extremely subjective, with 42% of articulations deemed unclassifiable (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004).

Outstanding issues from the literature

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the perceived lack in credibility associated with electronic advice may be attributed to the weaker relationships shared online, *or* the nature of the medium itself. However, very few studies have examined this. And despite more people now using the Internet, there is little known about how the impact of WOM on purchase probabilities differ in an online environment as opposed to in an offline environment. Thus, the final research questions are presented:

RQ2a: Does the impact of PWOM differ when received in an online environment compared with an offline environment?
RQ2b: Does the impact of NWOM differ when received in an online environment compared with an offline environment?

The next chapter explains the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 5   RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter outlines the data collection and coding procedure used in this study.

5.1   Background to research epistemology

This thesis falls under the post-positivist umbrella of social science research. According to Newman (2006), the post-positivist paradigm provides a solid and objective foundation for understanding human behaviour. This approach assumes that society is governed by underlying patterns and laws free of subjectivity, as the natural scientific world is (Sullivan, 2001; von Wright, 1993). Knowledge is developed through the use of verifiable techniques, which generate systematic and repeatable research results. Researchers operating under this paradigm adopt a role of deductive reasoning, where patterns emerging from empirical data accumulate as evidence for theory (Hunt, 1991). This highlights the importance of drawing on prior literature to enhance marketing knowledge.

The subsequent sections of this chapter are concerned with outlining the data collection and the coding procedure used in this research. Before doing so, I will first introduce the categories that were chosen for this study and provide justification for their usage.

Television shows and movies

The present study investigates WOM behaviour in the context of television shows and movies. Both are categories known to generate high levels of offline and online discussion (Eubank & Fay, 2008).

Television is regarded an attractive area for WOM research for a number of reasons. First of all, any research that provides insight into how consumers are influenced towards program viewing is of great value to both marketers and network broadcasters. For many businesses, television advertisements remain the most effective means for acquiring business (Romaniuk, 2007). The growing number of TV stations, in addition to channel fragmentation in the U.S and the U.K, has meant that it has never been harder vie for audience attention.

Knowledge that helps elevate ratings is of benefit to both commercial networks and the brands that use television media to connect with consumers (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). To date, minimal research has examined WOM in markets where 'purchase' is common and there are minor consequences for making a poor choice. Romaniuk (2007) comments that prior studies on the effects of WOM have mainly examined infrequently purchased and high-involvement service categories where switching costs are often high. One of the most common choice behaviors is deciding which TV shows to watch, making television a useful category for study.

A parallel entertainment market is that of motion pictures, which was chosen as the second category investigated within this study. According to Dellarocas et al (2006), the film industry is an ideal context for understanding online reputation and diffusions of WOM due to the overwhelming amount of online discussions that occur about a movie prior to its release date.

Whilst both television shows and movies fall under the media/entertainment umbrella, they have differing qualities. For instance, television programs have a continuous element to the structure, character or storyline and are often shown in the same timeslot each day or week, whilst movies are for the most part, a once-off experience. Additionally, network television shows generally run across seasons, whereas motion pictures tend to have a very short life span in theatres (Liu, 2006). Furthermore, the provision of free-to-air channels on Australian stations denotes no monetary cost associated with watching a particular program[2], whereas viewing a movie at the theatre or even hiring it on DVD will typically require a fee. Such differences leave scope for valuable comparisons between the two categories.

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[2] While households pay for subscription-television (i.e., Foxtel), the actual viewing of individual television programs is free.

5.2 Research design

In this section, the research design of this study is explained.

Data collection

An Internet survey was used to collect the relevant data for this research. Since the study aims to examine offline *and* online WOM behaviour, it was important to ensure that all respondents were capable of using web-based technologies for communicative purposes (i.e., able to engage in online WOM). With research showing that only 7% of WOM occurring online (Eubank & Fay, 2008), a methodology like telephone or face-to-face interviews could potentially under-represent instances of electronic WOM. An online survey, completed by online users, controlled for this potential bias. The web was also chosen as the preferred channel for data collection as it is known to generate greater response accuracy, allowing for fast turnaround of results (Malhotra, Hall, Shaw, & Oppenheim, 2006). This was especially important considering the short time frame of the Honours year.

Sample population

Respondents were recruited through an Internet panel management company, Pure Profile, where individuals opt-in to complete surveys and are paid for their time. Pure Profile's online database comprises of over 300,000 members, each member completing only one research survey every 6 months on average. The geographical scope of the research was a single Australian capital city (Sydney) to ensure that all respondents were exposed to the same television-programming schedule. To be deemed a suitable candidate for this study, respondent must not work in television, film or market research industries, participants must be between the ages of 18 and 65 and have watched television or at least one movie within the last year.

A total of 400 Australian participants completed the questionnaire. Seventeen respondents were removed during the analysis phase due to unusable or invalid responses, leaving a total sample of 383 participants.

The next section discusses the sampling method for recruiting respondents.

Sampling Method

A quota sampling approach was used to ensure an equal distribution across gender and age groups. The key benefit of sampling stratification is that it allows for testing of any demographic differences that might impact on the representativeness of online WOM, particularly given the reported skews of the Internet towards youth and males (Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006; Keller Fay Group, 2008). This also reduced the presence of any cohort effects. An equal distribution of gender (males: *n=197,* females *n=186)*, and across age groups was achieved: 18-24 *(n=92)*, 25-34 *(n=96)*, 35-44 *(n=97)*, and 46 to 64 *(n=98)*.

Research instrument

A retrospective questionnaire was designed to collect the necessary data for this study. East and Romaniuk (2007) suggest that retrospective surveys remain the most effective method available for generating consistent results in WOM, particularly in contrasting the impact of PWOM and NWOM.

The University of South Australia's Business Ethics Committee approved the questionnaire before its release into the field. Fieldwork commenced on the 20th March 2009, and the data was collected within 48 hours. The survey was designed to take approximately 15 minutes to complete to reduce any respondent-fatigue effects. Respondents were asked to report their WOM behaviour regarding television programs and movies. A copy of the instrument used in this research is available in Appendix 1.

The key metrics included are now defined, along with detail of how each construct was operationalised.

Last instance of WOM

In practice, it is very difficult to measure and examine all instances of WOM given and received (Romaniuk & East, 2007). To enable accurate recollection, only the most recent instances of WOM were asked about, consistent with research previously conducted by East, Hammond and Lomax (2005) and Romaniuk (2007).

Respondents were required to draw on the last instance of given PWOM, given NWOM, received PWOM and received NWOM for TV shows and movies. Any instances of WOM over a year ago were excluded from analysis. There has been considerable debate about whether WOM is an active recommendation or merely a positive/negative discussion (Mazzarol et al., 2007). In this study, both alternatives are considered WOM (e.g., PWOM included both positive advice and expressing positive comments about a show/movie).

WOM medium

To determine the medium in which the advice was exchanged (i.e. offline/online), respondents who had engaged in any WOM (given or received, positive or negative) were asked to identify *how* the statement or advice was communicated. Respondents were able to choose from options including: face-to-face, telephone, written letter, SMS and online/over the Internet. Each option was randomised for each category to reduce the presence of any order effects, as was the order of PWOM/NWOM. Face-to-face, telephone (including SMS) and written letters were all later coded to denote offline WOM. Any WOM given or received over the Internet was classed as online WOM.

Respondents who had engaged in any online WOM were also asked to indicate the electronic channel of communication. The options for this set included: E-mail, Instant Messaging/Chat, Social Networking Site, Blog/Forum and Consumer Review Site. An 'other' option was also included in the response set, however very few responses were recorded for this option[3].

Reasons for giving WOM

Respondents who had given any WOM were asked to recount what motivated or prompted them to do so through an unprompted, open-ended question. This approach was effectively used in Sundaram et al's (1998) motivational analysis for giving WOM.

WOM Impact

In this study, the impact of WOM was measured by East et al's (2008a) 'Room for Movement' method, which has shown to be an effective means for calculating the impact of positive and NWOM.

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[3] Three respondents specified 'Skype' within the 'Other' option for online communication. These were later coded into the Instant Messaging/Chat category.

The 'Room for Movement' approach involves asking respondents to recollect (for each instance of PWOM and NWOM received) the probability of watching the program/movie *before* receiving the advice, and probability of watching the program/movie *after* receiving the advice. Responses are rated on an 11-point, probabilistic Juster Scale (1966a). The Juster method uses respondents' subjective assessments of the probability of purchase to forecast future behaviour, and has been found to be one of the most accurate approaches in predicting consumer behaviour (Faulkner & Corkindale, 2004). The difference between a respondent's recalled probability before and probability after (i.e., shift in viewing propensity) depicts the impact of WOM. For instance, if a respondent indicated an initial viewing probability of 5/10, and this then changes to 8/10 after receiving WOM, then the WOM's impact on the receiver is +3. This approach is an effective means for examining relative impact across different conditions (i.e., offline and online, positive and negative).

Measurement of WOM impact is heavily reliant on the ability to capture change over time. An alternative method is to re-interview respondents (to examine viewing probability before and actual behaviour after advice). However, it would be difficult to isolate WOM as the *only* influence on action or non-action. Additional factors (e.g., advertising, program promotions) that may have influenced an individual to watch a show/movie could not be considered nor controlled for. For this reason, questioning respondents about their viewing probability before and after receiving WOM was most appropriate.

The following section outlines the data coding procedure used for classifying the triggers of WOM.

5.3   Data coding procedure

To determine the trigger of WOM, respondents were asked to indicate their reason for giving WOM in an unprompted, open-ended question. The verbatims were then coded via a content analysis procedure, where each response was allocated to a category drawn from prior research.

The three theoretical frameworks drawn on included: Mangold et al's (1999) WOM catalyst classifications, Sundaram et al's (1998) motivation categories, and Hennig-Thurau et al's (2004) online adaptation of motivation categories. These studies provide a solid foundation to explain both traditional and online WOM behaviour. Table 5.1 shows the most dominant drivers of PWOM.

Table 5.1: Categories for the triggers of PWOM

Factors that Stimulate PWOM	Description & Literature derived from…
• **Concern for Others**	Intention of aiding the receiver to make a satisfying purchase decision without anticipating any reward in return (*Hennig-Thurau et al 2004; Mangold et al 1999; Sundaram et al 1998*)
• **Satisfaction**	To vent the positive feelings associated with a satisfying purchase/consumption experience. Includes personal interest or excitement resulting from product ownership and product use (*Mangold et al 1999; Sundaram et al 1998*)
• **Self-Enhancement**	The sharing of positive experiences in an effort to enhance image among other shoppers; to show connoisseurship, to project themselves as experts, or to enhance status and to seek appreciation (*Hennig-Thurau et al 2004; Sundaram et al 1998*)
• **Coincidental Conversation**	PWOM arising from general conversation rather than specific discussion of the product/service (*Mangold et al, 1999*)
• **Help the Program/Movie**	PWOM resulting from a desire to help the company. The objective here is to help the establishment rather than the person asking for advice (*Hennig-Thurau et al 2004; Sundaram et al 1998*)
• **Economic Incentives**	Applicable where a reward or incentive motivates the giving of PWOM (*Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004*)
• **Marketing Efforts**	PWOM stimulated by an organisation's advertising or promotional efforts (*Mangold et al, 1999*)

Table 5.2 shows the most dominant drivers of NWOM, as extracted from prior research.

Table 5.2: Categories for the triggers of NWOM

Factors that Stimulate NWOM	Description & Literature derived from…
• **Concern for Others**	NWOM given to prevent others from experiencing the problems that they had encountered or to help others by warning them about negative consequences of a particular action (*Hennig-Thurau et a', 2004; Mangold et al 1999; Sundaram et al 1998*)
• **Dissatisfaction**	The use of NWOM to vent anger or dissatisfaction, or to reduce anxiety and frustration resulting from poor consumption experiences (*Mangold et al 1999; Sundaram et al 1998*)
• **Coincidental Conversation**	NWOM arising from general conversation rather than specific discussion of the product/service (*Mangold et al, 1999*)
• **Vengeance**	To retaliate against the company associated with the negative consumption experiences. A motive of deterring others from patronising the business that the giver perceives to not care enough about customers, to not listen to customer complaints and consequently should not be allowed to operate (*Sundaram et al 1998*)
• **Advice Seeking**	Consumers who encounter negative consumption experiences and are unaware of the means to seek redress will share negative experiences to obtain some advice on how to resolve their problems (*Hennig-Thurau et al 2004; Sundaram et al 1998*)
• **Marketing Efforts**	NWOM stimulated by an organisation's promotional efforts (*Mangold et al, 1999*)

Many categories were evident in more than one prior study (though the category may have been named differently in each study). For example, what Mangold et al (1999) referred to as *Receiver's Felt Need*, Sundaram et al (1998) classified as *Concern for Others,* and Hennig-Thurau et al (2004) referred to as *Altruism*. These categories were combined as they reflect the same underlying reason for giving WOM. The classification of verbatims involved two independent coders.

To instill consistent results and inter-coder reliability, coders were briefed beforehand and each was provided with a detailed coding scheme containing descriptions and examples of the categories adapted from the three frameworks (Appendix 2). Each then separately classified the verbatim comments regarding the triggers of WOM. An adjudication process was used to address any conflicts between the two coders. Where the two coders disagreed on the classification of a particular response, a third independent coder evaluated the response. If the third coder agreed with one of the previous two, the response was classified accordingly. Otherwise, an additional category was created of any responses that were deemed unclassifiable, however only 1.5% of responses were categorised this way. The presence of multiple coders eliminated any systematic errors that one coder may have made. As two coders coded every response independently, inter-coder reliability was possible. The level of inter-judge agreement was 80%. While there is no accepted standard for level of inter-coder reliability, similar levels of agreement have been reported for past studies on WOM antecedents (Mangold et al., 1999).

Since there has been limited research exploring the drivers of online and offline WOM within the entertainment/media industries, some responses were not suited to any of the existing categories drawn from the literature. Where coders felt that a particular verbatim response did not fit into an existing classification, a new category was created. Two additional categories were identified during the preliminary coding phase of the research and added to the initial list. A description of the added categories, which were applicable for both PWOM and NWOM, is provided in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Added Categories (PWOM and NWOM)

Added Categories (PWOM and NWOM)	Description
• **Program/Movie Content**	Where an aspect, feature or element of the TV show/movie was commented on with no reference to satisfaction or dissatisfaction.
• **Passing On**	The passing of WOM previously received, i.e., after having heard stories from others about a show/movie, or after being exposed to a review or critique.

In some instances, respondents listed multiple reasons for giving WOM (e.g., *"Talking to a friend who asked me about this show and I have heard really bad reviews and opinions about this program from a number of family/friends"*). The coding of such responses was resolved through discussion amongst the coders. Where a conclusion could not be drawn on the underlying motivation for WOM engagement, the first driver mentioned was used (in this example, *Concern for Others*).

The next chapter presents the results for RQ1.

CHAPTER 6   RESULTS (PART A)

Chapter 6 begins with some descriptive results and an offline and online WOM comparison. The focus of this chapter is presenting the results regarding the factors that influence offline and online WOM dissemination (RQ1). Data analysis was done in Excel and the statistical program SPSS using cross-tabulations, chi-square and Z-tests.

6.1   Descriptive Results

This section presents the descriptive results on the proportion of respondents who engaged in WOM, the nature of shows and movies discussed, *how* WOM occurred, relationship strength between participants and gender and age comparisons of offline/online WOM givers.

Proportion of respondents who engaged in WOM

Table 6.1 shows the proportion of respondents who had engaged in WOM across the two categories. The passing of positive advice was common; 84% of respondents had given PWOM about a TV show and 67% of respondents had given PWOM about a movie in the last year. Instances of PWOM were more common than NWOM, and instances of giving WOM were more common than receiving WOM.

Table 6.1: Proportion of respondents who had engaged in WOM (%)

	TV Shows (n=383)	Movies (n=383)
Given PWOM	84	67
Given NWOM	43	32
Received PWOM	49	32
Received NWOM	21	21
Ave	**48**	**38**

Many people talked about TV programs and movies

Nature of TV shows and movies

For each instance of WOM given and received, respondents were asked to indicate the name of the program/movie discussed. The number of programs discussed overall was extremely fragmented; there were 125 different titles of TV programs recalled just for given PWOM. Even the most positively discussed movie accounted for only 6% (see Appendix 3). This result suggests that the results from this study are applicable to a wide range of TV programs and movies, not just those assumed to be most popular.

To understand the type of films that were commonly talked about, respondents who had given WOM about a movie were asked to indicate *how* they saw the movie (i.e., at the cinema/theatre, DVD/video, on TV or Online Streaming/Internet Download). The results revealed that 53% of all WOM given about a movie was about a film seen at the cinema, 29% was about a movie purchased or hired on DVD/Video, 12% was regarding a movie seen on TV, and 8% was about a movie downloaded on the Internet.

WOM across different mediums

For each instance of PWOM and NWOM, given or received, respondents were required to specify the medium used. Table 6.2 shows the distribution of *all* incidents of WOM across different mediums for TV shows and movies.

Table 6.2: Distribution of WOM across mediums (%)

	TV Shows (n=756)[4]	Movies (n=611)	Ave
Face-to-face	86	82	**84**
Online/Over the Internet	6	9	**7**
Telephone	5	6	**6**
SMS	1	3	**2**
Written Letter	1	1	**1**

Face-to-face was the most common mode for WOM engagement

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[4] This number encompasses *all instances* of WOM (given and received, positive and negative). Note that some respondents may have both given *and* received WOM within the last year, therefore *n* > 363.

The vast majority of WOM conversations occurred through face-to-face dialogue, whilst online WOM accounted for only 7% of all WOM exchanged, and the overall pattern was consistent across TV shows and movies. This distribution of offline and online WOM is consistent with an extensive study of 18,000 U.S consumers by Neilsen (2008), which also found 7% of WOM occurred online.

Respondents who reported to have engaged in WOM *over the Internet* were then asked to specify the online platform where the exchange occurred. The distribution of online WOM across various Internet platforms is shown in Table 6.3, which is ordered by the average across both categories.

Table 6.3: Distribution of WOM across online platforms (%)

	TV Shows (n=47)	Movies (n=50)	Ave
Instant Messaging/Chat	18*	46	32
Social Networking Site	27	33	30
E-mail	21	17	19
Online Blog/Forum	19*	5	12
Consumer Review Site	15*	0	7

*P<0.05

Online WOM was evident across a range of platforms

Online WOM occurred across a range of different platforms. The three most common platforms for online WOM (for both TV programs and movies) were Instant Messaging/Chat, Social Networking Sites, and E-mail. The popularity of these channels for WOM may be due to each platform displaying similar qualities to offline communication (e.g., people are likely to know who they are talking to, ongoing two-way interaction).

WOM about TV shows was evenly dispersed across numerous platforms. WOM about movies on the other hand, was more likely to occur through Instant Messaging/Chat and within Social Networking Sites over other electronic channels. Statistical testing between the two categories shows that online WOM via Instant Messaging/Chat was significantly higher for movies than for TV programs (*P*<0.05). Online WOM on Blogs/Forums and Consumer Review Sites were significantly higher for TV programs than for movies (*P*<0.05), whereas WOM about movies within these platforms was rare.

Strength of relationship between participants

As outlined in the literature review, the general perception is that online WOM is mainly exchanged in weaker relationships (Cheung et al., 2008; Eubank & Fay, 2008). To compare the relationship strength between participants of offline WOM and online WOM, respondents were asked to specify the relationship they shared with the person they interacted with (for each instance given/received). Table 6.4 shows the relationship between participants for WOM exchanged offline and WOM exchanged online. WOM mostly occurred between *close family, friends, and colleagues*, regardless of mode. Though WOM amongst casual acquaintances was slightly more prevalent over the Internet, WOM between strangers was not common, even online.

Table 6.4: Strength of relationship between participants (%)

	TV Shows		Movies	
	Offline (n=708)	Online (n=48)	Offline (n=561)	Online (n=50)
Close family, friend or colleague	68	50	68	52
More distant family, friend or colleague	24	13	25	30
Casual Acquaintance	7	19	6	16
Did not know them personally	1	8	1	2

Most people engaged in WOM with others they know personally

A conclusion can therefore be drawn, that any behavioural effects that differ between offline WOM and online WOM *are not* likely to be because online WOM predominantly occurs amongst strangers.

Who gives online WOM?

Analysis was conducted to examine whether males were more likely to engage in online WOM than females, as found in past research (Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006). Table 6.5 shows the proportions of PWOM and NWOM given over the Internet by males and females for TV shows and movies[5]. The table can be interpreted as: of all PWOM about TV shows given by females, 5% was online, and of all PWOM about TV shows given by males, 10% was online.

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[5] Small sample sizes meant that demographic differences of those who received WOM could not be tested.

Only one significant difference was detected, in that more males gave PWOM online about TV shows than females (*P*<0.05). However, it seems that there is a general trend towards more males giving online WOM than females.

Table 6.5: Proportion of males and females who gave online WOM (%)

	Given PWOM		Given NWOM	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
TV Shows	5*	10	3	7
Movies	7	7	5	12
Ave	**6**	**9**	**4**	**10**

*P<0.05

More males gave online WOM

Statistical testing was also carried out to examine whether given WOM was more prominent amongst the younger demographic, as was found by Eubank and Fay (2008). A comparison was made between the younger and the older segments (though it should be noted that the oldest segment in this research comprised of people aged 45-60, not what is typically considered 'old' in society).

Table 6.6 shows the proportions of PWOM and NWOM given online by the youngest and oldest age segments. The table can be interpreted as: of all PWOM about TV programs given by the 18-24 segment, 10% was online, and of all PWOM about TV programs given by the 45-60 segment, 1% was online. There was only one significant difference between the 18-24 and 45-60 segments (i.e., 18-24 was more likely to give PWOM online about a TV program); however there is an overall trend is that youth are more likely to give online WOM in general.

Table 6.6: Proportion of youngest and oldest segment who gave online WOM (%)

	Given PWOM		Given NWOM	
	18-24	45-60	18-24	45-60
TV Shows	10*	1	10	2
Movies	7	3	16	3
Average	**8**	**2**	**13**	**3**

*P<0.05

More young people gave online WOM

These results illustrate that givers of online WOM are more likely to be young or male. The subsequent sections of this chapter present the results pertaining to *why people give WOM.*

6.2 The reasons for giving WOM

This section presents the factors that stimulate the giving of PWOM and NWOM (both offline and online).

Reasons for giving PWOM

The factors that influence the giving of PWOM for TV programs and movies are shown in Table 6.7, which is ordered by the average across both categories. The overall trend is that PWOM about TV shows and movies are given for the same reasons. The most common factors stimulating positive discussions are *Satisfaction, Coincidental Conversation, Program/Movie Content* and *Concern for Others*. The least common triggers of PWOM were *Marketing Efforts, Self-Enhancement, Passing On* and *Help the Program/Movie*.

Table 6.7: Factors that stimulate PWOM across categories (%)

	TV shows (n= 319)	Movies (n=259)	Ave
Satisfaction	46	48	**47**
Coincidental Conversation	18	19	**19**
Program/Movie Content	19	14	**17**
Concern for Others	12	12	**12**
Marketing Efforts	3	3	**3**
Self-Enhancement	0.9	2	**1**
Passing On	0	2	**0.8**
Help the Station/Movie	0	0.8	**0.4**
Don't know or Can't remember	*2*	*0.8*	*1*

PWOM about TV shows and movies are given for the same reasons

Satisfaction was the main motivation for expressing positive opinions about both TV programs and movies. This category accounted for nearly half of all responses (46% for TV and 48% for movies).

The comments belonging to this classification generally reflected the degree of contentment experienced by a respondent as a result of having seen a particular television program or film. Examples include, *"I love this show, it's one of my favorites"* and *"I didn't know what to expect when seeing this movie, but I saw it and really enjoyed it!"*.

Positive comments arising through *Coincidental Conversation* were second most common, accounting for 19% across both categories. Here, respondents reported to have expressed a positive opinion as part of a wider-discussion (e.g., *"We were discussing foreign movies we had on DVD"*).

Some respondents reported having given PWOM simply because they wanted to discuss some element of the show or movie. These statements were expressed without any reference to satisfaction levels (e.g., *"$1.50 to purchase property in the U.S!"*, *"Daniel Craig is very attractive",* and *"Debating who will be voted out this week"*). Responses of this nature were classed under the added category, *Program/Movie Content*. *Program/Movie Content* may have emerged as an added category due to the nature of television and film. For instance, programs and movies contain many elements associated with a story or plot that may stimulate discussion (e.g., characters, storylines, scenery, actors, music). PWOM relating to *Program/Movie Content* was slightly higher for TV than movies, but this difference was not significant.

PWOM resulting from *Concern for Others* accounted for 12% across both TV programs and movies. Despite television being a lower-cost category compared to movies (no cost to view TV shows, whereas over 80% of WOM given about movies was in regards to films seen at the cinema or hired/rented on video or DVD), people were just as eager to be helpful by recommending a good TV as they were to recommend a good movie. Examples of comments under this umbrella include, *"My father loves documentaries so I recommended it to him"* and *"Someone asked for a movie to watch"*.

Numerous respondents gave PWOM after having heard positive stories from others about a movie, or after reading about a movie in a review (e.g., film critique). For instance, one person stated as their motivation for giving WOM, *"Two friends had highly recommended this film, so I recommended my dad and sister to watch it with me"*.

These comments were classed under the added classification, *Passing On.* Responses of this nature were not evident for TV programs, perhaps because movies are more likely to get critically reviewed than TV shows. This suggests people are more likely to transfer or 'pass-on' positive feedback or information they receive about movies than TV shows. However, this category was not substantial enough for statistical testing.

Overall, there were no major differences between the distribution of PWOM triggers for TV shows and for movies.

In the next section, I present the findings for why people give NWOM.

Reasons for giving NWOM

Table 6.8 shows the factors that stimulate NWOM for TV shows and movies. The table is ordered by the average across both categories. Negative opinions were generally expressed for the same reasons across TV and film. *Dissatisfaction, Program/Movie Content* and *Coincidental Conversation* were the main triggers for NWOM. The least common drivers of NWOM were *Marketing Efforts, Concern for Others, Vengeance* and *Passing On*.

Table 6.8: Factors that stimulate NWOM across categories

	TV Shows (n=166)	Movies (n=118)	Ave
Dissatisfaction	55	53	**54**
Program/Movie Content	23	19	**21**
Coincidental Conversation	13	19	**16**
Marketing Efforts	2	4	**3**
Concern for Others	3	3	**3**
Vengeance	3	0.8	**2**
Passing On	0	2	**0.9**
Don't know or Can't remember	*1*	*0.8*	*1*

NWOM about TV shows and Movies are given for the same reasons

Dissatisfaction was the key motive for giving NWOM, comprising more than half of all responses (55% for TV, 53% for film). Examples of comments belonging within this category include, *"I hate this show"* and *"Worst action movie ever"*.

Program/Movie Content triggered one-fifth of negative comments expressed. These respondents claimed to have engaged in negative discussion regarding some specific element of the show or movie (e.g., characters, storyline, costumes). Since these responses did not explicitly make reference to consumption experiences, they could not be classed as *Dissatisfaction*. Examples of responses for this category include, *"It had a sad ending for the lovers…"*, *"Violent"* and *"It was a good movie but a bit slow".* The prevalence of this category was slightly higher for TV than for movies (23% and 19% respectively), as was found for PWOM. However, the difference between these two proportions fails significance tests ($P>0.05$).

Negative comments arising within *Coincidental Conversations* comprised 13% of NWOM for TV programs and 19% for movies. This suggests that negative comments about a movie have a slightly higher chance of being expressed as part of general discussion than television shows ($P>0.05$).

Surprisingly, the main drivers of NWOM are similar to those reported as common drivers for PWOM (with *Dissatisfaction* in place of *Satisfaction*). This suggests that the majority of people will express positive and negative opinions for much the same reasons.

Summary: Reasons for giving PWOM & NWOM

The main findings from this section are:
- The main motivation for giving PWOM was *Satisfaction* and the main motivation for giving NWOM was *Dissatisfaction*.
- Patterns were generally consistent across TV shows and movies.
- *Marketing Efforts, Self-Enhancement, Passing On, Help the Company* and *Vengeance* rarely triggered the giving of WOM.

In the following section, the reasons for giving WOM are evaluated according to medium of transmission. The findings for RQ1 are also presented.

6.3   WOM Triggers across different mediums

The first component of this study investigates how PWOM and NWOM emerge during person-to-person communication and *how this differs according to medium*. Chi-squared significance tests were used to assess the level of difference between the proportions within the offline and online environment. A result of *P*<0.05 denoted a significant variance.

The results for RQ1a on PWOM are presented first.

RQ1a: Do the reasons for giving PWOM online differ from the reasons for giving PWOM offline?

Table 6.9 shows the reasons people give offline and online PWOM about TV programs and movies. The same ordering or ranking of WOM triggers was evident amongst offline and online recommendations. This indicates that overall, the reasons for giving PWOM online *do not* differ from the reasons for giving PWOM offline.

Regardless of how respondents transmitted their message, *Satisfaction, Coincidental Conversation, Concern for Others* and *Program/Movie Content* were the most common drivers of PWOM. Reported instances of PWOM resulting from *Self-Enhancement, Marketing Efforts, Passing On* and to *Help the Station/Movie* were minimal in both environments.

Table 6.9: Factors that stimulate PWOM across mediums (%)

| | TV Shows | | Movies[6] | | |
	Offline (n=296)	Online (n=23)	Offline (n=240)	Online (n=18)	Ave
Satisfaction	46	39	49	39	**43**
Coincidental Conversation	18	22	19	22	**20**
Concern for Others	12	13	11	22	**15**
Passing On	19	13	15	6	**13**
Self-Enhancement	0.3*	9	2	0	**4**
Marketing Efforts	3	0	3	0	**2**
Passing On	0	0	1	6	**2**
Help the Station/Movie	0	0	0.8	0	**0.2**
Don't know or Can't remember	2	4	0.4	6	**3**

$P<0.05$

PWOM was given for the same reasons online as offline

Despite category or mode of transmission, *Satisfaction* was the most common motive for expressing positive comments. This motivation was less prevalent for PWOM articulated online compared to offline for both TV and movies, however the differences did not pass as significant ($P>0.05$).

PWOM triggered by some aspect of a *Movie's Content* was three times higher offline than online (15% and 6% respectively, $P=0.25$), though the difference was not significant. Additionally, there were twice as many people who gave PWOM about a movie online compared with offline due to *Concern for Others* (11% offline versus 22% online, $P=0.14$), however the variance was also not statistically different.

For both TV shows and movies, PWOM triggered by *Marketing Efforts* was only evident within offline scenarios (3% for both TV and movies, *ns*). *Self-Enhancement* was the only category where a statistical difference was found (0.3% offline versus 9% online, *P=0.01*). This was only observed in the television category. These results suggest that people will often express positive opinions online for the same reasons as they would offline. The only exception to this rule was found for *Self-Enhancement* in the context of TV programs.

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[6] Total *n* is one case short for Movies, as one respondent chose 'other' as medium of transmission, but did not indicate how the WOM was given. Therefore, this response was excluded from analysis.

This may be due to the continual nature of TV programs, in that people feel more attached and defined by viewing them and may develop a greater sense of self-identity with them compared to movies. However the small sample sizes suggest that such difference may have occurred due to sampling error, and would benefit from further testing.

Overall, the reasons for giving PWOM online are representative of the reasons for giving PWOM offline. In the next section, I present the findings for RQ1b.

RQ1b: Do the reasons for giving NWOM online differ from the reasons for giving NWOM offline?

Table 6.10 shows the factors influencing NWOM, and how the distribution of WOM differs for the two mediums. The results are ordered by the averages across categories. Though at face value, it appears that the reasons for giving NWOM online are the same as the reasons for giving NWOM offline, the low incidence of online NWOM makes it very difficult to draw valid conclusions about any differences between two modes.

Table 6.10: Factors that stimulate NWOM across mediums (%)

	TV Shows[7]		Movies		
	Offline	**Online**	**Offline**	**Online**	
	(n=156)	*(n=8)*	*(n=108)*	*(n=10)*	**Ave**
Dissatisfaction	55	50	52	60	54
Program/Movie Content	22	38	19	10	22
Coincidental Conversation	13	0	19	10	11
Concern for Others	3	13	3	0	5
Marketing Efforts	2	0	3	10	4
Passing On	0	0	5	0	1
Vengeance	3	0	0.9	0	1
Don't know or Can't remember	*1*	*0*	*0*	*10*	*3*

The giving of online NWOM was rare

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[7] Total *n* for TV shows is two cases short as two respondents did not specify whether the WOM was given offline or online.

Despite the small sample sizes, it is evident that *Dissatisfaction* remains the primary driver of NWOM, regardless of mode or category (over 50% across all modes and contexts). The giving of NWOM, especially within an online environment was extremely rare (with only 8 of the people sampled giving NWOM about TV programs and 10 people gave NWOM about movies over the Internet). Therefore, the conducting of statistical tests to compare the two mediums was not feasible.

Summary: RQ1a & RQ1b

The main findings for RQ1a and RQ1b are:

- *Dis/Satisfaction* was the most common motivation for giving WOM regardless of mode or context.
- Online PWOM triggers were similar to offline PWOM triggers.
- The giving of NWOM online was extremely rare.

The next section contains the results for RQ2 on the impact of WOM.

CHAPTER 7   RESULTS (PART B)

This chapter presents the research findings for RQ2. In the first section, probabilities of viewing distributions (before and after WOM) are presented. Following this, I examine how the impact of PWOM and NWOM differ according to medium. All data in this chapter was analysed in Microsoft Excel and SPSS. Statistical testing involved the use of cross-tabulations, one-way ANOVAs and chi-square tests.

7.1   The impact of WOM on viewing probabilities

As detailed in Chapter 5, this study draws on East et al's (2008a) 'Room for Movement' approach, which involves measuring WOM impact as a shift in the stated probability of purchase (*viewing* in the context of this study). Two dependant variables were collected to determine impact of WOM:

1) Self-reported probability of viewing the TV show/movie **before** receiving WOM, and
2) Self-reported probability of viewing the TV show/movie **after** receiving WOM

This section describes the general distribution of the probabilities. The results for PWOM are presented first.

Impact of PWOM: distribution of probabilities

Respondents who had received positive advice about a TV program or movie were asked to rate their probability of watching the show/film before, and after being exposed to the advice. This was done on an 11-point Juster scale (1966b), where zero = *no chance or almost no chance of viewing*, and 10 = *certain or practically certain of viewing*.

Figure 7.1 shows the distribution of viewing probabilities prior to and after receiving PWOM for the television category *(n=189).* The same is shown in Figure 7.2 for movies *(n=149).* Respondents' starting probabilities ranged from no chance of viewing to practically certain of viewing a program or film.

For TV shows, a faint 'U' shaped distribution is evident, as demonstrated by slightly more people at either ends of the scale and few people reporting a mid-ranged score (see Figure 7.1). However, this observation was not visible for movies, as there were more respondents who reported a mid-to-high score as their starting probability, rather than very low and very high scores.

Figure 7.1: Distribution of probabilities before and after PWOM for TV shows

Figure 7.2: Distribution of probabilities before and after PWOM for Movies
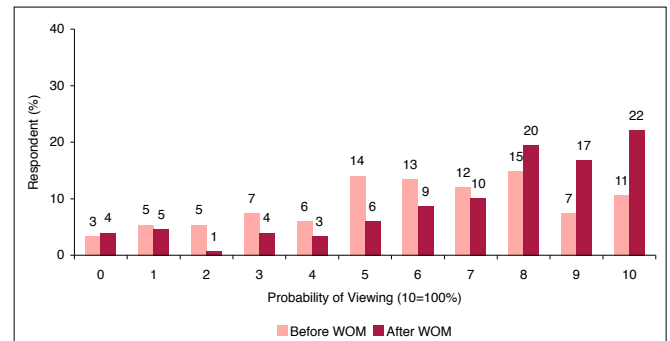
More people gave higher viewing probability scores after receiving PWOM

The general assumption is that PWOM encourages brand choice and likelihood towards purchase (e.g., East & Hammond, 2006; Romaniuk, 2007; Traylor & Mathais, 1983). Support for this was apparent, by observing just the shift in mean probability scores before and after receiving PWOM. For TV programs, the average probability score pre-PWOM was 4.8, and the post-PWOM score was increased to 7.4. For movies, the mean probability before receiving PWOM was 5.4, and 7.1 after. This result demonstrates that exposure to PWOM *did* increase people's probabilities of viewing. This was also evident in the positive skews depicted in Figure 7.1 and 7.2; after exposure to PWOM, 75% of respondents reported a propensity score of 7 or higher for TV programs (out of a possible 10), and 69% with a score of 7 or higher for movies.

In the next section, the results concerning the pre and post NWOM distributions are presented.

Impact of NWOM: distribution of probabilities

Figure 7.3 shows the probabilities for watching a TV program *(n=80)* before and after receiving NWOM. The same distribution for movies is shown in Figure 7.*4 (n=81).* Similar to PWOM, initial viewing probabilities were widely spread across the 11-point scale.

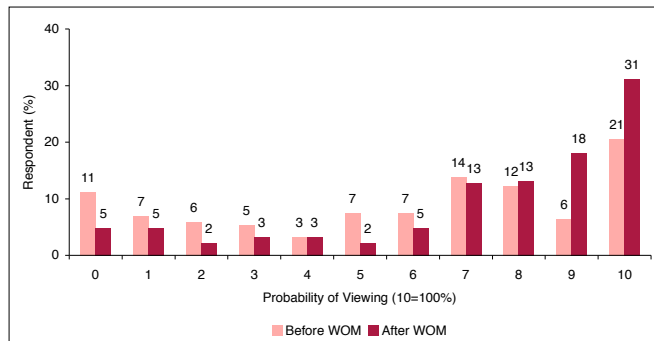*Figure 7.3: Distribution of probabilities before and after NWOM for TV shows*
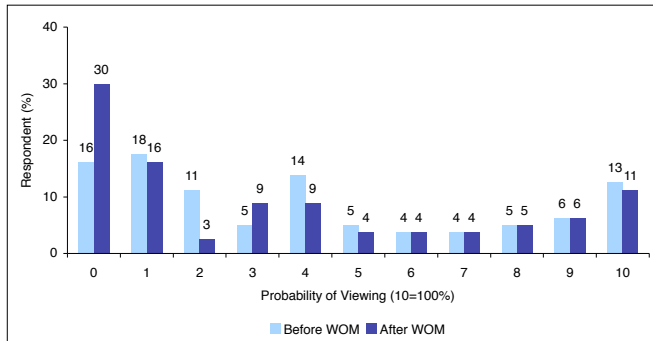
Figure 7.4: Distribution of probabilities before and after NWOM for Movies
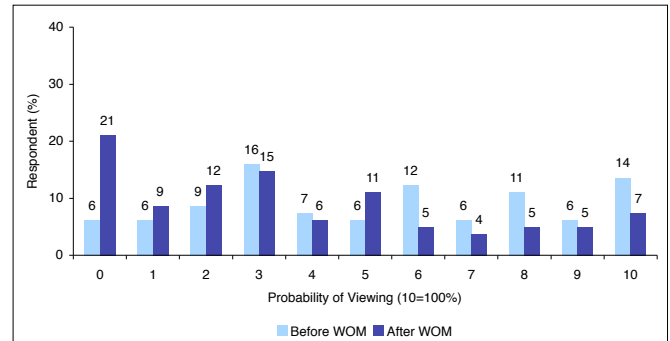
More people gave lower viewing probability scores after receiving NWOM

The general consensus in the literature is that NWOM dissuades brand choice and discourages purchase (East et al., 2005; Holmes & Lett, 1977). Thus, it was expected that more people would record lower viewing probability scores after having received NWOM. The movement in the mean probability scores pre and post receiving NWOM support this pattern. For TV programs, the mean recalled probability score before being exposed to NWOM was 4.8, and the mean score was a lower 3.6 after receiving NWOM. For movies, the mean probability before NWOM was 5.6, and a lower 3.7 after. This result indicates that, at the aggregate level, NWOM exerted a negative effect on viewing propensities. This is also demonstrated as 58% of respondents who received negative advice about a TV show, and 57% of respondents receiving negative advice about a movie ended on a probability score of 3 or lower.

The next section of this chapter examines the distribution of the actual shifts in viewing propensities.

7.2   Change in probability distributions

To determine the impact of WOM on receivers, the difference between probability before and probability after was calculated (i.e., overall change in viewing propensity). This analysis required that the ceilings and floors in scores be removed; this is explained below.

Removal of ceilings and floors

The results from Figure 7.1 reveal that 21% of respondents were already certain of watching a particular show before receiving any recommendation. Similarly, 11% of respondents were definite that they would have watched a movie before receiving PWOM (see Figure 7.2). Any PWOM these individuals receive cannot further increase their likelihood of watching (as there is no room to shift probabilities higher). In such cases, given that PWOM is likely to have a positive effect, the change in probability before and after receiving the WOM would be recorded as zero. Since the presence of zero scores would alter the relative mean impact, respondents who stated to have a starting viewing probability score of 10 (99-100% chance of viewing) were excluded from analysis on PWOM impact[8].

Similar issues are present for NWOM, which should have a negative effect on purchase behaviour (East et al., 2005; Holmes & Lett, 1977). Respondents who specified no chance of watching a TV show or movie (scores of '0') will have no room to move lower after receiving NWOM about a show/movie. For this reason, individuals who stated a viewing probability of '0' for NWOM were also excluded from analysis.

The distributions of actual changes in probability (after the removal of ceilings and floors) are presented in the next section.

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[8] E.g., a recommendation cannot increase the chance of viewing if a receiver is already certain (10/10) of watching the show/movie before exposure to any WOM. The same advice is more likely to have an effect on someone who had a lower chance of viewing (say, 4/10).

Impact of PWOM: change in viewing probability

Figure 7.5 and 7.6 show the change in viewing probability following an incident of PWOM for TV shows and movies. For both categories, the majority of respondents experienced either no change, or small positive change in viewing propensity. Very large shifts in scores were rare.

Figure 7.5: Shift in viewing probability after PWOM for TV shows
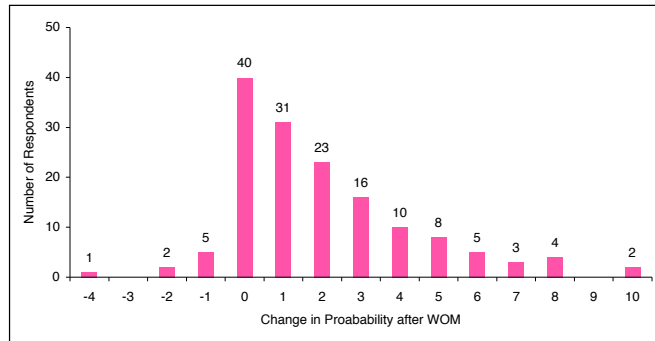
Figure 7.6: Shift in viewing probability after PWOM for Movies
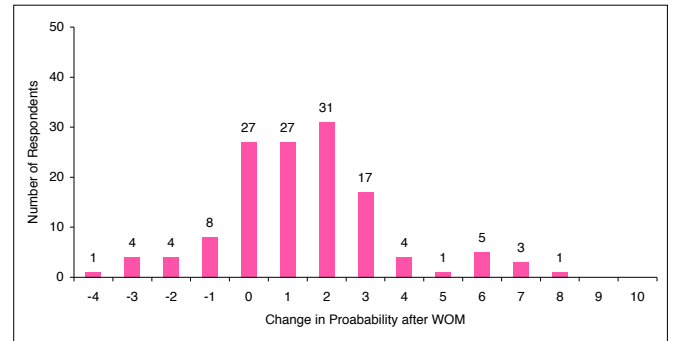
Most receivers experienced no change or small positive change after receiving PWOM

In the majority of cases, PWOM had a positive effect. However, there were a few instances where exposure to positive advice repeatedly produced a negative effect. This was evident in 8 cases for TV program and 14 cases for movies. Although there is a chance that respondents were either inattentive or may have interpreted the question incorrectly, there is reason to believe that these contrary effects are genuine. Fitzsimons and Lehman (2004) explain that in certain situations, people who receive PWOM may perceive it negatively. Their research found that unsought recommendations that contradict a person's initial impressions of a brand could sometimes lead to behavioural backlash where the receiver either ignores or intentionally opposes the giver's advice. Based on the findings from such research, the contrary effects evident here were included in the final analysis.

Impact of NWOM: change in viewing probability

The changes in viewing probabilities for negative comments are illustrated in Figures 7.7 and 7.8 for TV and film. NWOM effects for movies were more scattered across the scale compared to those for TV (illustrated by a wider dispersion). Across both categories, the majority of NWOM resulted in either no, or small negative change in viewing probabilities.

There were two cases where outliers were present, as highlighted in Figures 7.7 and 7.8. One person reported a change of +9 for TV shows and one person reported a change of +7 for movies. Sampling bias was reduced through the removal of these outliers for analysis.

Figure 7.7: Shift in viewing probability after NWOM for TV shows

Figure 7.8: Shift in viewing probability after NWOM for Movies
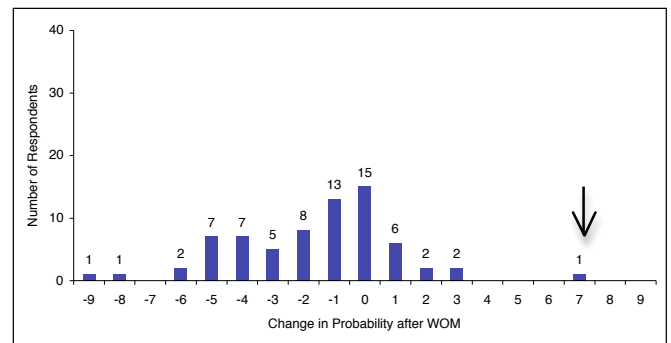
Most respondents experienced no change or small negative change after receiving NWOM
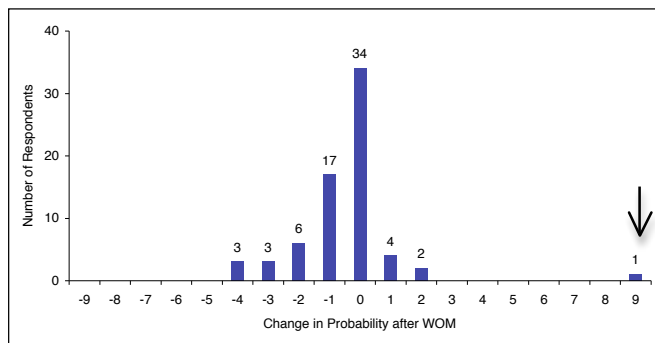
In most instances, NWOM resulted in a negative change in viewing probability. However, contrary responses are also evident where exposure to negative comments resulted in a positive effect. According to Romaniuk (2007), controversy associated with negative advice may provide a catalyst for purchase consumption. For instance, receiving information about a controversial issue regarding a television series may instill curiosity and induce the receiver to want to watch the following episode. Further, research has found that people will sometimes reject advice and become more committed to a brand subject to negative comments (Laczniak et al., 2001).

The opposing reaction may have also occurred if the receiver of WOM disagrees with the values of the advisor and expects to like what he/she dismisses (e.g., receiving positive advice from a person you dislike) (East et al., 2008a). Therefore, there is reason to believe that any positive effect that negative advice may have in this study are genuine, and hence were also included in analysis.

Summary: Shifts in viewing distributions

The main findings from this section are:

- PWOM generally had a positive effect and NWOM generally had a negative effect on viewing probabilities.
- For PWOM, the majority of respondents experienced either no change or small positive change. For NWOM, the majority of respondents experienced either no change or small negative change. But there were some instances where WOM produced contrary responses.

In the next section of this chapter, I compare the mean impact for online and offline WOM, and present the findings for RQ2.

7.3 The impact of online WOM versus offline WOM

RQ2 is concerned with examining the relative impact of online and offline WOM. The mean changes in probabilities as a result of offline and online WOM were calculated and compared according to prior level of commitment which, as detailed within the literature review, has been found to influence the impact WOM has on receivers (Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000; East et al., 2008a).

One-way ANOVAs were then performed to assess whether there were any statistical differences between mean scores at each prior-probability level. This section presents the findings from this analysis.

RQ2a: Does the impact of PWOM differ when received in an online environment compared to an offline environment?

Figure 7.9 and 7.10 displays the mean impact scores (average shift in viewing probability) for offline and online PWOM according to prior-commitment level for TV programs (offline *n=141*, online *n=8*) and movies (offline *n=123*, online *n=10*). The overall trend demonstrates the impact of PWOM is greatest when prior-viewing probability is low, regardless of category or mode. On the flipside, the impact of PWOM was smallest when initial viewing probability was high. A consistent trend across both categories was that when prior-viewing probability was low, *online* WOM had a higher impact than offline advice. Though this variance lacks statistical veracity (due to small sample sizes) and further replication with larger sample sizes would be beneficial in understanding this result.

Figure 7.9: The impact of offline/online PWOM for TV shows

	Low (0-3)	Medium (4-6)	High (7-9)
Offline WOM	3.2	2.2	0.7
Online WOM	4.5	2.5	1.3
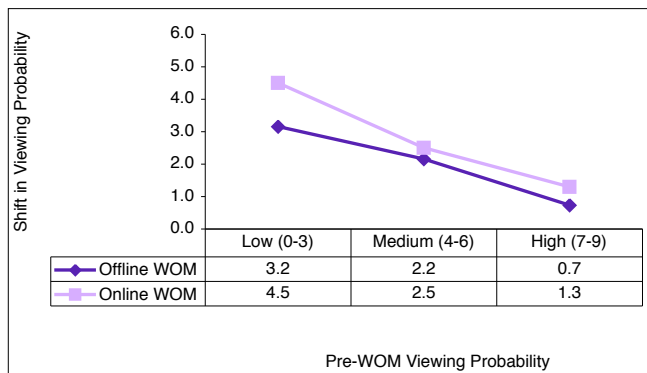
Figure 7.10: The impact of offline/online PWOM for Movies

	Low (0-3)	Medium (4-6)	High (7-9)
Offline WOM	2.1	1.5	0.8
Online WOM	3.3	1.5	0.5
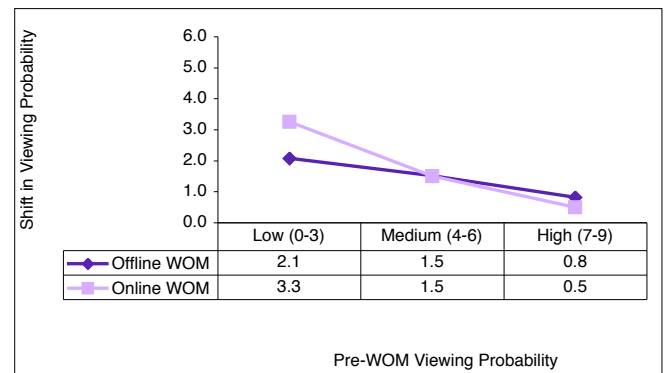
The impact of PWOM across different prior-probability levels was the same regardless of category or mode of transmission

RQ2a is concerned with examining the difference between the impact of online and offline PWOM. Across both TV programs and movies, the impact of offline PWOM and online PWOM followed the same trend. One-way ANOVAs found no significant differences between the impacts of online and offline PWOM for TV shows or movies (*P*>0.05) at any prior viewing probability level.

According to the 'Room for Movement' method (East et al., 2008a), *relative* effects are most accurate when contrasting WOM impact at the *middle* prior-purchase probability level. This discounts any potential biases (in the allowable space for change) affected by the presence of ceilings and floors. To examine the relative impact of PWOM between the two categories, the mean score for TV programs *at* the middle prior-viewing probability level (i.e., 4-6) was compared to the mean score at the middle prior-viewing probability level for movies. The impact of PWOM for TV programs (*M*=2.1) and the impact of PWOM for movies (*M*=1.5) was not significantly different (*P*=0.17).

In the following section, I examine the impact of offline and online NWOM.

RQ2b: Does the impact of NWOM differ when received in an online environment compared to an offline environment?

Figure 7.11 and 7.12 indicate how the impact of NWOM about TV shows (offline *n=60*, online *n=6*) and movies (offline *n=68*, offline *n=7*) are affected by prior viewing probability. For TV programs, both offline and online NWOM had very little impact on viewing probability across varying levels of prior viewing probabilities. The results, for offline WOM in particular, show virtually no difference in the impact of negative advice (Figure 7.11). For movies, the higher the initial viewing probability, the more power negative advice had on dissuading choice. As initial viewing propensities got lower, so did the impact of NWOM. This trend was evident for both offline and online WOM (Figure 7.12).

Figure 7.11: The impact of offline/online NWOM for TV shows

	Low (1-3)	Medium (4-6)	High (7-10)
Offline WOM	-0.9	-0.6	-0.7
Online WOM	0	-1.0	-0.7

Pre-WOM Viewiwng Probability

Figure 7.12: The impact of offline/online NWOM for Movies

	Low (1-3)	Medium (4-6)	High (7-10)
Offline WOM	-0.2	-2.1	-2.9
Online WOM	-0.3	-2.0	-2.5

Pre-WOM Viewiwng Probability
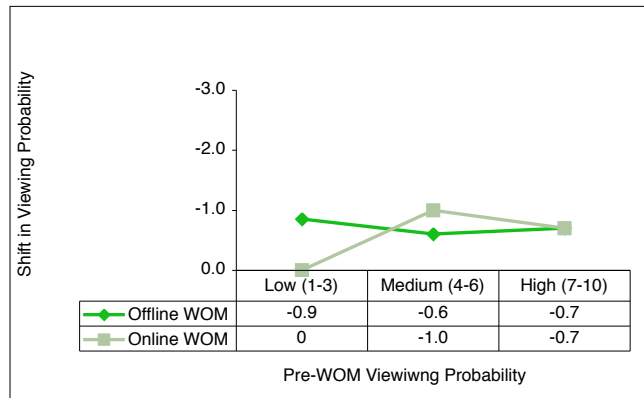
NWOM about TV shows had little impact on viewing probabilities, regardless of mode
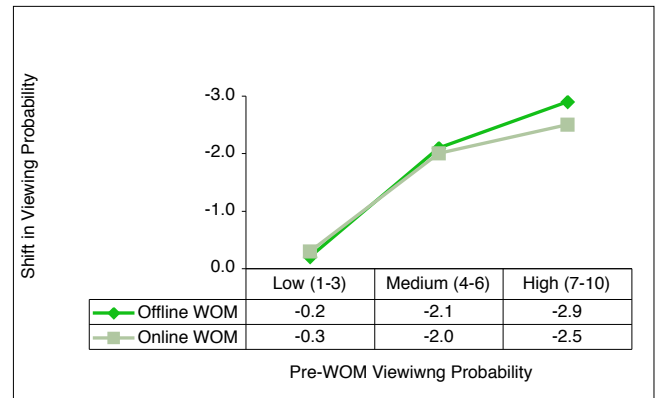
The impact of offline and online NWOM about movies followed the same trend across the prior-probability levels

RQ2b examines the difference in impact of offline and online NWOM. For the television category, the overall impact of NWOM from both mediums was generally low. For movies, the impact of offline and online NWOM was very similar at each level of prior-viewing probability. One-way ANOVAs revealed that there were no significant differences between the impact of online and offline NWOM for TV shows or for movies (P>0.05). These results thus indicate that there is no difference between the impact of NWOM when received in an online environment compared to an offline environment.

The impact of NWOM (at the middle prior-viewing probability level) across the television program and movies category was compared. The result shows that the impact of NWOM about movies (M=-2.1) was significantly greater than NWOM about TV shows (M=-0.7, P=0.01). NWOM about movies may be more influential than NWOM about TV programs due to the higher degree of risk associated with a poor movie decision compared to a poor television program choice (i.e., greater amount of time invested, monetary fee).

PWOM versus NWOM

For each category, the relative impact of PWOM versus NWOM was compared. Again, comparisons were made for mean scores at middle prior-probability level. The relative impact of PWOM versus NWOM was determined by comparing the *absolute* mean changes in viewing propensities[9]. For the TV category, the impact of PWOM (M=2.5) was significantly higher than the impact of NWOM (M=1.1, P<0.001). PWOM may have had a greater effect since it is very easy to act on a positive recommendation to watch a TV program due to the low risks involved. There is not much to lose by trialing an unknown TV program (i.e., does not cost anything and viewers can quickly change the channel if they dislike it).

For movies, there was no significant difference between the impact of PWOM (M=2.1*)* and the impact of NWOM (M=2.3, *P=0.6)*. This may be because it is generally harder to act on a positive recommendation to see a movie since people physically need to travel to a theatre/DVD store and pay a fee to view it. It is also very easy to let negative advice persuade decision about a movie (generally, people will not want to pay to see a movie that they may not like).

Summary RQ2a & RQ2b:

- There were no significant differences between the impact of offline WOM and online WOM.

Other important findings from this section include:

- The impact of PWOM was greatest when prior-viewing probability was low for both TV shows and movies.
- For movies, the impact of NWOM was greatest when prior viewing probability was high regardless of mode.
- The impact of NWOM was generally small for TV programs, regardless of prior-probability and mode.

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[9] E.g., if impact of NWOM is -3, and impact of PWOM is +6, this would be compared as a change of 3 versus a change of 6.

- The impact of NWOM about movies was significantly greater than the impact of NWOM about TV programs.
- For TV programs, the impact of PWOM is significantly greater than the impact of NWOM. For movies, there was no difference between the impact of PWOM and the impact of NWOM.

The next chapter contains discussion of the results as well as implications for both marketing practice and theory based on the findings of this thesis.

CHAPTER 8   DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Chapter 8 collates the main findings from this thesis and discusses associated results.

Do the reasons for giving WOM online differ from the reasons for giving WOM offline?

There was no evidence to suggest that the reasons for giving WOM online are different to the reasons for giving WOM offline.

Both electronic and traditional PWOM were triggered by similar factors. This suggests that factors such as online anonymity and ability to reach mass audiences over Internet, do not influence the motivations for articulating online PWOM as initially suspected (Carl, 2006; Eubank & Fay, 2008). Dellarocas and Narayan (2006) also found that the antecedents of offline and online WOM exhibit important similarities.

The sharing of negative comments online was rare (i.e., within the last month, only 4% of respondents reported to have given NWOM about a TV show and movie online). Therefore, statistical testing involving given online NWOM was not possible. However, it does appear that despite mode of transmission, *Dissatisfaction* remains the primary reason for expressing negative opinions.

The drivers of WOM

Overall, PWOM was predominantly driven by *Satisfaction* associated with viewing experience and NWOM was predominantly triggered by *Dissatisfaction* associated with viewing experience. Opinions expressed due to *Dis/Satisfaction* accounted for approximately half of all advice given. This finding is consistent with numerous researchers who assert WOM is mainly driven by the level of satisfaction attributed to purchase or consumption experiences (Anderson, 1998; Feick & Price, 1987; Richins, 1984; Sundaram et al., 1998).

This was also evident within the online environment, providing support for Dellarocas and Narayan (2006), who suggest that highly dissatisfied and highly satisfied customers engage in the highest level of electronic WOM activity. However such a result differs from Hennig-Thurau et al's (2004) research, where it was found that consumers' desire for social interaction, desire for economic incentives, concern for other customers and potential to enhance own self-worth are the primary factors contributing to online WOM. Three of these four drivers were negligible in this research. One reason for this may be that Hennig-Thurau et al (2004) examined only conversations within electronic opinion platforms, whereas this present study finds that less than 10% of all online WOM instances occurred within Customer Opinion Platforms (and only for NWOM about TV programs). Therefore, Hennig-Thurau et al's (2004) research may not have captured the reasons for giving WOM within other Internet platforms where the majority of online WOM occurs. This stresses the importance of including a wide range of electronic platforms in online research to be able to generalise results.

In this study, it may be possible that satisfaction or dissatisfaction experienced by givers was driven by subjective feelings about the TV program or movie. Numerous studies suggest that human emotional responses to product and service performance play an important role in influencing satisfaction (e.g., Engel et al, 1969). It is possible that television and movies are two categories capable of driving profound emotion in viewers through compelling storylines, reputation of actors, passion evoked by characters etc. Therefore, this may suggest why satisfaction levels were such a large driver of WOM within these categories.

Mangold et al (1999) suggest that though consumption experiences may be the basis for giving WOM, consumers are more likely to be influenced by the receiver's need and therefore, personal satisfaction is of limited importance. However, *Concern for Others* as a catalyst in this study accounted for only 12% of PWOM and 3% of NWOM given. The disparity between the results from this study and others, which find WOM mainly arises due to the receiver's felt need for information (Mangold et al., 1999; Mazzarol et al., 2007), may be attributed to the different nature of the categories examined. For instance, Mangold et al's (1999) research focused on high-involvement services, whereas television and movies are common choice and require lower-involvement.

According to Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003), people commonly seek advice to reduce the risk of purchasing unsuitable items. Television and film are categories where prerelease information is abundant (e.g., program promotions, TV guide, trailers, reviews) and there are low risks associated with poor viewing choices. Viewers may also be aware of the genres that they like or dislike to make appropriate choices. Therefore, people may feel less motivated to offer advice about what to watch, since it seems that others will not require assistance when making a viewing selection. This may explain why *Concern for Others* was not a common driver of WOM in this study and thus provides a boundary condition to the work of Mangold et al (1999) and Mazzarol et al (2007).

Other popular triggers of WOM that emerged during this study include *Coincidental Conversation* and *Program/Movie Content*. Whilst the latter category has not yet arisen in any former motivational framework (it is quite category specific), numerous researchers have already found coincidental discussion to be a dominant driver of WOM (Mangold et al., 1999; Mazzarol et al., 2007). Mangold et al (1999) found that one-fifth of recommendations arise randomly or unexpectedly as part of broader conversations, however their research only examined WOM in the context of services. *Coincidental conversation* accounted for 17% of all WOM given in this study, thus contributes to existing knowledge by transferring Mangold et al's (1999) finding to the entertainment industry

WOM opinions associated with *Program/Movie Content* were generally about assorted elements of the TV show or movie (e.g., *"Talking about the twist in the series, all characters went back to the island"*). Comments belonging in this category did not explicitly imply that the respondent liked or disliked what they viewed and thus illustrates that WOM is not necessarily given due to satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In regards to NWOM, such finding is contrary to the underlying assumption in the literature that negative information is almost always devastating (Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000). Some instances of WOM, which was reported to be 'negative' by the giver, actually contained some element of attached positivity. For example, one respondent stated as their reason for giving NWOM about a movie, *"One of my friends was thinking about going, so I said it had an interesting story, was well acted and was a good movie but factually inaccurate in many ways. Eric Bana was not a good Henry VIII"*.

Comments of this nature, though intended to be negative, could be perceived by a receiver as positive. Despite conventional thought that managers should be concerned with minimising the spread of NWOM (Hart et al., 1990), the presence of such example suggests that NWOM may not necessarily be detrimental to firm success.

Despite academic speculation that marketing campaigns stimulate WOM (Bayus, 1985; Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006), positive statements were rarely expressed about the *Marketing Efforts* of TV programs or films in this present study. Dellarocas and Narayan (2006) found that there was a positive relationship between a product's volume of online ratings provided by moviegoers and the marketing expenditure of that movie. However, their study did not explicitly question individual respondents on the underlying motives for expressing opinions. Therefore, there was no evidence to suggest that marketing efforts specifically influenced the giving of WOM. It may just be that, consistent with the law of Double Jeopardy (Martin, 1973), primetime TV shows or blockbuster movies, which can afford larger marketing campaigns, will have more viewers, and hence more WOM in general. Or that WOM more so serves as a complement to advertising rather than a substitute, as was suggested by Lui (2006). But there was little evidence that recommendations are purely driven by media influences, as suggested in prior literature (Bayus, 1985; Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006).

Does the impact of PWOM and NWOM differ when received in an online environment compared to an offline environment?

Overall, there was no difference between the impact of positive or negative advice received offline and online. This differs to the assertion within the literature, that information gained from online sources are less influential on consumer behaviour compared to advice gained offline (Eubank & Fay, 2008; Mayzlin, 2006). An explanation for this could be that the majority of online WOM was exchanged between people who shared close relationship ties. WOM occurring between strangers was rare (only 8% of all online WOM about TV programs and only 2% of online WOM about movies occurred between strangers). Despite literature suggesting that anonymity may influence the impact of information (Eubank & Fay, 2008; Mayzlin, 2006), this finding suggests that the Internet medium itself does not decrease the perceived credibility or trustworthiness of online information.

The impact of PWOM

The effects of positive recommendations was influenced by the receiver's initial viewing probabilities, consistent with the suggestion of East et al (2008a). However once these were accounted for, there was no difference in the impact of PWOM between TV programs and movies, despite more effort involved to act on positive advice about a movie (i.e., harder to visit a cinema or physically hire a movie than turn on TV).

PWOM exerted the greatest impact when reaching individuals with low commitment levels. This result was consistent across both TV shows and movies. Such finding coincides with East et al's (2008a) theory, where PWOM is most powerful when the receiver's likelihood of buying is low, as there is a larger 'gap' and thus more room for movement. Assuming that commitment levels also reflect the degree of familiarity, this finding corresponds with research showing that unfamiliar brands have more to gain from PWOM (Sundaram & Webster, 1999). Such brands are more susceptible to change as a result of PWOM than familiar brand evaluations. For both TV programs and movies, PWOM had a middle effect (not a large effect but not a small effect either) on viewing propensity, when initial viewing probability was in the center of the scale.

Across both categories, PWOM had the least impact when initial viewing probability was high. Again, this conforms with East et al (2008a) who theorise that people with high starting purchase probabilities have less room to move upwards and hence positive advice will have limited influence on these individuals. This also reiterates findings by Sundaram and Webseter (1999), that the effect of a recommendation is greatly reduced when the object of advice is familiar. However, it should be noted that although PWOM received by these individuals may not have caused drastic shifts in viewing propensities, any advice received could have a salience effect by minimising memory decay, reinforcing their preference for the show/movie or reiterating their initial decision to view (Berry, 2000).

The impact of NWOM

The impact of NWOM about movies was significantly greater than the impact of NWOM about TV programs. This difference may be attributed to movies being perceived as a higher-risk purchase (duration of movie is longer therefore more time invested, coupled with monetary cost), or because people have formed a relationship with the TV show and are not likely to alter viewing behaviour.

For the television category, the impact of NWOM was generally very small regardless of prior-commitment. Previous research on WOM and the viewing of TV programs by Romaniuk (2007) also found that the effect of NWOM on receivers was insignificant. Such finding is contrary to the 'Room for Movement' theory (East et al., 2008a), which expects NWOM to have the most impact when prior-purchase probability is high, and little effect when initial purchase probability is low. This result could be explained by Ahluwalia (2000), who found that in some instances, individuals who were very likely to purchase a brand give less weight to NWOM on that brand. This is likely to be the case for TV shows, where viewers tend to develop relationships with shows overtime, and hence will ignore negative information about shows they are committed to (E.g., *"I love Gossip Girl, nothing will not change my mind"*). However, this does not explain why there was minimal change even when initial viewing probability was in the middle. It may just be that in common, low-risk categories like television, the value of negative information is low regardless of prior-probability, as was suggested by Romaniuk (2007).

The results pertaining to the impact of NWOM for movies was consistent with the 'Room for Movement' (East et al., 2008a) proposition. That is, NWOM experienced the greatest impact when prior probability was high and effects were minimal when initial propensity to view was low. This highlights that NWOM is quite persuasive in deterring 'purchase' when received by moviegoers who are seriously considering a film.

PWOM versus NWOM

PWOM about TV programs had significantly greater impact than NWOM. For movies, there was no difference between the impact of PWOM and NWOM. Such results are contrary to the common conception that negative information is more influential than positive information (Reichheld, 2003; Richins, 1983).

In the next chapter, the implications, limitations and future research are presented.

CHAPTER 9 IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

Chapter 9 is the last chapter of this thesis. This chapter is separated into three key areas. The first section explains the implications for academia and practice that arise from this research. The second section entails the limitations of the study. In the final section, the avenues for future research that would address the limitations and add to the marketing body of knowledge are presented.

9.1 Implications

This section outlines the implications the findings from this study have for marketing academics and practitioners.

Contribution to marketing knowledge

The findings from this thesis make numerous contributions to marketing research.

Firstly, my thesis contributes to existing WOM theory by extending the scope of research to categories that, historically, have not typically been examined. In the past, WOM studies have primarily focused on investigating infrequently purchased, high-involvement and high-risk service categories, for instance, insurance and financial institutions (East et al., 2008a; Mangold et al., 1999). Little research has examined categories like television shows and movies, where choice is common and the consequence of poor choices are minor. This study builds upon the small body of knowledge on WOM in such markets. The results that arise from this study may also be applicable to other entertainment, leisure or recreation-related markets such as theatre, concerts and sporting/public events.

This thesis provides insight to further understanding the reasons behind a customer's decision to engage in WOM within different mediums. Knowledge on why people give online WOM remains relatively new and has only received little attention in academia.

To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first that entails a side-by-side comparison of the factors that drive online and offline consumer recommendations. The merging of frameworks derived from existing offline and online WOM studies (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Mangold et al., 1999; Sundaram et al., 1998), as well as the addition of two new categories leads to the development of an expanded classification-scheme on WOM triggers. This framework will be useful for other academics in future research that aims to compare the reasons for giving WOM in differing contexts, particularly within the entertainment industry. The results relating to WOM antecedents supports earlier claims from the literature (Anderson, 1998; Sundaram et al., 1998), that PWOM is predominantly driven by satisfaction and NWOM is predominantly driven by dissatisfaction. My study finds that these assertions also hold true in an online environment.

This thesis confirms earlier assertions from the literature (East et al., 2008a), that the impact of WOM is influenced by an individual's initial probability of purchase. This was demonstrated in most cases, where the impact of advice varied when initial viewing propensity was low as opposed to when it was high. Such a result therefore reiterates the methodological importance of taking into account prior-commitment when examining WOM impact. Online observations do not always allow a researcher to identify the receivers of WOM, let alone isolate the receiver's initial probabilities of purchase. This, combined with the fact that past research has struggled to delineate between statements that are positive and negative (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004), suggest that retrospective surveys remain the most effective method for collecting data on the impact of WOM.

As well as enhancing the understanding of the WOM phenomenon, this study provides insight into how online conversations could be monitored in future research. The nature of the Internet means online WOM can exist in multiple forms (e.g., customer reviews, online rankings, testimonials). Yet little is known about the *best* channel in which to monitor consumer discussions. Historically, the most common electronic platforms used in WOM studies have been Consumer Review Sites and Discussion Boards (Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003). However, the results from my study show that consumer conversations occur within numerous online channels (including Instant Messaging, Social Network Sites, E-mail).

Research that fails to examine WOM within a range of platforms run the risk of obtaining results that are not entirely representative of the wider online community. Hence, it is important for future WOM studies to take into account multiple online channels. It should be noted however, that observations of conversations within mediums such as E-mail and within Social Network sites are often private and only viewable by the participants themselves. This also suggests that recall surveys may be the most effective method for researching WOM.

Overall, the findings from this thesis show that online WOM is similar to offline WOM. Although the majority of consumer discussions were found to be offline, there is no evidence to suggest that people give online and offline WOM for different reasons, or that online and offline WOM have different effects on those receiving advice. This implies that WOM in an online environment is representative of offline behaviour and vice versa. This finding is important as it means that insights obtained through decades of research on offline WOM are applicable within the online domain. Additionally, any new WOM findings derived from online research may also be applicable to the offline environment.

In the next section, the implications for marketing practice are presented.

Contributions to marketing industry

There are several implications for marketing practitioners that arise from this study.

The results indicate that WOM mainly occurs for reasons that brand managers cannot easily influence. The most common drivers of WOM were *Satisfaction* or *Dissatisfaction*, *Program/Movie Content* and *Coincidental Conversation*. These categories represent stimuli that are very difficult to encourage and control. Although managers may be able to easily monitor satisfaction levels through the use of satisfaction surveys, or improve satisfaction by improving service quality, such efforts may not necessarily drive WOM. For instance, we know that many people who give PWOM about a TV program like the show, but *will everyone who likes a show spread PWOM about it?* Exploration of this could be an agenda for future studies.

Although marketers may not have the power to directly drive WOM, the identification of these triggers may be useful in developing strategies where opportunities are created for consumers to share their impressions.

Despite investigation into two categories that generate a great deal of online discussion, WOM exchanged online was not typical. Though many researchers have speculated on the rapid growth of the Internet and thus, online WOM (Awad et al., 2004; De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006), the majority of conversations still occur offline, mainly through face-to-face. This suggests that brand managers who are abandoning their current marketing approaches and are becoming too focused on building online communities may be neglecting bigger opportunities.

Prior research has established that positive recommendations will accelerate brand acceptance and encourage purchase (Traylor & Mathais, 1983). A key to brand success is thus ensuring that PWOM reaches the right people, where such effects can happen. This study finds that PWOM had the greatest impact when the receiver had a low starting viewing probability. On the other hand, positive advice had little impact on people who were already likely to view a particular program/movie. This finding suggests that marketers should not focus too much on targeting prospective customers or people who are sure to buy from a brand. Many campaigns are known to target very loyal followers (e.g., Starbucks have launched an online community to collaborate with loyalists). These individuals are unlikely to change their behaviour upon receiving positive recommendations. Instead, WOM efforts should be directed towards individuals who exhibit low initial probabilities, as this is the group where advice will have the greatest effect on purchase probability.

This thesis has presented valuable findings for academics and practitioners of marketing. However, like all studies, this research is hampered by some weaknesses. The following sections will explain the methodological limitations.

9.2 Limitations

Acknowledging weaknesses is an important component of academic research that helps give perspective to the findings of any study. This section explains the limitations associated with my research.

Respondent Recall

A key limitation in this study is the reliance on respondent recall. The research design requests that participants draw on the last instance of WOM that occurred. However, respondents' ability to remember past events will accurately decline over time and may result in the recall of inaccurate information (Neuman, 2006). Further, measures of WOM may also be biased by selective recall in different ways for given and received WOM. This may result in the most memorable incident of WOM being reported rather than the most recent or typical. For example, the recall of given WOM may be biased towards TV shows/movies that are strongly liked or disliked, whereas the recall of received WOM may be biased towards those having the most impact on the receiver at the time of receiving or subsequently. According to Mangold et al (1999), this limitation is problematic if the content of more memorable WOM is different from the content of less memorable WOM. Though retrieval bias is present in many WOM studies (East & Hammond, 2006; Mangold et al., 1999; Romaniuk, 2007), it is still important to recognise this as a limitation.

Sample Sizes

Generally, large samples are ideal for quantitative research different (Zikmund, 2000). However, some measures in this study suffered from very small sample sizes. The limited cases for online and NWOM meant that it was not possible to statistically test the reasons for giving NWOM online against the reasons for giving NWOM offline.

Generalisability/ Scope of research

According to Malhotra et al (2006), Internet users are not representative of the general population. The use of an online survey may potentially amplify the presence of heavy Internet users, who may have been more likely to complete the questionnaire than others. Research has also shown that respondents give different responses within online surveys compared with surveys distributed via post (McDonald & Adam, 2003). Additionally, since respondents opted-in to complete the questionnaires, self-selection bias may have also been present. Such bias may distort the results because they may over-represent extreme positions (e.g., heavy TV and film viewers) whilst under-represent responses from those who are different (Zikmund, 2000).

Another limitation of this thesis relates to the scope covered. The short time frame for the Honours year meant that I was only able to examine WOM in the context of TV programs and movies. Therefore, findings could be specific only to television and film industries. This potentially limits the ability for results to be generalised across other product and service categories (e.g., fast moving consumer goods).

The results of this study may also be only applicable to the Australian market (where a strong free-to-view model exists comprising of three main networks, as opposed to greater fragmentation of channels in other countries like the U.S and U.K). Additionally, I was also unable to test for any differences between different online mediums (e.g., E-mail where contacts are often known to one another versus Recommendation Sites where contacts are often unknown), nor the differences between offline/online sought versus unsought WOM.

The next section of this chapter will conclude this thesis by outlining avenues for future research that could address these limitations and add to the marketing body of knowledge.

9.3 Avenues for future research

This is the final section of this thesis. This section will suggest potential agendas for future research based on the findings of this thesis. A particular focus will be the replication and extension of the methodologies used in this study.

The methodological limitations of this study can be overcome in various ways. One of the ways to minimise recall bias is to capture responses as close to the time of WOM as possible (East et al., 2008a). Future research could question only respondents who had given or received WOM in the last week. Alternatively, later studies could utilise an experimental design or other research procedures to isolate the last communication that occurred rather than the last remembered.

Subsequent studies should also have sufficient sample sizes to allow for detailed analysis of online NWOM. Increasing sample sizes will increase statistical power and enable the researcher to test for significant differences between the reasons for giving online NWOM and offline NWOM.

The replication and extension of this study is needed in order to establish generalisability of the findings. Future studies could extend on this research by examining whether there are any variances according to different genres of shows and movies (e.g., the impact of WOM about reality TV shows versus comedies, high rating TV shows versus low rating series). Furthermore, the effects of WOM before the premiere of a TV show/movie and after is also an area that may benefit from further investigations. Extending this research to other product and service industries would also be beneficial, as would replication in other countries in order to establish the generalisability of these findings internationally.

Prior research has found that advice specifically sought after by the receiver will have more impact on behaviour compared to advice that is just offered by givers (East et al., 2005). Future research could test whether this holds true in an online context. Exploration into how WOM differs between various online mediums (e.g., Chat Rooms, Customer Review Sites) could also be an agenda for future research.

Since it seems that many electronic discussions occur within mediums that are closer to offline WOM than initially assumed, future studies could examine how the effects of online WOM between family/friends differ to online WOM between strangers.

The results from this thesis show that in a few cases, PWOM received resulted in a negative shift in viewing probability, and NWOM received resulted in a positive shift in viewing probability. Such a result may have occurred if WOM produces controversy, if the receiver disagrees with the values of the giver, or if an individual expects to receive a strong recommendation but receives one that is weak (Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1988; East et al., 2008a; Romaniuk, 2007). Contrary responses in this research may have also occurred due to misinterpretation of the question by the respondent or carelessness whilst answering questions. The presence of contrary responses is of some concern because they limit the ability to interpret findings on the impact of WOM, yet there are currently no studies that explain why people give contrary answers. Investigations into contrary responses are beyond the scope of this research, but are the agenda for future research. Later studies would benefit by exploring the kind of people who give contrary responses and investigating why these responses occur. This can be achieved by questioning respondents why they indicate a certain shift in viewing probability that is different to what is expected. This can also be examined for very large shifts in purchase probabilities.

This thesis finds that online advice had just as much impact as offline advice on receivers. Another area for future investigation is looking at how the giving of WOM affects givers. Prior literature has suggested that the giving of PWOM may build the brand preferences of the advice giver (Chandon, Morwitz, & Reinartz, 2005). An extension of this research would therefore be to examine how the impact of giving online and offline WOM affects the person articulating the advice.

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APPENDIX 1   QUESTIONNAIRE

SQ1

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey today. Please pick the option that reflects the field of work you are in.

Please select one

○ Car Manufacturer (1)
○ Financial Sector (2)
○ TV or Film (3)
○ Market Research (4)
○ None of the above (5)

SQ2

Thinking about all the movies (any type, local or foreign) you have seen within the last month, please type in the number of movies you have seen in each of these different options:

Please type a number into each box.

On Television (1)   _____

At the Cinema/Theatre (2)   _____

DVD or Video (owned or rented) (3)   _____

Online streaming/ Internet download/ Computer File (4)   _____

Other (5)   _____

SQ3

Do you watch any television?

Please select one

○ No (1)
○ Yes (2)

Q1a

We'd like to find out how you spend your leisure time. Please type in the number of hours you spent yesterday on each of the following activities:

Please type a number into each box.

Watching television (1)   _____ hours (1)

On the Internet (excluding for work purposes) (2)   _____ hours (2)

Reading print (newspapers, magazines, journals etc.) (3)   _____ hours (3)

Listening to the radio (4)   _____ hours (4)

Q1b

Now thinking back over the last week, could you please type in the number of hours over the total week, you spent on each of the following activities:

Please type a number into each box.

Watching television (1)	_____	hours (1)
On the Internet (excluding for work purposes) (2)	_____	hours (2)
Reading print (newspapers, magazines, journals etc.) (3)	_____	hours (3)
Listening to the radio (4)	_____	hours (4)

Q1.1

When was the last time you said something positive about, or recommended someone else watch TV programs? This can be done for instance, though face-to-face conversations, telephone discussions, SMS, Facebook postings, online forums, email and so on.

Please pick one of the following options to represent your answer.

○ Within the last week (1)
○ More than a week but less than a fortnight (2)
○ More than a fortnight but less than a month (3)
○ More than a month but less than 6 months (4)
○ More than 6 months but less than a year (5)
○ More than a year or don't remember (6)
○ Have not said anything positive about a TV program to anyone (7)

Q1_2

Please type in the number of TV programs you discussed positively or recommended at this occasion.

Please type a number in the box provided

Q1_3

Please type in the name of the last TV program you said something positive about, or recommended someone to watch.

Q1_3a

The following questions will only be about the last TV program discussed in this instance.

Q1_4

How was your positive statement or recommendation made?

Please pick one of the following options.

○ Face to Face (1)
○ By telephone (2)

○ Through a written letter (3)
○ Via SMS (4)
○ Online/over the Internet (5)
○ Other (please specify) (6)_____

Q1_4a

How was your statement made? Was it...

Please pick one of the following options.

○ Online social networking site (1)
○ Website specifically relating to this show (2)
○ Online consumer review site (3)
○ Online blog/forum (4)
○ Email (5)
○ Instant Messaging or Chat (6)
○ Other (please specify) (7)_____

Q1_5

Please type in what motivated or prompted you to express this statement or give this recommendation.

Please be as specific as you can in your answer.

Q1_6

What is your relationship to the person you interacted with about this TV program?

Please pick one of the options below.

○ Close family, friend or colleague (1)
○ More distant family, friend or colleague (2)
○ Casual acquaintance (3)
○ I did not know them personally (4)

Q1_7

Did the person ask you for this advice or recommendation?

Please select one.

○ No (1)
○ Yes (2)
○ Don't know (3)

Q1_7a

Which of the following options was the request for advice/your opinion about?

○ A specific TV program (1)
○ Any TV programs on that night (2)
○ TV programs in general (3)
○ Other (please specify) (4)_____

Q1_8

Using the options below, please indicate the number of times you have watched this program in the last 12 months. This may include viewing the program on TV, DVD/box set, online download etc.

◯ Never (0)
◯ 1 (1)
◯ 2 (2)
◯ 3 (3)
◯ 4 (4)
◯ 5 (5)
◯ 6 (6)
◯ 7 (7)
◯ 8 (8)
◯ 9 (9)
◯ 10 (10)
◯ 11-20 (11)
◯ 21-30 (12)
◯ 31+ (13)

Q1_9

Thinking about the last 12 months, please indicate the percentage of time you have seen this program through the following different ways Your total percentage should add up to 100%.

Please type a number into each box.

On television (1)	_____	% (1)
On DVD/Video (owned or rented) (2)	_____	% (2)
Online streaming/ Internet download/ Computer file (3)	_____	% (3)
Other (4)	_____	% (4)

Q1_10

Please consider all your experiences to date with this TV program. By picking an option on the scale presented below, please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with this program overall.

Please select one

◯ Very satisfied (7)
◯ Satisfied (6)
◯ Somewhat satisfied (5)
◯ Neither satisfied or satisfied (4)
◯ Somewhat dissatisfied (3)
◯ Dissatisfied (2)
◯ Very dissatisfied (1)

Q2_1

When was the last time you said something negative about, or advised someone else against watching any TV programs? This can be done for instance, though face-to-face conversations, telephone discussions, SMS, Facebook postings, online forums, email and so on.

Please pick one of the following options to represent your answer.

○ Within the last week (1)
○ More than a week but less than a fortnight (2)
○ More than a fortnight but less than a month (3)
○ More than a month but less than 6 months (4)
○ More than 6 months but less than a year (5)
○ More than a year or don't remember (6)
○ Have not said anything negative about a TV program to anyone (7)

Q2_2

Please type in the number of TV programs you discussed negatively or advised someone else against watching at this occasion.

Q2_3

Please type in the name of the last TV program you said something negative about, or advised against.

Q2_3a

The following questions will only be about the last TV program discussed in this instance.

Q2_4

How was your negative statement or advice made?

Please pick one of the following options.

○ Face to Face (1)
○ By telephone (2)
○ Through a written letter (3)
○ Via SMS (4)
○ Online/over the Internet (5)
○ Other (please specify) (6)_____

Q2_4a

How was your statement made? Was it...

Please pick one of the following options.

○ Online social networking site (1)
○ Website specifically relating to this program (2)
○ Online consumer review site (3)
○ Online blog/forum (4)
○ Email (5)
○ Instant Messaging or Chat (6)
○ Other (please specify) (7)_____

Q2_5

Please type in what motivated or prompted you to express this statement or give this advice.

Please be as specific as you can in your answer.

Q2_6

What is your relationship to the person you interacted with about this TV program?

Please pick one of the options below.

○ Close family, friend or colleague (1)
○ More distant family, friend or colleague (2)
○ Casual acquaintance (3)
○ I did not know them personally (4)

Q2_7

Did the person ask you for this advice or recommendation?

○ No (1)
○ Yes (2)
○ Don't know (3)

Q2_7a

Which of the following options was the request for advice/your opinion about?

○ A specific TV program (1)
○ Any TV programs on that night (2)
○ TV programs in general (3)
○ Other (please specify) (4)_____

Q2_8

Using the options below, please indicate the number of times have you watched this program in the last 12 months. This may include viewing the program on TV, DVD/box set, online download etc.

○ Never (0)
○ 1 (1)
○ 2 (2)
○ 3 (3)
○ 4 (4)
○ 5 (5)
○ 6 (6)
○ 7 (7)
○ 8 (8)
○ 9 (9)
○ 10 (10)
○ 11-20 (11)
○ 21-30 (12)
○ 31+ (13)

Q2_9

Thinking about the last 12 months, please type in the percentage of time you have seen this program through the following different ways. Your percentage must add to 100%.

Please type a number into each box.

On television (1)   _____ %
                                                                                                         (1)

On DVD/Video (owned or rented) (2)   _____ %
                                                                                                         (2)

Online streaming/ Internet download/ Computer   _____ %
file (3)   (3)

Other (4)   _____ %
                                                                                                         (4)

Q2_10

Please consider all your experiences to date with this program. By picking an option on the scale presented below, please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with this program overall.

○ Very satisfied (7)
○ Satisfied (6)
○ Somewhat satisfied (5)
○ Neither satisfied or satisfied (4)
○ Somewhat dissatisfied (3)
○ Dissatisfied (2)
○ Very dissatisfied (1)

Q3_1

When was the last time someone else said something positively about, or recommended you watch any TV programs? Again, remember that this can be done for instance, though face-to-face conversations, telephone discussions, SMS, Facebook postings, online forums, email and so on.

Please pick one of the following options to represent your answer.

○ Within the last week (1)
○ More than a week but less than a fortnight (2)
○ More than a fortnight but less than a month (3)
○ More than a month but less than 6 months (4)
○ More than 6 months but less than a year (5)
○ More than a year or don't remember (6)
○ No one has said anything positive about a TV program to me (7)

Q3_2

Please type in the number of TV programs discussed positively and/or recommended by others at this occasion.

Q3_3

Please type in the name of the last TV program someone said something positive about, or recommended you to watch.

Q3_3a

The following questions will only be about the last TV program discussed in this instance.

Q3_4

How was the positive statement or recommendation made?

Please pick one of the following options.

◯ Face to Face (1)
◯ By telephone (2)
◯ Through a written letter (3)
◯ Via SMS (4)
◯ Online/over the Internet (5)
◯ Other (please specify) (6)_____

Q3_4a

How was the statement made? Was it...

Please pick one of the following options.

◯ Online social networking site (1)
◯ Website specifically relating to this program (2)
◯ Online consumer review site (3)
◯ Online blog/forum (4)
◯ Email (5)
◯ Instant Messaging or Chat (6)
◯ Other (please specify) (7)_____

Q3_5

What is your relationship to the person you interacted with about this program?

Please pick one of the options below.

◯ Close family, friend or colleague (1)
◯ More distant family, friend or colleague (2)
◯ Casual acquaintance (3)
◯ I did not know them at all (4)

Q3_6

Did you ask for this advice or actively seek this recommendation?

◯ No (1)
◯ Yes (2)
◯ Don't know (3)

Q3_6a

Which of the following options was your request for advice/an opinion about?

○ A specific TV program (1)
○ Any TV programs on that night (2)
○ TV programs in general (3)
○ Other (please specify) (4)_____

Q3_6b

And did you seek more than one opinion about this topic?

○ No (1)
○ Yes (2)

Q3_6c

How many opinions did you seek?

Please type in a number of opinions you sought.

Q3_7

What was your probability of watching this program before you heard this comment or received this advice?

Please rate your answer according to the following scale.

○ Certainly, practically certain (99 chance out of 100) (10)
○ Almost sure (9 chance out of 10) (9)
○ Very probable (8 chance out of 10) (8)
○ Probable (7 chance out of 10) (7)
○ Good possibility (6 chance out of 10) (6)
○ Fairly good possibility (5 chance out of 10) (5)
○ Fair possibility (4 chance out of 10) (4)
○ Some possibility (3 chance out of 10) (3)
○ Slight possibility (2 chance out of 10) (2)
○ Very slight possibility (1 chance out of 10) (1)
○ No chance, almost no chance (1 chance out of 100) (0)

Q3_8

What was your probability of watching this program after you heard this comment or received this advice?

Please rate your answer according to the following scale.

○ Certainly, practically certain (99 chance out of 100) (10)
○ Almost sure (9 chance out of 10) (9)
○ Very probable (8 chance out of 10) (8)
○ Probable (7 chance out of 10) (7)
○ Good possibility (6 chance out of 10) (6)
○ Fairly good possibility (5 chance out of 10) (5)
○ Fair possibility (4 chance out of 10) (4)
○ Some possibility (3 chance out of 10) (3)
○ Slight possibility (2 chance out of 10) (2)
○ Very slight possibility (1 chance out of 10) (1)
○ No chance, almost no chance (1 chance out of 100) (0)

Q4_1

When was the last time someone else talked negatively about, or advised you against watching any TV programs? Again, remember that this can be done for instance, though face-to-face conversations, telephone discussions, SMS, Facebook postings, online forums, email and so on.

Please pick one of the following options to represent your answer.

○ Within the last week (1)
○ More than a week but less than a fortnight (2)
○ More than a fortnight but less than a month (3)
○ More than a month but less than 6 months (4)
○ More than 6 months but less than a year (5)
○ More than a year or don't remember (6)
○ No one has said anything negative about a TV program to me (7)

Q4_2

Please type in the number of TV programs that were discussed negatively and/or advised against by others at this occasion.

Q4_3

Please type in the name of the last TV program someone said something negative about, or advised you against watching.

Q4_3a

The following questions will only be about the last TV program discussed in this instance.

Q4_4

How was the negative statement or advice against made?

Please pick one of the following options.

○ Face to Face (1)
○ By telephone (2)
○ Through a written letter (3)
○ Via SMS (4)
○ Online/over the Internet (5)
○ Other (please specify) (6)_____

Q4_4a

How was the statement made? Was it...

Please pick one of the following options.

○ Online social networking site (1)
○ Website specifically relating to this program (2)
○ Online consumer review site (3)
○ Online blog/forum (4)
○ Email (5)
○ Instant Messaging or Chat (6)
○ Other (please specify) (7)_____

Q4_5

What is your relationship to the person you interacted with about this program?

Please pick one of the options below.

◯ Close family, friend or colleague (1)
◯ More distant family, friend or colleague (2)
◯ Casual acquaintance (3)
◯ I did not know them at all (4)

Q4_6

Did you ask for this advice or actively seek this recommendation?

◯ No (1)
◯ Yes (2)
◯ Don't know (3)

Q4_6a

Which of the following options was your request for advice/opinion about?

◯ A specific TV program (1)
◯ Any TV programs on that night (2)
◯ TV programs in general (3)
◯ Other (please specify) (4)_____

Q4_6b

And did you seek more than one opinion about this topic?

◯ No (1)
◯ Yes (2)

Q4_6c

How many opinions did you seek?

Please type in a number of opinions you sought.

Q4_7

What was your probability of watching this program before you heard this comment or received this advice?

Please rate your answer according to the following scale.

◯ Certainly, practically certain (99 chance out of 100) (10)
◯ Almost sure (9 chance out of 10) (9)
◯ Very probable (8 chance out of 10) (8)
◯ Probable (7 chance out of 10) (7)
◯ Good possibility (6 chance out of 10) (6)
◯ Fairly good possibility (5 chance out of 10) (5)
◯ Fair possibility (4 chance out of 10) (4)
◯ Some possibility (3 chance out of 10) (3)
◯ Slight possibility (2 chance out of 10) (2)

○ Very slight possibility (1 chance out of 10) (1)
○ No chance, almost no chance (1 chance out of 100) (0)

Q4_8

What was your probability of watching this program after you heard this comment or received this advice?

Please rate your answer according to the following scale.

○ Certainly, practically certain (99 chance out of 100) (10)
○ Almost sure (9 chance out of 10) (9)
○ Very probable (8 chance out of 10) (8)
○ Probable (7 chance out of 10) (7)
○ Good possibility (6 chance out of 10) (6)
○ Fairly good possibility (5 chance out of 10) (5)
○ Fair possibility (4 chance out of 10) (4)
○ Some possibility (3 chance out of 10) (3)
○ Slight possibility (2 chance out of 10) (2)
○ Very slight possibility (1 chance out of 10) (1)
○ No chance, almost no chance (1 chance out of 100) (0)

Q4_9-Q4_11

Now just thinking generally about the number of times you have talked about TV programs in the past week... Please type in the total number of times within the last week you have said something...

...Positive about, or recommended someone watch a TV program (9)   _____

...Negative about, or advised someone against watching a TV program (10)   _____

...That was neither positive nor negative (i.e. neutral) about a TV program (11)   _____

Q4_12_Q4_14

Now thinking about the your total experiences hearing others talk about TV programs in the last week... Please type in the total number of times within the last week you have heard something...

...Positive about, or received a recommendation to watch a TV program (12)   _____

...Negative about, or received advice against watching a TV program (13)   _____

...Neither positive nor negative (i.e. neutral) about a TV program (14)   _____

Q5_pre

We would now like you to think about your experiences talking about Movies. We would first like to find out about any movies you have discussed with others. This can include any movie shown at the cinema/theatre, released on DVD/video, or aired on television, local or foreign.

Q5_1

When was the last time you said something positive about, or recommended someone watch any movies? This can be done for instance, though face-to-face conversations, telephone discussions, SMS, Facebook postings, online forums, email and so on.

Please pick one of the following options to represent your answer.

○ Within the last week (1)
○ More than a week but less than a fortnight (2)
○ More than a fortnight but less than a month (3)
○ More than a month but less than 6 months (4)
○ More than 6 months but less than a year (5)
○ More than a year or don't remember (6)
○ Have not said anything positive about a movie to anyone (7)

Q5_2

Please type in the number of movies you discussed positively or recommended someone else to watch at this occasion.

Q5_3

Please type in the name of the last movie you said something positive about, or recommended that someone watch.

Q5_3a

The following questions will only be about the last movie discussed in this instance.

Q5_4

How was your positive statement recommendation made?

Please pick one of the following options.

○ Face to Face (1)
○ By telephone (2)
○ Through a written letter (3)
○ Via SMS (4)
○ Online/over the Internet (5)
○ Other (please specify) (6)_____

Q5_4a

How was your statement made? Was it...

Please pick one of the following options.

○ Online social networking site (1)
○ Website specifically relating to this show (2)
○ Online consumer review site (3)
○ Online blog/forum (4)
○ Email (5)
○ Instant Messaging or Chat (6)
○ Movie critique/review site (7)
○ Other (please specify) (8)_____

Q5_5

Please type in what motivated or prompted you to express this statement or give this recommendation.

Please be as specific as you can in your answer.

Q5_6

What is your relationship to the person you interacted with about this movie?

Please pick one of the options below.

○ Close family, friend or colleague (1)
○ More distant family, friend or colleague (2)
○ Casual acquaintance (3)
○ I did not know them at all (4)

Q5_7

Did the person ask you for this advice or recommendation?

○ No (1)
○ Yes (2)
○ Don't know (3)

Q5_7a

Which of the following options was the request for advice/your opinion about?

○ A specific movie (1)
○ Any new movies (2)
○ Movies in general (3)
○ Other (please specify) (4)_____

Q5_8

Have you seen this movie?

○ No (1)
○ Yes (2)

Q5_9

How did you last see this movie?

Please pick one of the following options.

○ On TV (1)
○ At the Cinema/theatre (2)
○ DVD or Video (owned or rented) (3)
○ Online Streaming/ Internet download/ Computer file (4)
○ Other (please specify) (5)_____

Q5_10

Please consider all your experiences to date with this movie. By picking an option on the scale presented below, please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with this movie overall.

Please select one

❍ Very satisfied (7)
❍ Satisfied (6)
❍ Somewhat satisfied (5)
❍ Neither satisfied or satisfied (4)
❍ Somewhat dissatisfied (3)
❍ Dissatisfied (2)
❍ Very dissatisfied (1)

Q6_1

When was the last time you said something negative about, or advised someone else against watching any movies? This can be done for instance, though face-to-face conversations, telephone discussions, SMS, Facebook postings, online forums, email and so on.

Please pick one of the following options to represent your answer.

❍ Within the last week (1)
❍ More than a week but less than a fortnight (2)
❍ More than a fortnight but less than a month (3)
❍ More than a month but less than 6 months (4)
❍ More than 6 months but less than a year (5)
❍ More than a year or don't remember (6)
❍ Have not said anything negative about a movie to anyone (7)

Q6_2

Please type in the number of movies you discussed negatively or advised someone else against watching at this occasion.

Q6_3

Please type in the name of the last movie you said something negative about, or advised against.

Q6_3a

The following questions will only be about the last movie discussed in this instance.

Q6_4

How was your negative statement or advice against made?

Please pick one of the following options.

❍ Face to Face (1)
❍ By telephone (2)
❍ Through a written letter (3)
❍ Via SMS (4)
❍ Online/over the Internet (5)
❍ Other (please specify) (6)_____

Q6_4a

How was your statement made? Was it...

Please pick one of the following options.

◯ Online social networking site (1)
◯ Website specifically relating to this show (2)
◯ Online consumer review site (3)
◯ Online blog/forum (4)
◯ Email (5)
◯ Instant Messaging or Chat (6)
◯ Movie critique/review site (7)
◯ Other (please specify) (8)_____

Q6_5

Please type in what motivated or prompted you to express this statement or advice.

Please be as specific as you can in your answer.

Q6_6

What is your relationship to the person you interacted with about this movie?

Please pick one of the options below.

◯ Close family, friend or colleague (1)
◯ More distant family, friend or colleague (2)
◯ Casual acquaintance (3)
◯ I did not know them at all (4)

Q6_7

Did the person ask you for this advice?

◯ No (1)
◯ Yes (2)
◯ Don't know (3)

Q6_7a

Which of the following options was the request for advice/your opinion about?

◯ A specific movie (1)
◯ Any new movies (2)
◯ Movies in general (3)
◯ Other (please specify) (4)_____

Q6_8

Have you seen this movie?

◯ No (1)
◯ Yes (2)

Q6_9

How did you last see this movie?

Please pick one of the following options.

○ On TV (1)
○ At the Cinema/theatre (2)
○ DVD or Video (owned or rented) (3)
○ Online Streaming/ Internet download/ Computer file (4)
○ Other (please specify) (5)_____

Q6_10

Please consider all your experiences to date with this movie. By picking an option on the scale presented below, please indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with this movie overall.

Please select one

○ Very satisfied (7)
○ Satisfied (6)
○ Somewhat satisfied (5)
○ Neither satisfied or satisfied (4)
○ Somewhat dissatisfied (3)
○ Dissatisfied (2)
○ Very dissatisfied (1)

Q7_1

When was the last time someone else said something positive about, or recommended any movies to you? This can be done for instance, though face-to-face conversations, telephone discussions, SMS, Facebook postings, online forums, email and so on.

Please pick one of the following options to represent your answer.

○ Within the last week (1)
○ More than a week but less than a fortnight (2)
○ More than a fortnight but less than a month (3)
○ More than a month but less than 6 months (4)
○ More than 6 months but less than a year (5)
○ More than a year or don't remember (6)
○ No one has said anything positive about a movie to me (7)

Q7_2

Please type in the number of movies discussed positively and/or recommended by others at this occasion.

Q7_3

Please type in the name of the last movie someone said something positive about, or recommended that you watch.

Q7_3a

The following questions will only be about the last movie discussed in this instance.

Q7_4

How was the positive statement or advice made?

Please pick one of the following options.

◯ Face to Face (1)
◯ By telephone (2)
◯ Through a written letter (3)
◯ Via SMS (4)
◯ Online/over the Internet (5)
◯ Other (please specify) (6)_____

Q7_4a

How was the statement made? Was it...

Please pick one of the following options.

◯ Online social networking site (1)
◯ Website specifically relating to this show (2)
◯ Online consumer review site (3)
◯ Online blog/forum (4)
◯ Email (5)
◯ Instant Messaging or Chat (6)
◯ Movie critique/review site (7)
◯ Other (please specify) (8)_____

Q7_5

What is your relationship to the person you interacted with about this movie?

Please pick one of the options below.

◯ Close family, friend or colleague (1)
◯ More distant family, friend or colleague (2)
◯ Casual acquaintance (3)
◯ I did not know them at all (4)

Q7_6

Did you ask for this advice or actively seek this recommendation?

◯ No (1)
◯ Yes (2)
◯ Don't know (3)

Q7_6a

Which of the following options was your request for advice/opinion about?

◯ A specific movie (1)
◯ Any new movies (2)
◯ Movies in general (3)
◯ Other (please specify) (4)_____

Q7_6b

And did you seek more than one opinion about this topic?

◯ No (1)

○ Yes (2)

Q7_6c

How many opinions did you seek?

Please type in a number of opinions you sought.

Q7_7

What was your probability of watching this movie before you heard this comment or received this advice?

Please rate your answer according to the following scale.

○ Certainly, practically certain (99 chance out of 100) (10)
○ Almost sure (9 chance out of 10) (9)
○ Very probable (8 chance out of 10) (8)
○ Probable (7 chance out of 10) (7)
○ Good possibility (6 chance out of 10) (6)
○ Fairly good possibility (5 chance out of 10) (5)
○ Fair possibility (4 chance out of 10) (4)
○ Some possibility (3 chance out of 10) (3)
○ Slight possibility (2 chance out of 10) (2)
○ Very slight possibility (1 chance out of 10) (1)
○ No chance, almost no chance (1 chance out of 100) (0)

Q7_8

What was your probability of watching this movie after you heard this comment or received this advice?

Please rate your answer according to the following scale.

○ Certainly, practically certain (99 chance out of 100) (10)
○ Almost sure (9 chance out of 10) (9)
○ Very probable (8 chance out of 10) (8)
○ Probable (7 chance out of 10) (7)
○ Good possibility (6 chance out of 10) (6)
○ Fairly good possibility (5 chance out of 10) (5)
○ Fair possibility (4 chance out of 10) (4)
○ Some possibility (3 chance out of 10) (3)
○ Slight possibility (2 chance out of 10) (2)
○ Very slight possibility (1 chance out of 10) (1)
○ No chance, almost no chance (1 chance out of 100) (0)

Q8_1

When was the last time someone else spoke negatively to you about, or advised you against any movie? Again, remember that this can be done for instance, though face-to-face conversations, telephone discussions, SMS, Facebook postings, online forums, email and so on.

Please pick one of the following options to represent your answer.

○ Within the last week (1)
○ More than a week but less than a fortnight (2)
○ More than a fortnight but less than a month (3)

○ More than a month but less than 6 months (4)
○ More than 6 months but less than a year (5)
○ More than a year or don't remember (6)
○ No one has said anything negative about a movie to me (7)

Q8_2

Please type in the number of movies discussed negatively and/or advised against by others at this occasion.

Q8_3

Please type in the name of the last movie someone said something negative about, or advised you against watching.

Q8_3a

The following questions will only be about the last movie discussed in this instance.

Q8_4

How was the negative statement or advice against made?

Please pick one of the following options.

○ Face to Face (1)
○ By telephone (2)
○ Through a written letter (3)
○ Via SMS (4)
○ Online/over the Internet (5)
○ Other (please specify) (6)_____

Q8_4a

How was your statement made? Was it...

Please pick one of the following options.

○ Online social networking site (1)
○ Website specifically relating to this show (2)
○ Online consumer review site (3)
○ Online blog/forum (4)
○ Email (5)
○ Instant Messaging or Chat (6)
○ Movie critique/review site (7)
○ Other (please specify) (8)_____

Q8_5

What is your relationship to the person you interacted with about this movie?

Please pick one of the options below.

○ Close family, friend or colleague (1)
○ More distant family, friend or colleague (2)
○ Casual acquaintance (3)
○ I did not know them at all (4)

Q8_6

Did you ask for this advice or actively seek this recommendation?

○ No (1)
○ Yes (2)
○ Don't know (3)

Q8_6a

Which of the following options was your request for advice/your opinion about?

○ A specific movie (1)
○ Any new movie (2)
○ Movies in general (3)
○ Other (please specify) (4)_____

Q8_6b

And did you seek more than one opinion about this topic?

○ No (1)
○ Yes (2)

Q8_6c

How many opinions did you seek?

Please type in a number of opinions you sought.

Q8_7

What was your probability of watching this movie before you heard this comment or received this advice?

Please rate your answer according to the following scale.

○ Certainly, practically certain (99 chance out of 100) (10)
○ Almost sure (9 chance out of 10) (9)
○ Very probable (8 chance out of 10) (8)
○ Probable (7 chance out of 10) (7)
○ Good possibility (6 chance out of 10) (6)
○ Fairly good possibility (5 chance out of 10) (5)
○ Fair possibility (4 chance out of 10) (4)
○ Some possibility (3 chance out of 10) (3)
○ Slight possibility (2 chance out of 10) (2)
○ Very slight possibility (1 chance out of 10) (1)
○ No chance, almost no chance (1 chance out of 100) (0)

Q8_8

What was your probability of watching this movie after you heard this comment or received this advice?

Please rate your answer according to the following scale.

○ Certainly, practically certain (99 chance out of 100) (10)
○ Almost sure (9 chance out of 10) (9)
○ Very probable (8 chance out of 10) (8)

○ Probable (7 chance out of 10) (7)
○ Good possibility (6 chance out of 10) (6)
○ Fairly good possibility (5 chance out of 10) (5)
○ Fair possibility (4 chance out of 10) (4)
○ Some possibility (3 chance out of 10) (3)
○ Slight possibility (2 chance out of 10) (2)
○ Very slight possibility (1 chance out of 10) (1)
○ No chance, almost no chance (1 chance out of 100) (0)

Q8_10-Q8_12

Now just thinking generally about the number of times you have talked about movies in the past week… Please type in the total number of times within the last week you have said something...

...Positive about, or recommended someone watch a movie (10) _____

...Negative about, or advised someone against watching a movie (11) _____

...That was neither positive nor negative (i.e. neutral) about a movie (12) _____

Q8_13-Q8_15

Now thinking about the your total experiences hearing others talk about movies in the last week... Please type in the total number of times within the last week you have heard something...

...Positive about, or received a recommendation to watch a movie (13) _____

...Negative about, or received advice against watching a movie (14) _____

...Neither positive nor negative (i.e. neutral) about a movie (15) _____

Q9_pre

Finally, we'd just like to get some general information about you to ensure that we have a good cross section of respondents.

Q9_1

Thinking about the way you use the Internet for personal use, what are the activities you are commonly involved in?

You may pick more than one response.

❑ Chat, Instant Messaging EG (e.g. MSN, Yahoo Chat) (1)
❑ Social Network sites EG (e.g. Facebook, My Space) (2)
❑ Email (3)
❑ Reading/viewing blogs, online forums, discussion groups (4)
❑ Contributing to blogs, online forums, discussion groups (5)
❑ General browsing, surfing, finding information, Search Engines (6)
❑ Online Shopping (7)
❑ Creating/updating/monitoring own website (8)
❑ Download music or video files (9)
❑ Online Banking (10)

❑ Online Dating (11)
❑ Other (please specify) (12)_____

Q9_3

How would you rate your level of Internet experience?

○ A novice – I am a new or infrequent user (1)
○ Fairly experienced – I feel confident using the Internet for general browsing and e-mail (2)
○ Experienced – I shop or bank online as well as e-mail (3)
○ Advanced – I feel confident in downloading music/video and /or contributing to chat rooms (4)
○ Expert – I am a very confident user e.g. setting up blogs / my own website, I am someone people turn to for internet advice (5)
○ Don't know (6)

Q9_4

Please indicate your year of birth:

Q9_5

Are you...?

○ Female (1)
○ Male (2)

Feedback

That is all the questions we have for you today. Thank you very much for your time. Before you finish, we would like to ask for any feedback or suggestions you have on our online survey. Any comments are appreciated and will help us to improve our future surveys.

APPENDIX 2   CODING GUIDELINES

PWOM Trigger	Description	Examples
(1) **Concern for Others/** Altruism	The act of doing something for others without anticipating any reward in return	*I want to help others with my own positive experiences* *I want to give others the opportunity to make the right purchase decision*
(2) **Satisfaction/** Product Involvement	Personal interest in the product, excitement resulting from product ownership and product use	*This way, I can express my joy about a good experience*
(3) **Self-Enhancement**	Enhances image among other customers by projecting themselves as intelligent shoppers	*I feel good when I can tell others about my buying successes* *I give WOM to show others that I am a clever shopper*
(4) **Coincidental Conversation**	PWOM arising from general conversation rather than specific discussion	*Others were talking generally about their opinions*
(5) **Help the Company**[10]	Desire to help the company	*I am so satisfied with a company that I want to help them become successful* *In my own opinion, good companies should be supported*
(6) **Economic Incentives**	Where the giver gives WOM because they receive remuneration from the company/platform operator	*I give WOM because of the incentives I receive* *I receive a reward for giving WOM*
(7) **Marketing Efforts**	Discussion was stimulated by advertisements, commercials or public relations	*I wanted to discuss an advertisement/commercial*

---

[10] 'Company' later changed to 'Station/Movie'

NWOM Trigger	Description	Example
(21) **Concern for Others/** Altruism	To prevent others from encountering the problems they had encountered or to help others by warning them about negative consequences of a particular action	*I want to warn others about bad shows/movies* *I want to save others from having the same negative experiences as me*
(22) **Dissatisfaction/** Venting Negative Feelings/ Anxiety Reduction	Uses NWOM as avenue to vent anger Expressing opinion to help ease anger, anxiety and frustration associated with poor buy	*I want to warn others of bad movies/shows* *Venting negative feelings lets me shake off frustration about bad experiences* *I like to get anger off my chest*
(23) **Coincidental Conversation**	NWOM arising from general conversation rather than specific discussion	*Others were talking generally about their opinions*
(24) **Vengeance**	Retaliate against the company associated with the negative consumption experiences. Deterring others from patronizing the business.	*The company harmed me, and now I will harm the company!* *I want to take vengeance upon the company*
(25) **Advice Seeking**	Customer encountered a negative consumption experience and was unaware of the mean to redress. The sharing of feelings to obtain some advice on how to resolve problems.	*I am hoping to receive advice from others that helps me solve my problems* *I expect to receive tips or support from others*
(26) **Marketing Efforts**	Discussion was stimulated by advertisements, commercials or public relations	*I wanted to discuss an advertisement/commercial*

(Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Mangold et al., 1999; Sundaram et al., 1998)

APPENDIX 3   MOST DISCUSSED TV SHOWS AND MOVIES

TV Shows

Given PWOM	% (n=323)	Examples
Biggest Loser	5.2	*"We have a section for TV shows on forum. And there's a biggest loser section where we discuss the show. I post regular comments in there"*
Underbelly	5.2	*"Strong story, gritty drama"*
Grey's Anatomy	3.1	*"A character returned to the show & I was advising a friend of it as she does not have a TV, and really liked the returning character"*
Packed to the Rafters	3.1	*"Tuesday night is my night for television"*
SYTYCD	2.3	*"The quality of dancers on the show and the great routines"*

Given NWOM	% (n=165)	Examples
Biggest Loser	4.7	*"Not right degrading humans"*
Big Brother	3.1	*"I think it is a stupid show and the people on it are morons"*
Underbelly	2.3	*"Load of crap second series, relying on nudity and sex for ratings"*
SYTYCD	2.1	*"I was watching television with my mother and we were waiting for Rove to start but the show before it (So You Think You Can Dance) JUST WOULD NOT END!! And what they were showing was just time-wasting crap"*
Home and Away	1.6	*"Do not like the show and wanted them to turn it off"*

Received PWOM	% (n=189)
Lost	2.1
SYTYCD	1.6
Dexter	1.6
Underbelly	1.3
House	1.3
Scrubs	1.3

Received NWOM	% (n=80)
SYTYCD	1
Big Brother	0.8
Grey's Anatomy	0.8
Home and Away	0.8
Life on Mars	0.8
Lost	0.8
Underbelly	0.8
Wipeout Australia	0.8

Movies

Given PWOM	% (n=258)	Examples
Slumdog Millionaire	6	*"It far surpassed my expectations"*
Grand Torino	5.5	*"Clint Eastwood played a good part in a great movie"*
Watchmen	3.7	*"Two friends highly recommended the film, so I recommended my dad and sister watch it with me"*
Confessions of a Shopaholic	2.1	*"Thought my friend would have enjoyed the movie as it could have been made about her"*
Australia	1.6	*"A must see on the big screen"*

Given NWOM	% (n=165)	Examples
Watchmen	2.9	*"The movie was that bad it needed to be commented"*
Confessions of a Shopaholic	1.6	*"The movie was a waste of resources"*
Australia	1.3	*"Too long"*
He's Just Not That Into You	1	*"Feedback after we watched the movie."*

Received PWOM	% (n=149)
Slumdog Millionaire	5.5
Watchmen	2.1
Grand Torino	1.3
He's Just Not That Into You	1.3
Australia	1.3
The Dark Knight	1.3

Received NWOM	% (n=81)
Watchmen	1
Australia	1.3
Confessions of a Shopaholic	1.3
He's Just Not That Into You	1.3