Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) Based on Website and Subjectivity of Digital Testimony : an Analysis in Consumer Trust Perspective

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Abstract: The existence of digital technology is necessary in this era of globalization. The application is very broad and challenging to the extent where humans can explore it. One of the implementation is in the field of digital marketing, namely through electronic word of mouth or e-WOM. By the medium of digital marketing, e-WOM can be used through various applications, such as the website-based one. In the context of e-WOM, humans as subject beings, certainly have their own subjective point of view. Digital subjectivity through the concept of e-WOM naturally in certain condition meets the perspective of the consumer trust. The purpose of this paper is to provide a theoretical perspective on how e-WOM is viewed critically and analytically. Through the public trust theory, this research explains the reality that relates to the digital testimonials via the website as a new possibility. The result of the discussion lies in the importance of consumer awareness, which though the word of mouth communication, consumers still have critical power in how e-WOM as a new media is conveyed on the consumer's point of view. The dimension of customer trust can be used to identify the scale of ultimate reality or the artificial reality of a testimony via e-WOM. This is where consumer criticism is grown and is expected to have a wise perspective on this matter.

1 INTRODUCTION

Electronic word mouth (e-WOM) can be seen as information and consumer opinions in the form of positive or negative statements made by loyal customers or former consumers about a product or service from a particular company (Tjenghar, 2016). The application of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) by using the internet, specifically social media, is considered more effective since it can be widely accessed. With the implementation of electronic word of mouth on social media, providers of goods or services benefit from low cost high impact. A person's mindset also develops along with the ease of searching for information related to goods or services desired since the consumers become more expressive in convincing other consumers through opinions from their experiences.

For companies, e-WOM can be used as a feedback mechanism which could help them to improve the quality of the products or services they produce, to get new customers, and as a corporate image (Dellarocas, 2003). At the practical level, the e-WOM channel or channel in the digital world is varied, ranging from Whatshapp applications, Fanpages, Twitter, Instagram, Line, to pages / websites.

This theoretical reflection builds up discussions on e-WOM channels that are carried out through pages or websites. The reason is because the website usually becomes the main place visited by consumers and is one-to-many, so there is possibility of creating e-WOM phenomenon. In addition, the website is also a manifestation of credibility or corporate image, thus the content on the website affects the characteristics or nature which resulting to the spread of e-WOM messages. Furthermore, e-WOM indirectly becomes a company strategy to maintain and control its image in order to remain good in cyberspace and help provide new views for business people in marketing products and services.

e-WOM with the website basis is also suitable for new businesses since the product could get recognition and brand awareness formation from the public.

2 METHODS

The topic will be discussed in a descriptive-analytic manner, so that it meets certain scientific degrees. As Creswell (2014) said, this writing is an expression of a constructive way of reasoning. The discussion will be established on the joints of thought that try to provide its own point of view, certainly not to be detached from the theoretical guidance provided. Bongdan and Taylor (1992) also explain that qualitative research is capable of producing an in-depth description of speech, writing, and human behavior, resulting those can be observed in an individual, community, or organization level in the context of a particular setting studied from the extensive and holistic point of view.

Now, the problem question is, what is the theoretical explanation for the website-based e-WOM that is analyzed through the perspective of consumer psychology, especially from the dimensions of trust or consumer trust? The description below will explore theoretically the problem question above.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) is an informal information dissemination activity by word of mouth through internet or online media. e-WOM is a development of technological advancements that become a new paradigm of interpersonal traditional communication that leads to a new generation of cyberspace. The existence of technological advances has an impact on the increasing trend for consumers in finding the information they need towards certain product, thus increases e-WOM activity as a negative or positive statement made by consumers in actual, potential or consumers who previously used a product or company where the information is available for other people or institutions through online media (Thurau et al., 2004).

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) from the message's sender point of view means that consumers who collect information from online discussions or forums show high interest in the topic of certain product rather than consumers who get information from sources conducted by corporate marketing (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). Meanwhile, e-WOM in the company can be a feedback mechanism that helps companies to improve the quality of products or services in getting new consumers (Dellarocas, 2003).

The form of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) is an important factor in the formation of consumer behavior. With recommendations or reviews given by other consumers in a sharing review platform, it can influence consumers in decision making. Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) is a form of internet media to share positive and negative responses between consumers and prospective consumers (Duan et al., 2008 in Severi, Ling, & Nasemoadeli, 2014). Furthermore, e-WOM becomes the process of exchanging information both on the opinions and perspectives of an individual to other individuals who seems have no commercial elements in between.

Websites are the first and most popular medium of communication when they need information about certain company or organization. Therefore, in this century every company must complete its communication facilities by creating a website (Kriyantono, 2012). Mohr et all (2010) provides criteria for interactive website elements for consumers. The website elements include: (1) context, which refers to the website design and layout aimed at building the user's mood or image, (2) content, which is the content of the website, in the form of text, images, sounds and videos. Generally, within the website, a product of digital marketing contained in the website, including information, products and services. The content must be related to how the information is presented. Also it is important to provide website content that is useful for consumers with designs and layouts that are easy for consumers to understand. (3) Connection, where the level that allows a site to connect to another one. The purpose is so the existence of another site link can be provided if the user cannot fulfill their needs at the site, thus, the needs of the users can be satisfied.

Trust is important when one group, namely the company and customers, have confidence to create mutually beneficial relationships. This trust is an important element because it is the basis of future cooperative relationships, and when trust is embedded between one party and another, the

company with customers can obtain the needs and each of their desires. Trusts can also be interpreted by faith or confidence from one party to another in maintaining a relationship. Trust is defined as the willingness to rely on the ability, integrity and motivation of others to act in order to satisfy one's needs and interests as agreed implicitly or explicitly (Sheth and Mittal, 2004).

In the context of relationship marketing that is used to determine the extent to which consumers feel the promise or integrity offered by the company, trust is an effort to build consumer trust which consists of three attributes, namely: (a) harmony, as an effort to maintain good relations through certain programs from the company to its consumers, (b) acceptance, in this case consumers who use products or services from a company know of certain programs provided by the company and understand the benefits to be gained, and (c) participation simplicity, where ease of procedures is perceived by consumers if using products or services from a company.

3.1 Digitizing Testimony and Uncertainty Situations

If a website-based e-WOM in the world of modern marketing still in the form of reality which leads to the user (human being), it resulting to how human interaction with the internet still does not negate on how the expression of human attitude itself towards something that they are faced and enjoyed. With its excellence, the website is able to represent complex subjects in the real world towards reality in cyberspace. Many web-based applications then become a place for the world of modern marketing. Almost all institutions, factories, stores and so on use websites to communicate with the public via cyberspace. The advantages of websites include: content, context, and connections.

The dimensions of **content** on the web are certainly unlimited, in the sense that they will depend on their needs and their creation according to the extent of the programmer or web designer. In this case technology then challenges bravely to humans, how far human beings can use it as well as possible. According to the theory expressed by Mohr et al (2010: 393) which states that a good content in the form of text, images, sound, and video, the website of certain product can consist of digital marketing contained in the website, including information, product and service. Well, this is where

there is a sufficient room provided for consumer to express their opinion. A consumer can do e-WOM in the form of digital testimonials, both in the form of text, audio, visual and audio visual. There is a "freedom" for internet users to display content on the website.

Then the dimensions of the **context**, where the dimensions of the website can be made with a particular context. When the target is among young people, web ornaments can be designed according to the characteristics of young people such as color which is a matter of taste. But market appetite seems to be considered. e-WOM on website, regarding the context, for example, is in the form of the use of diction, and the typical sentence of young people. Again, the user element becomes an active subject that will determine how the context is built.

Last, **connection** problem. The distribution of information and data will become more widespread, liberating the distribution of messages from the envelope of time and space. Factual reality is in accordance with Gruen's theory (2006) which explains that electronic word of mouth is a communication medium to share information about certain product or service that has been consumed between consumers who do not know nor meet each other before on a scale that is free of space and time. Some of the website features that can be created to help disseminate messages, for example, by directly connected or linked to the Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Line, and Twitter applications. This is the great connection logic that liberates human for the need to share messages.

Then, word of mouth in the form of testimonials that are posted through the website has become a very broad subject. The extensive context is entirely dependent on the witnesses about certain product and service from the stall itself. When someone orders the same product to the same stall via online, it turns out that the word of mouth that comes out of each consumer will be different. In the ordinary scope, the level of customer satisfaction about the service and the product being shipped is symbolized by an asterisk. The more stars are selected, the more satisfied consumers are. Therefore, if you look closely, for example in the product review section, we will find a different number of asterisks even though it is intended for products and from the same stall. This is what the subjectivity means of digital testimonials which in reality is an inevitable condition. The difference between giving a number of asterisks is a reflection of what is felt by consumers.

In another perspective, we can just name it the condition as a digital uncertainty, which terminology refers to a condition that is uncertain, and consumers don't realize much of the reason for being generally colonialized based on word of mouth as the most credible information through the highest level of trust. This digital uncertainty finally returned to consumers who perceived it, then poured their experiences through digital pages. Therefore, basically, everyone's experience will certainly not be the same, since satisfaction and dissatisfaction are also influenced by taste. People's taste will certainly be very different from one another. Not to mention the question of honesty, where everyone humanely has the potential to be dishonest in what kind of word of mouth they have experienced and felt.

Thus, the interpretation becomes satisfaction indicator to the word of mouth, which could be found on the number of stars. For example, on the particular product page, in the end it can still display uncertain information. Uncertainty is marked by a sense that is in our hearts, namely how when we notice a testimonial that is represented in the asterisk.

3.2 *E-Word of Mouth* and Logic of Consumer Trust

If word of mouth is assumed to be the most credible information, then the product is indeed worth the information. In reality, this does not happen, as evidence by each product review showing variations in ratings from consumers. We do not deny that what is conveyed by consumers reflected from the star scale is derived from what is perceived. At this point, the logic of consumer trust will be examined in more depth by using three main attributes in seeing indications of a public trust or a consumer trust in a product. These three attributes are harmony, acceptance and ease of participation.

The first attribute is **harmony**, which in this context is intended as an effort to maintain mutual relations or relationships that are interwoven well through certain programs. The program is given to the company to its customers, as a manifestation of a good and mutual relationship, or in the other words is to create a good image to the customers. In modern imaging, this practical activity can be found with the term of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), wherein the corporate page contains the power of mouth of the target program.

The program of CSR itself often involving its consumers to build a direct communication within the two parties. For example, an online shop for particular product gives a certain bonus, and the bonus is included in the consumer's testimony, therefore, a harmony between the corporation and the consumer is created. Disharmony can occur when what is delivered is not in line with the expectations. If word of mouth that occurred was negative, we can interpret how the effort to build consumer trust in the institution or company from the dimension of harmony is less or in the other word, unsuccessful. To overcome this, there are several steps that could be taken to gain trust by using indirect way. For online shop companies, for example, timeliness might be something that can cover deficiencies, or the guarantee of goods exchanged if received one's damaged, are positive methods that can be taken gain positive word of mouth.

Building customer trust from the dimension of harmony disseminated through the website is an effort that should become fundamental concern, since the power of mouth through digital word of mouth will massively and simultaneously reach consumers throughout the world. How big is the influence of the electronic word of mouth dimension, has the potential to make a corporation or institution to be vigilant in providing its services.

e-WOM provides a strengthening of the logic of consumer trust, in addition, by the dimension of harmony described above, also through **acceptance** by consumers. The consumer trust logic of this dimension means that consumers who use products or services from a company know of certain programs provided by the company, and understand the benefits that they get. The consumer trust here is created by word of mouth which is the content of consumer experience when they buy a product, which resulting to award a gift, or in business terms, a grand prize. Banking business with funding products for example, offer stimulus in the form of grand prizes or gifts given by the company as a form of reward for loyal consumers. Automatically, consumer testimonies will be published on the company's website, specifically the electronic word of mouth. At the same time, the logic of consumer trust will also be built strongly against the services mentioned by the company.

Finally, the **logic** of consumer trust is built from the participation simplicity dimension, where there is an ease of procedure perceived by consumers when using a product or service from a company. When potential customers want to buy goods through online shops, for example, the ease of using applications is a reinforcing factor for the page's

automatic and product behavior. Like the ease of ordering motorcycle taxis via the Go-Jek or Grab applications. When a person feels convenient to get or even to reach the product or service, they tend to give testimony about the ease of access to goods and services. Testimony of easy access is powerful word of mouth material that can be shared virally in digital media, such as websites. So that unconsciously an effort to construct public trust in the company has been synthesized properly.

e-WOM does rely on the greatness of digital media by building public trust that can also be shared through digital media. Modern marketing strategies between companies, especially in a high competition climate, objectify the power of electronic word of mouth. And it would favorable situation for both parties, consumers or companies, as long the word of mouth come from ones which honest, genuine and can be accounted for.

4   CONCLUSIONS

Word of mouth is the terminology when a company has the medium to acquire consumer trust, especially in highly simultaneous one. The principle of e-WOM is the experience of the consumer or subject when using certain product of goods or services, and finally expressing their opinion in accordance with what they feel according to the product they have bought. Through digital technology, consumers can do or say anything and they are in a zone where it's not restricted by space nor time, which means that once expressing and giving opinions though positively or negatively, it will quickly spread the information.

Based on the explanation above, we can conclude that there are several important aspects to pay attention to regarding of the e-WOM. Not only adjusting the website content to the target consumers, the company need to level up their game to gain the mutual acceptance of the consumers. These several aspects plays an important role for the further development of the company. If the company has more positive impacts than the others, the company will gain trust and is capable to build mutual relationship with the consumers and vise versa.

Finally, the important thing that has become the concern in managing a company is the public trust that can be strengthened with an ethical perspective, which in business theories can be identified as business ethics. Even though companies that provide biased and false e-WOM content designs will

certainly be selected naturally in a competitive market climate, in freedom of opinion, it is possible that the subjectivity of consumer testimonies contained in e-WOM will occur. Therefore, the principles of customer trust are expected to help consumers to be more analytical and critical as buyers.

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