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Who are Fans of Facebook Fan Pages? An Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication Perspective

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WHO ARE FANS OF FACEBOOK FAN PAGES? AN

ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATION

PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Given its great business value and popularity, Facebook fan pages have attracted more and more attention in both industry and academia. Fans of Facebook fan pages play an important role in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication. This study focused on the population of fans on Facebook fan pages and examined the differences between fans and non-fans in terms of demographics, social network sites (SNS) use, Internet use, and online shopping behaviors. The results indicated that fans used SNS more frequently than non-fans. Additionally, from the eWOM perspective, the researchers moderated product types in the model of people's word-of-mouth (WOM) preferences and found that people had different preferences for eWOM and traditional WOM for different products. Traditional WOM is still the most important source of information for people when shopping online.

Keywords: Fan Pages, Fans, eWOM, Product Type, Traditional WOM

INTRODUCTION

Given the exponential growth of people gathered by Facebook, its business value has been increasingly recognized in both industry (Jeanjean, 2012) and academia (Lin & Lu, 2011). One billion people actively use Facebook monthly (facebook, 2012); 830,000 new users join every day; more importantly, more than 1.5 million organizations have created fan pages (or brand pages) on Facebook; and 20 million people "like" Facebook fan pages every day (Jeanjean, 2012). Establishing a fan page to attract fans based on the platform of social network sites has become a popular marketing practice to encourage WOM communication (Li & Bernoff, 2008).

A Facebook fan page is similar to a personal profile. Different from a personal profile for social and personal reasons, a fan page is public and used for product/service or corporation promotion. Once fans "Like," "Share," or post on events of fan pages, free promotion for the pages shows on the fans' walls automatically. The existing research about Facebook fan pages either explored the driving forces behind the popularity of fan pages from a psychological perspective (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012; Lin & Lu, 2011), or investigated the strategies to attract fans and increase fan base from a business perspective (Jahn & Kunz, 2012; Jeanjean, 2012). However, little is known about fans as

eWOM has spread so far. Understanding fans of fan pages is significant for us to understand eWOM communication and marketing communication online.

Brand fan page is a unique phenomenon built upon social media, which is considered a greatly simulated environment for WOM marketing because of its community and interactive characteristics. Although online customer reviews have been proved as effective eWOM in marketing (Barton, 2006; "Survey: 48 percent of retail websites not offering product ratings reviews," 2012), scholars believe that social eWOM based on social media has greater potential in effective marketing than online customer reviews (Pai & Tsai, 2011). However, the study about eWOM credibility (Hu & Ha, 2013) indicated that social eWOM was not as dependable as online customer reviews at present. Therefore, the authors asked the following questions: Is social media eWOM really an effective marketing tool? What kind of WOM, either traditional or electronic, do people prefer when shopping online? Additionally, scholars found that, during e-commerce transactions, different product settings (search and experience products) affected people's beliefs in different recommendation sources (Benlian, Titah, & Hess, 2012). Thus, the author further analyzed product type and examined whether it moderated the effect of different types of WOM (both traditional and electronic) on people's choices of online shopping sources.

We first presented a literature review on fan pages and eWOM, investigating fans of Facebook fan pages and highlighting the differences between fans and non-fans. To examine the acceptance of social network sites as eWOM, the authors moderated product type in the model of people's preferences for WOM type. Discussion about the role of fans and eWOM was presented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Word of Mouth (WOM) & Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Brand fan pages are important online bases on which brands can engage their customers and enhance their loyalty. However, fans play more important roles—gathering potential customers—because their 'likes' and comments on posts of brand pages are automatically shown in their news feeds, which directly become eWOM. eWOM is an electronic version of oral communication shared among people regarding their consumption experience of products and services. WOM was the recommended

communication between receivers and communicators, whom receivers perceived as independent from retailers (Arndt, 1967; Breazeale, 2009). The commercial value of WOM has been recognized since the 1920s (Butler, 1923). Abundant research has demonstrated the effectiveness of WOM in marketing compared to other marketing strategies, such as newspaper ads, direct sales, and radio ads (Day, 1971; Goldenberge, Libai, & Muller, 2001; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1965). Similarly, according to a survey conducted by Inc. Magazine in 2006, WOM has been exercised by 82% of the fastest growing companies (Ferguson, 2008), and almost one-third of the 23 service industries have chosen WOM as one of the most important marketing tools (East, Hammond, Lomax, & Robinson, 2005).

WOM is limited to face-to-face oral communication; however, eWOM expands the concept to text-based communication. eWOM has been defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). This suggests any computer-mediated communication (CMC) including blogs, emails, and bulletin board systems, can be considered as eWOM (Buttle, 1998). Nevertheless, the definition given by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) overlooked customers' or potential customers' shared/reposted posts, which were created originally by retailers. eWOM should also include the retailer-generated content shared or reposted by customers or potential customers because such postings implied customers' opinions either as an endorsement or a rebuttal. Therefore, we argued that eWOM should be *any information, including not only customers' own statements but also shared/reposted posts from retailers or other published sources, which are exchanged among potential, actual, or former customers about a product or brand available to a multitude of people via the Internet*.

According to their different functions and communication forums, eWOM fell into four categories (Hu & Ha, 2013): 1) Specialized eWOM refers to customer reviews posted on the specialized comparison-shopping or rating websites. These websites do not sell products but only provide customer reviews of one specific product or all kinds of products, such as *Yelp* and *Consumersearch.* 2) Affiliated eWOM refers to customer reviews affiliated to retail websites, such as customer reviews on Amazon and eBay. These retail websites provide both product/service and customer reviews at the same time. 3) Social eWOM refers to any information related to brands/products exchanged among

social media users. 4) Miscellaneous eWOM includes brand/product relevant information on other online social media such as discussion boards, emails, and blogs.

Although social eWOM is not as well developed as other types of eWOM, the effect of viral marketing on social media cannot be underestimated. For instance, fans of brand fan pages have increasingly grown and contributed a large portion of social eWOM marketing. According to new research by YouGov (Burgess, 2013), almost half of social media users (45%) have liked fan pages of brands, and they are most likely to be current customers (33%). Although fans comprise a large part of social eWOM, empirical research on fans is scarce. Little is known about this population, and to our best knowledge, there has been a comparative study between fans and non-fans of brand fan pages. Moreover, fans, as spreaders of social eWOM, can use different types of WOM. Their preference for WOM is shown in their shopping decisions, which are vital to the success of customer retention and acquisition for marketers.

Theoretical Implications

WOM communication has a significant impact on potential behaviors in that the persuasion communication theory suggested that outside sources influence people's behaviors by imposing an impact on people's attitudes. According to persuasion effect research, there is a presumed relationship between attitudes and behaviors (O'Keefe, 2002). People's attitudes are determined by several factors (source factors, receiver factors, message factors, and context factors) in the process of communication, in which source is one of the most investigated factors. Thus, the research about sources in WOM communication is particularly important for a better understanding of the communication effect.

The effectiveness and popularity of different sources varies in their source credibility, which was defined as "judgments made by a perceiver (e.g. a message recipient) concerning the believability of a communicator" (O'Keefe, 2002, p.181). Three dimensions of source credibility were investigated. The first is expertise, which is also referred to as "competence" and "expertness," aiming to measure if sources have the capability to know the truth. The second is trustworthiness, also called "character," "safety," or "personal integrity," measuring to what extent a source is inclined to tell the truth if he or she knows it (O'Keefe, 2002). The third is goodwill, which refers to the degree a receiver believes a source is on behalf of a perceiver" (McCroskey & Teven,

1999). The three-dimension structure of source credibility suggested that every source has different proportions of the three dimensions in its credibility. For example, if one wants to buy a high-technology product, an expert may have high credibility in expertness with low credibility related to goodwill; parents or friends may have high credibility in goodwill and trustworthiness, but low in expertness. However, just one dimension in source credibility could boost the whole perception of the source; even if an expert is low in trustworthiness and goodwill, people still consult him/her for information when they are going to make significant decisions related to his/her expertise. In that sense, it is reasonable to argue that people may use different sources to help them make purchase decisions for different types of products.

McConnell (1970) found that certain media might be more effective than other media for promoting certain products. In the context of rural Chinese consumer research, Chen, Zhao, and Griffith (2008) reported people's preference for information sources for different categories of product. For household appliances, dietary supplements, and soft drinks, television commercials topped the ranks of all information sources. However, consumers' second and third preferred information sources varied across different product types. Weinberger and Dillon (1980) found that people relied more on WOM for services than goods. Goods always refers to tangible and physical products, such as clothes and cars. Services are always considered to be intangible, such as entertainment and services of restaurants, lawyers, and accountants (Heim, 2009). In summary, for different product categories, different information sources may generate distinct persuasion effects. Being aware of source variations, we examined customers' choices (both fans and non-fans) of different types of WOM according to different product types when they were engaged in online shopping.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) explained the product type's moderate role in people's preference for different sources from a product involvement perspective. According to the ELM, human beings have two non-mutually exclusive cognition routes—central and peripheral routes (O'Keefe, 2002). The central route involves high elaboration, deep issue-relevant analysis, and careful scrutiny of the relevant information. The peripheral route requires low elaboration. People with high involvement and ability to process information are more likely to be affected by the central arguments of a persuasive communication; the sources with qualified content and reasonable arguments are preferred (Dainton & Zelley, 2005). However, people with low involvement under

peripheral routes just want to find some shortcut to help them make snap decisions. In WOM communication, people's involvement in communication mainly refers to their product involvement, which is determined by four factors: product importance, risk importance, the product's symbolic value, and the product's pleasure value (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Different product involvement suggests different preferences for outside sources. Thus, in this study we examined customers' choices (both fans and non-fans) of different types of WOM according to four particular types of product with different product involvements. The four categories of product include the most common product settings sold on Amazon.com, a well-known international electronic commerce company. The first product type encompasses books, movies, music, and games. The second one is electronics. The third one includes health and beauty products. The last one comprises clothing, shoes, and jewelry. Compared with the last two product types, the first two require high involvement in terms of either symbolic value or pleasure value in WOM communication.

Although eWOM is considered powerful in marketing, social eWOM has not been completely developed yet. Research on eWOM focuses mainly on customer reviews in the recent decade (Chu & Kim, 2011; Doh & Hwang, 2009; Lee & Youn, 2009; Moe & Trusov, 2011; Sen & Lerman, 2007). It is necessary to understand social eWOM, especially in terms of fans of brand fan pages as well as their behaviors. Meanwhile, the claim of increasing power of social eWOM and over traditional WOM still needs to be verified. Thus, it is necessary to conduct a comparative study of people's preference for WOM.

Fans & Brand Fan Pages

Since Facebook announced its "long-awaited ad strategy" and launched Facebook fan pages in November 2007 (Hof, 2007; Holahan, 2007), electronic commerce has entered a new stage. Facebook fan pages provide a space for businesses, organizations, sports teams, films, TV shows, and other brands on social network sites to attract audiences and maintain "long-life relationship[s]" with their fans (Kryder, 2010). Brands can send links, ads, videos, and texts to their fans and post updates on their fan pages to engage them. More importantly, fans can respond to the updates and participate in the events created on fan pages, which are automatically posted on their news feeds and presented to their "friends," turning into ads for brands (Holahan, 2007). Things spread

virally through those connections on social network sites (Holahan, 2007).

Although people have already realized the importance of engaging audiences and potential clients with brands on social media, empirical research on fans and fan pages is just beginning (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). Only a few preliminary studies about fan pages have been done so far. Some researchers explored the effects of fan pages' marketing (de Vries et al., 2012; Sachs, Eckel, & Langan, 2011). Others mainly focused on motivations/drivers of brand fan pages' use (Lin & Liu, 2011), while descriptive research showed us that customers who became fans of brand fan pages tended to be more loyal (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006), visiting the stores more, and generating more positive word-of-mouth than non-fans (Dholakia & Durham, 2010).

Based on the aforementioned definition and categories of eWOM, the information shared and posted by fans accounts for a large part of social eWOM. Fans, as the spreaders of social eWOM, either consciously post product-relevant information or unconsciously spread the word for brands on social media by participating in activities on fan pages (their activities on Facebook automatically show on news feeds visible to their "friends"). As the increasing development of eWOM and the rise of social media, scholars and practitioners have focused more and more on marketing practices that integrate social media and encourage customers' engagement, such as Facebook fan pages. However, little is known about the population of fans, as spreaders of social eWOM, in terms of their demographics and characteristics so far, let alone people's preferences for this kind of social eWOM. Our study bridged the gap to investigate fans of brands on Facebook from a word-of-mouth communication perspective and explored how they differed with non-fans in terms of demographics, Internet use, SNS use, online shopping behaviors, and WOM use preferences.

Therefore, our study first focused on the population of fans on fan pages and compared them with non-fans in terms of demographics and online behaviors. Then we examined which kind of WOM fans and non-fans prefer. Lastly, we tested which kind of WOM communication was used most for both fans and non-fans among all kinds of WOM communication. We proposed the following research questions:

RQ1: Who are "fans" of fan pages on Facebook? How do they differ from non-fans in demographics?

RQ2: What are the differences in social network sites (SNS) use, Internet use, and online shopping behaviors between "fans" and "non-fans"?

RQ3: What kind of WOM do "fans" use most when shopping online?

RQ4: What kind of WOM do "non-fans" use most when shopping online?

RQ5: Comparing traditional WOM with eWOM, which do fans and non-fans prefer when shopping online?

RQ6: How does product type affect customers' preferences for different WOM and eWOM?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is based on a recent mailed and self-administered survey among the general population in Northwest Ohio from September 6-30, 2012. Participants could choose to respond to the web version of the survey. A mail and web survey mode was used instead of the telephone, because self-paced surveys such as mail and web can prevent the time pressure and acquiescence bias in phone surveys (Shrum, 2002) and facilitate honest answers as shown in previous studies, comparing the results in survey mode (e.g., Kreuter, Presser & Tourangeau, 2008).

A simple random sample of residents (n=1500) selected from a Northwest Ohio residents database supplied by a local newspaper was sent the questionnaire package with a cover letter, a visually attractive questionnaire booklet, and a stamped reply envelope with a fresh one dollar bill as an incentive for participation, following the Tailored Design Method of Dillman (2007), which was proven to achieve a high response rate. The non-respondents of the first mailing were sent a postcard reminder one week from the initial contact, and those with e-mail addresses (n=250) were contacted by e-mail to remind them to return the questionnaires. A total of 253 responses were received finally. The response rate was 16.9% (calculated by AAPOR formula). In our study, 108 respondents did not use social network sites, resulting in the final N=145. The questionnaire, which took approximately 15 minutes to complete, consisted of questions about respondents' news use of different forms of WOM, the sources of information for online shopping, and their demographic information, such as age, gender, household income, and education level.

Measures

SNS use was the number of years the respondents had used social networking sites (SNS). SNS involvement, which measured people's SNS participation, was computed as the product of the time spent on social network sites and the updating frequency level (Hu & Ha, 2013). This is a more accurate concept with which to measure the degree to which people are involved in SNS. The *time* spent on SNS was measured by asking the respondents to report the time they spent on SNS per week. *Updating frequency on SNS* was measured by asking people to check how frequently they update their social network page. Seven possible responses were provided: 1) several times an hour, 2) every several hours, 3) every day, 4) once to several times a week, 5) between once a week and once a month, 6) less than once a month, and 7) hardly ever update. We recoded the seven items into three categories—the last two items were viewed as low updating frequency, items four and five as medium updating frequency, and the first three items as high updating frequency.

People's SNS behaviors were measured by asking how frequently they engage in these activities on SNS, in an 18-item 5-point scale from "Post News Content from Other News Media," to "Post Product Review/Comments," coding 1 (Never) to 5 (Almost daily). *Internet use* and *online shopping* were measured respectively by the number of years the respondent had used the Internet as well as online shopping frequency and expenses.

The researchers included seven types of eWOM and WOM as dependent variables in a checkbox table with product type variable (independent variable). People were asked if they consult with any of following sources when they shop online: 1) content posted, forwarded, or shared by "friends" on Facebook; 2) video reviews online by experts; 3) video reviews online by nonprofessionals; 4) customer reviews from online shopping websites; 5) comparison-shopping websites, 6) people around you in daily life; and 7) experts either online or in person. People were asked to check all that apply.

Independent variables are people's preferences for WOM, measured by numbers of product type for which respondents would consult a type of WOM.   A multiple-choice question was given to ask people if they "like[d]" any fan pages on Facebook. They responded to four options: 1) yes, all the time; 2) yes, some of them; 3) yes, only a few of them; and 4) no, I have never been a fan of fan pages on Facebook. Because few respondents chose "yes, all the time," the results were recoded into a dichotomous

category—fans or non-fans. For *product type*, the researchers referred to Amazon.com's product classification and included the four most common online shopping product types in the eWOM and WOM table— 1) books, movies, music, and games; 2) electronics; 3) health and beauty; and 4) clothing, shoes, and jewelry.

Statistical analysis

To investigate the differences between fans and non-fans regarding SNS use, Internet use, and online shopping behaviors, we conducted an independent-sample t-test between the two groups. Mean and standard deviation were provided, and the t-tests were conducted to examine which WOM or eWOM people rely on for shopping decisions. At last, we also ran a cross-tabulation to scrutinize the most-used WOM or eWOM by product type.

RESULTS

RQ1: Descriptive statistics for the study variables (see Table 1) are based on 145 resident respondents who used social media and shop online. Respondents were divided into two groups—fans and non-fans. First, most of the fans were females (68.3%); males only composed 31.7% of the fans. Fans were much younger than non-fans due to sample skew toward an older group, t = -3.488, $p < .001$. There was no difference in race and marital status. Fans had relatively lower disposable personal income after taxes per month than non-fans. But still a number of fans (31.7%) earned a disposable personal income of $1501-3000. Non-fans have higher education level than fans.

RQ2: An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the differences in SNS use, Internet use, and online shopping behaviors between fans and non-fans. There was a statistically significant difference in SNS use experience, with fans (M = 3.68, SD = 2.14) having higher scores than non-fans, $t_{(128)} = 7.79$, $p < .001$. In addition, fans more frequently posted news content from other news media ($t_{(90)} = 2.27$, $p < .05$), linked to other media sites ($t_{(90)} = 4.20$, $p < .001$), and posted pictures taken by themselves or people they knew than non-fans did ($t_{(89)} = 2.95$, $p < .01$). They also used social networking sites to stay in touch with their families ($t_{(90)} = 2.82$, $p < . 01$) and friends ($t_{(90)} = 3.42$, $p < .001$) and to find potential romantic partners ($t_{(90)} = 2.19$, $p < .05$) more frequently than non-fans. They more frequently read comments or posts by celebrities, politicians, or athletes ($t_{(90)} = 3.41$, $p < .01$); posted comments or shared something their

"friends" has posted ($t_{(90)} = 2.88$, $p < .01$); sent instant messages on SNS ($t_{(90)} = 3.00$, $p < .01$); tagged people ($t_{(90)} = 2.26$, $p < .05$); and played games ($t_{(90)} = 2.30$, $p < .05$) on social network sites. Lastly, it is not surprising that fans more frequently searched for shopping information ($t_{(90)} = 3.30$, $p < .001$) and posted product reviews on SNS ($t_{(90)} = 2.14$, $p < .05$) than non-fans did. However, there were no significant differences in their SNS involvement, Internet use experience, online shopping frequency, and online shopping expenses. Overall, these results suggested that fans were more active on SNS than non-fans.

RQ3: For fans (See Table 2), a paired t-test indicated that there was a higher number of product types for which they rely on people around them in their daily lives (M = 2.81, SD = 1.13) and specialized eWOM (M = 2.06, SD = .98), $t = 4.49$, $p < .001$. No satisfactory evidence showed that there were any differences among dependence on different eWOMs: social, affiliated, and specialized eWOM. However, it is worth noticing that the average dependence scores on eWOM of fans were all higher than those of non-fans. An independent-samples t-test indicated that only the dependence on specialized eWOM was statistically different between the two groups, $t_{(143)} = 2.15$, $p < .05$. The results suggested that fans used traditional WOM most; however, they used more specialized eWOM than non-fans did.

Table 1 Demographics of Fans and Non-Fans Respondents (n = 145)

Variable	Fans (n = 63)	Non-Fans (n = 82)
Gender		
Male	20 (31.7%)	49 (59.8 %)
Female	43 (68.3%)	33 (40.2%)
Missing		
Age		
20-29	7 (11.3%)	1 (1.2%)
30-39	15 (24.2%)	6 (7.3%)
40-49	7 (11.3%)	15 (18.3%)
50-59	18 (29.0%)	18 (22%)
60-69	7 (11.3%)	22 (26.8%)
70+	8 (12.9%)	20 (24.4%)
Missing	1	
Range	20-91	27-85

Note: 108 missing of 253 cases resulted n = 145

Table 1 Demographics of Fans and Non-Fans Respondents (n = 145) (Cont.)

Variable	Fans (n = 63)	Non-Fans (n = 82)
Race		1
African-American	3 (4.8%)	2 (2.4%)
Asian	2 (3.2%)	2 (2.4%)
Caucasian	57 (90.5%)	76 (92.7%)
Hispanic	1 (1.6%)	0
Native American	0	0
Others	0	2 (2.4%)
Missing		
Marital Status		
Married/Co-habituated with a partner	41 (65.1%)	50 (61.0%)
Single	9 (14.3%)	11 (13.4%)
Divorced/Separated	12 (19.0%)	14 (17.1%)
Widowed	1 (1.6%)	7 (8.5%)
Missing		
People Living With You		
0	12 (19%)	21 (25.6%)
1-3	44 (69.8%)	56 (68.3%)
3+	7 (11.2%)	5 (6.1%)
Missing		
Range	0-7	0-6
Disposable Personal Income After Taxes per Month		
Under $500	7 (11.1%)	13 (15.9%)
$500-$1500	27 (42.9%)	25 (30.5%)
$1501-$3000	20 (31.7%)	18 (22.0%)
Over $3000	9 (14.3%)	26 (31.7%)
Missing		
Education Level		
Grade 8 or less	0	0
Grade 9-11	1 (1.6%)	0
High school graduate or equivalent	10 (15.9%)	14 (17.1%)
1 to 3 years of college or technical school	25 (39.7%)	26 (31.7%)
College graduation (4 years)	14 (22.2%)	18 (22.0%)
Attended or completed graduate school	13 (20.6%)	24 (29.3%)
Missing		

Note: 108 missing of 253 cases resulted n = 145

RQ4: For non-fans, there was a significant difference in the score of people's preference for traditional WOM (people around them) (M = 2.49, SD = 1.12) and affiliated eWOM (M = 1.93, SD = .98); $t_{(81)}$ = 3.918, $p <. 001$. However, there was no

significant difference in the scores of people's dependence on affiliated eWOM and social eWOM (M = 1.72, SD = .85) and specialized eWOM (M = 1.72, SD = .93), respectively. Our results suggested that non-fans depended on traditional WOM most to get shopping information when shopping online. Since there was no sufficient evidence indicating that non-fans used more customer reviews from online shopping sites (affiliated eWOM), we deduced that, besides consulting people around, they evenly used other types of eWOM, such as social, affiliated, and specialized eWOM.

Table 2 Statistics of People's Preferences for eWOM and Traditional WOM

	Fans (n = 63)		Non-Fans (n = 82)		The Total (n = 145)	
	# of product category		# of product category		# of product category	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	S.D
1. Social eWOM	**1.92**	.94	**1.72**	.85	**1.81**	.89
2. Video Reviews by Experts	1.59	.89	1.56	.85	1.57	.86
3. Video Reviews by Non-Experts	1.51	.98	1.34	.86	1.41	.92
4. Affiliated eWOM	**2.05**	1.07	**1.93**	.98	**1.98**	1.02
5. Specialized eWOM	**2.06**	.98	**1.72**	.93	**1.87**	.97
6. People around	**2.81**	1.13	**2.49**	1.12	**2.63**	1.35
7. Experts' suggestion	1.75	.98	1.57	.85	1.65	.91

RQ5: On the whole, in the resident sample, people relied much more on their family members, friends, and acquaintances to get shopping information than eWOM, $t_{(144)}$=5.73, $p<.$ 001. Traditional WOM still seemed popular, influencing people's online shopping behaviors. Social, affiliated, and specialized eWOM seemed to be people's second choice when shopping online. However, there were no significant differences among these three types of eWOM. People barely used other types of eWOM and WOM.

Table 3 Preferences for eWOM and WOM by Product Type (n = 145)

Product Type	Social eWOM	Video Reviews by Experts	Video Reviews by Non-Experts	Affiliated eWOM	Specialized eWOM	People around	Experts' suggestion
	Frequency of Use						
Books, Movies, Music & Games	**102** **(70.3%)**	72 (50%)	48 (33.1%)	87 (60%)	63 (43.4%)	**105** **(72.4%)**	58 (40.0%)
Electronics	83 (57.2%)	95 (65.5%)	85 (58.6%)	99 (68.3%)	**118** **(81.4%)**	98 (67.6%)	**111** **(76.6%)**
Health & Beauty	25 (17.2%)	32 (22.1%)	28 (19.3%)	37 (25.5%)	34 (23.4%)	**87** **(60.0%)**	41 (28.3%)
Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry	52 (35.9%)	29 (20.0%)	44 (30.3%)	64 (44.1%)	56 (38.6%)	**91** **(62.8%)**	29 (20.0%)

RQ6: As it is shown in Table 3, we examined people's preference for eWOM and WOM across four types of products. First, when people bought books, movies, music, and games, among 145 responses, 105 (72.4%) reported use of traditional WOM. This was followed by social eWOM (102/70.3%). However, when it came to purchasing electronic products, most people would consult specialized eWOM (118/81.4%) and experts either online or in person (111/76.6%). It is interesting to note that, when they bought health and beauty products, they rarely used these kinds of eWOM and WOM, except for traditional WOM. For clothing, shoes, and jewelry products, they relied on traditional WOM most as well, but the differences in their choices between different kinds of eWOM and WOM were less than for health and beauty products. Our results suggested that people had different preferences for eWOM and WOM for different products.

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

People refer to outside information to help them complete cognitive analysis, either under central or peripheral routes, to make final purchase decisions. This cognitive process explains the importance of WOM marketing and why people use WOM when shopping. However, individual characteristics, as well as source characteristics, are significant factors influencing persuasive outcomes. The first contribution of this study was to distinguish fans and non-fans on Facebook according to demographic characteristics. We examined WOM preferences for fans and non-fans to gain a further understanding of social eWOM users and spreaders. The second contribution of this study was that people's preferences for WOM according to different product type settings were identified. Lastly, a comparative study between traditional and electronic WOM communication with an emphasis on social eWOM was conducted.

This study has several implications for WOM marketing. First of all, we considered fans as spreaders of social eWOM and identified several demographical characteristics of fans and non-fans of Facebook fan pages. The results indicated that females are more likely to be fans of fan pages. This is consistent with previous research that females were more likely to be persuaded by promotional information (Becker, 1986) or information with empathy (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). Marketing managers should be aware that females play an important role in social eWOM communication. It is necessary for marketers to tailor their promotion activities on social media to cater to women's tastes. Apart from gender, participants' disposable personal income level and education level affect the possibility of being fans of fan pages. People with higher disposable personal income and education are less likely to be fans. A possible explanation could be that people with higher incomes care less about sales or discount information than people with lower incomes. Most of the benefits of being a fan are receiving discounts and promotional sale messages. The higher the educational levels, the higher the self-monitoring levels, which may lead to people's indifference to online shopping information and less suspicion of retailers' motives for encouraging them as fans. They might have less time to spend on shopping online, and they do not review product information as other fans typically do. However, these people with high income and education also have a relatively high consumption capability. Thus, ways to engage these wealthier and highly educated customers should be put on the agenda of marketers. Additionally, since people with lower income and education are more engaged in fan

pages, they impose a significant impact on spreading words in eWOM communication. It is imperative to take actions to retain these promoters and keep them motivated.

In terms of SNS usage of fans and non-fans of Facebook fan pages, fans are more active in SNS use than non-fans. This result is not surprising, because people who have already become fans of certain Facebook fan pages are supposed to use more SNS than non-fans. But it is also possible that they are more likely to become fans because they spend more time on SNS and have more possibility of becoming fans. Thus, this result could not be over interpreted without examining other relevant influential factors. More marketing activities should be undertaken to enhance loyal customers and engage potential ones. Indeed, social eWOM is people's second reference in online shopping.

One interesting finding is that traditional WOM is still the most important source for both fans and non-fans. In other words, the effect of eWOM is not as powerful as we expected for online shopping. eWOM has not been able to take the place of the traditional WOM yet. However, it is worth noticing that the seniors who composed the greatest part of our sample might skew this result.

This study also reveals that people's preferences for different types of WOM vary by product type. For example, most people would choose specialized eWOM and expert WOM when buying products with relative high risk and symbolic value and that require high involvement, such as electronics, whereas they stick to traditional WOM when considering buying products requiring lower involvement, such as health and beauty, clothing, shoes, and jewelry. In terms of books, movies, music, and game products with high pleasure value and requiring high involvement as well, traditional WOM was still more preferred by most people. This result has practical implications: merchants can take people's preferences for WOM into consideration according to the product type they are promoting. For instance, a company selling electronics can consider putting more promotion efforts into specialized eWOM, such as cooperating with comparison-shopping websites to spread product or sales information.

This study has some limitations. One problem with this study is the small number of social media users in the general population, which directly contributed to the limitation of a small sample size. For future studies about the general population's social media use, we suggest inviting more people to participate (at least more than 1500). Secondly, the data skewed to the seniors might affect our results and interpretations. Given that college students are heavy users of Facebook, analysis including college students may provide

more accurate and significant findings. Third, this study employed only four types of products according to Amazon.com product classification. Therefore, for future study, we call for more detailed product classification in terms of product involvement. Moreover, this study only showed the dichotomy of fans and non-fans, while it explored less about the differences between highly involved and lowly involved fans. Future study considering these concerns may provide even more insights into being a "fan" of a brand or a company's social media page.

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