

362/22/5715

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Title of the thesis : Effectiveness of Word of Mouth Publicity on Buying Behaviour of Consumer Durable Products: An Empirical Study

Abstract

This study looks into 'Word of Mouth' (WoM) related issues like incidence of WoM, factors that cause WoM, its nature and significance, media used and sources of WoM, across gender, age group, education and occupational differentials, in the Indian scenario. With rising pressure to control marketing expenses and attribute communication source to each customer leads, WoM, which is not in control of marketing people holds great importance.

The study reinforces that WoM communication plays a significant role in developing a better understanding about the product performance and features, product quality and cost effectiveness and thus needs to be an essential component of marketing strategy. 87 % respondents mentioned that they had sought WoM before purchasing these products.

Study finds that about 62% respondents, who sought WoM, feel that usefulness of inputs is ≤ 7 on a scale of 10. It was found that respondents sought/ received WoM to know on Product performance/ Features of the product, followed by Repair/ Maintenance, After sales service, Quality of Services and interaction, Pricing, Comparison of two brands, Place to buy it from and Advt. /promotions of a product. 82% people mentioned that the recommendation was received face to face and Family members (36.9%), friends (32.5%) and Experts (31%) are widely considered as the 'Most Trustworthy sources'. While 62% of the respondents believe that WoM has helped them "To take decision fast", a little more than half (55%) of the respondents have deferred their purchase waiting for the right inputs or right recommendations. Respondents feel

that 'Comparative information available at one place' and 'A facility to understand Technical information about the product' will help them to take decisions fast.

Marketers may make strategic place for WoM providers in their communication plan for their profile of audience. Customer education will play a major role, particularly for high involvement products. It will be good, if marketers are able to help current consumers verbalize the good experience. Marketers need to ensure that while using WoM as a strategy which includes formal/ semi-formal WoM senders, they should have enough information and may also refer them to exact sources of information. Showing satisfaction as evidence will work better for marketers. Otherwise, prospective customers are prone to see WoM as 'Showing off the products' or see it as that WoM sender is 'being paid for it'. Marketers may avoid portraying WoM sender as mass communicator for WoM regarding the product.
