Examining the Antecedents of Writing Electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM) Among Golf Product Consumer

Jinwook Chung, Grand View University
Namhun Lim, Indiana University
Choonghoon Lim, Indiana University
Wooyoung Lee, University of Central Missouri

Introduction

Golf equipment industry has been significantly growing and it is the second biggest retail market segment in sport equipment industry with $2.48 billion annual sales in 2009 (SGMA, 2010). With the emergence of the Internet and online shopping, online sales of golf equipment have increased in the past year (SBRnet, 2011). In addition, popularity of e-commerce have brought attention to many marketers and sport marketing researchers. The online retailers are providing opportunities to the consumers to share their experiences such as product reviews, discussions, and forums. Previous studies have explained that electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is one of the strong marketing sources of a product. One distinct characteristic of eWOM process is that it is an interaction between consumers who are writers and readers. Different from other marketing tools, in the process of eWOM, writers play a significant role to eventually influence the behavior of the potential consumers of the product. To date, while many studies have examined the behavior of eWOM readers, limited numbers of studies have attempted to examine why consumers write eWOM (Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2010). Hence, the purpose of current study was to investigate the relationship between different individual characteristics (e.g., golf equipment innovativeness, golf equipment expertise, and ability to write eWOM) and the motivations of eWOM writers who write about golf equipment. Current study compared three different proposed models and suggested the best model of explaining eWOM writer's behavior.

Literature Review

Diffusion of Innovation explains the transfer of new information to other people through a channel (Rogers, 1995). eWOM is a channel that consumers spread or share their information with others. Providers of eWOM messages are the consumers who have experienced the product and these same eWOM messages influence purchase intention of other consumers (Park, Lee, & Han, 2007). eWOM writing motivation was examined (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004) based on the previous word of mouth motivation studies (Dichter, 1966; Engel, Kegerreis, & Blackwell, 1993; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998). Further, relationship between individual characteristics and information sharing intentions were studied in the past. For example, one’s motivation to share knowledge differs based on their level of innovativeness (Rogers). Second, consumers with higher expertise will have sufficient knowledge to share with others (MacInnis, Moorman, & Jaworski, 1991). Third, ability to write eWOM is considered as a variable that influences knowledge sharing intentions (Gruen, Osmanbekov, & Czaplewski, 2005).

Methodology

Based on the previous studies, current study proposed eWOM writing model. Model was proposed that golf equipment expertise (EXP) and golf equipment innovativeness (INN) have effect on eWOM writing motivation (MOT). In addition, ability to write eWOM online (ABI) was a mediator. Further, it was proposed that eWOM writing motivation influence behavioral intention to write eWOM (WRI). Samples (N=205) were collected from golf courses in Bloomington, IN and Los Angeles, CA. Paper surveys were distributed to the regular golfers who were aware of eWOM. Current study utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to develop a model that would explain the relationship among individual characteristics, motivation to write eWOM, and the behavioral intention of golf product consumers who write eWOM.

Results

Individual characteristics variables included EXP (M = 3.13, SD = 1.13), INN (M = 3.17, SD = 1.04), and ABIL (M = 3.87, SD = 0.99). Dependent variables included MOT (M = 3.60, SD = 0.75) and WRI (M = 3.50, SD = 1.04).
Subjects were primarily Caucasian (76.6%) males (95.1%) born after 1981 (40.5%). Reliability testing revealed that all variables satisfied the recommended acceptable level of Cronbach's alpha with range between .83 (MOT) and .90 (EXP, INN, WRI). In addition, AVE values ranged from .57 (MOT) to .85 (EXP, INN, WRI).

The results of measurement model indicated that S-B/df ratio (S-B \( \chi^2/df = 2.46, p<.05 \)) reached an acceptable level. CFI of .91 and RMSEA of .08 were acceptable. The results of the proposed model's fit evaluation showed that S-B/df ratio (S-B \( \chi^2/df = 2.74, p<.05 \)) reached an acceptable level. CFI reached .90, RMSEA reached .09, and SRMR reached .07, which indicated a good fit. The results revealed significant direct effects between EXP and ABI, INN and ABI, ABI and MOT, MOT and WRI. Further, ABI was a mediator between EXP and MOT, INN and MOT.

Discussion

eWOM writing model explains that golf equipment expertise and golf equipment innovativeness are important antecedents of explaining golf equipment consumers who are potential eWOM writers. In addition, eWOM writing model explains that online consumer’s ability to write eWOM online (e.g., computer skills) is an important factor to increase motivation of eWOM writer. Increasing the motivation of eWOM writer can increase marketing opportunities for online sport retailers. For example, as eWOM is an effective marketing source that positively influence consumer's purchase intention, it is important to provide them with sufficient information. As ABI is an important mediator, these online retailers need to provide consumers with easy to use website where low ABI consumers are able to share their experience. Further, online retailers need to understand who the consumers of the industry are and their individual characteristics. For example, it is important for the marketers to provide positive experiences to the demographics that have higher expertise or higher innovativeness among golf equipment consumers. Finally, current study adds knowledge to the body of diffusion literature by employing individual characteristics to explain eWOM system.

References


