

This paper addressed a burgeoning topic in research today: word of mouth and electronic word of mouth. The study attempts to discover how eWOM 'works' by investigating the role of information valence and social network density. Since WOM is notoriously difficult to study, I applaud the author(s) for envisioning an experiment that tests relationships between constructs. I do believe that the manuscript needs some additional work before it can be published in an academic journal.

I will begin with some major concerns with the paper, and then end with some smaller questions and comments for the author to consider.

#### Major Concerns and Issues

##### 1. Tenuous connection to the advertising field and literature.

While WOM is of interest to advertisers, the manuscript does little to address the importance of the topic to the audience: the readers of the Journal of Advertising. After some initial commentary that WOM is a powerful form of advertising, the field of advertising is virtually ignored. I also noted that only three references in the study come from the JOA, and two of these are over 20 years old. I think there is significant literature on the interests of advertisers in developing, controlling, and monitoring both WOM and eWOM, and adding some of this literature may help to make this study more of interest to the readers of JOA.

##### 2. Lack of differentiation between WOM and eWOM

The literature review seems to bounce back and forth between literature that discusses WOM and literature that discussed eWOM. This appears to me that there is an implicit assumption that WOM is no different from eWOM. However, that is not stated and supported with literature. The author(s) should provide evidence that the two are similar, or different, as the case may be. As it stands, it was difficult to track the logical development of your arguments and hypotheses.

##### 3. Research design issues

The research design was somewhat problematic.

- A student sample may be appropriate for this study, it may not be. The author(s) need to justify the use of a student sample. It is more of a concern that the student sample consists of students taking advertising and marketing classes. The author(s) should address whether such an orientation may have some influence on the actual outcome of the study.
- The students were asked to report five 'closest friends or colleagues' with whom they were most likely to exchange product-related information online. This clarification (the idea that they would be likely to exchange information with them) seems to set up a confound that may not be able to be overcome. The fact that the 'alters' are those with whom some sort of exchange is expected would naturally lead to your findings, wouldn't it? Please provide more information on why this manipulation was selected.

- Why was a digital camera product selected? What type of pretest was done to select a digital camera vis a vis other expensive products or lower cost products? How might this type of product (an expensive one) affect the results relative to a less expensive product (such as, say, an athletic shoe or a restaurant for lunch)? The study would be much stronger if your results held true for more than one product and one situation.
- You asked the respondents to consider themselves members of an online discussion group that is aimed at exchanging useful information related to the camera. Do you know whether your respondents actually participated in any online forums? Any that discussed products? In addition, why was a forum selected as opposed to sending email about products or talking to friends about products? How might this have affected your results?

#### Minor concerns and issues

1. Page 2: The Engel et al cite found that consumers tend to talk more about positive aspects: yet why do we keep reading that consumers tell one person about a good experience and ten about a negative one? What exactly do you mean by 'talk more'?
2. Page 2: "There is a common notion that negative information looms larger than positive information in peoples mind". Source?
3. Page 3: "Conversations with acquaintances or strangers happen rarely." Source? Moreover, isn't this what an online forum is really all about?
4. Page 4: define ' high (or low) valued information.
5. Page 6: define cooperative behaviors.
6. Page 6: please give an example of egocentric network density in order to illustrate the concept. Also explains how this relates or affects an online forum.
7. Page 7: is there a moderate density network?
8. Page 10 H1a should include a direction of the variance.
9. Page 20: The discussion at the bottom of the page seems to be reaching beyond the actual results of the study.
10. Page 21: provide source for the 'implicit assumption that the more persuasive a message, the more likely consumers will talk about it.'

Best of luck on your research into this interesting and important topic.

## Comments for Authors #042

### REVIEWER 2

This paper is very interesting in what it attempts to do. However, there were a number of things which were not altogether clear or sufficient to establish what you are seeking.

First, while there is an attempt to be theoretical in this paper, I'm not sure about what has been done. It indeed could be useful to pose the moderated mediation model versus the mediated moderated model, but the way the models are presented makes it seem more like a fishing expedition. This needs more development.

I also had a problem with the manipulation. You seem to confound or conflate negative information with negative framing. At various points in the paper, you speak of one or the other and I think they are different. I am particularly concerned when you say the DCQ-011A is superior to competing brands in the 'positive' condition, but that other brands are inferior in the negative condition. Both are still positive valenced information but are just presented differently. Negative information would be that the DCQ-0011A is inferior to the other brands. The aspect of satisfaction/dissatisfaction in these conditions could be construed as both positive/negative information and positively-framed/negatively-framed. But this seems to me to be a confound (and you have confounded it in your presentation) so it is not clear what you have tested.

I think the concept of WOM intention needs to be explained better as to what it is and why it is useful. Also on p. 13, you speak of how it is measured but you never really say what you asked – need exact question.

I'm not clear about the relationship between the 'ego' and 'alters' in your formulation. Please explain.

I'm also not clear how the density formula on p. 14 works in terms of what you did. You need to explain and exemplify.

A table of means and standard deviations would be useful. Also provide labels for the variables in Figure 1.

The title should reflect something about the moderated mediation effect, such as "The Framing Effects of Information Valence...: A Moderated Mediation Model of the Effect of Social Network Density."

In closing beyond clarifying some of the issues I have discussed, perhaps there would be some merit in running another study where you consider positive/negative information on the one hand and positive/negative framing on the other. Or at least run something that is not confounded as your present data appears to be.

**Reviewer 3**

In general, this paper addresses interesting topics, which should becoming increasing significant in our overall understanding of eWOM. The objectives of the paper are acceptable. The basic assumptions are logically correct, and the results have been discussed sequentially. However, my primary concern with this paper is its contribution to the WOM discipline. Significant improvements should be made before it can be published. Specific comments are outlined below:

**Major issues**

1. The paper lacks precise conceptual definitions of the main constructs. You should clearly define *information valence* and *eWOM* early on. Also, it would be better if the definition of Social Network Density be moved to somewhere in pages 2~4 (now at the end of page 6).
2. Interaction in a dyad surely differs from that in a triad. However, in virtual communities the relationships between people are weak; hence, social network density is generally low. Why do you choose “social density” as a moderating variable? What has it to do with information valence? As I have examined your paper, I notice little connections between the main variables you addressed. You need to provide more theoretical explanation for the variables studied and for the phenomenon observed in the research setting.
3. Terms should be used consistently. It took me extra time to figure out that a) *the characteristics of the information*, b) *the valence of information*, c) *the valence of product-related information* mean the same thing. Similarly, I suppose *entitativity*, *social coherence of a group*, *density of social connections*, *egocentric network density*, *social network density* all mean the same thing.
4. “Good English is concise” You often use complex sentences which makes reading cumbersome. An example is, “With people who are socially close, like friends or family, however, one could have casual conversations quite often, which would increase the chances for any information, whether positive or negative, to be transferred.” I am sure sentences like this can be tighten up for better readability.
5. In many cases, you introduce new concepts without explaining their meaning. This made it difficult for readers to gain a basic understanding of what you were trying to say. For example, the introduction of concepts *salient*, *diagnostic*, in p. 2 and *psychological/behavioral cost* in p. 3. Also, you need to explain the rationale for including these concepts in the article.
6. The term ‘M’ used in page 15 is inadequately defined. How was its value determined? And how did the value affect the participants involved to a particular frame (Positive or Negative).

## Minor issues

7. Regarding your abstract, it does not provide an accurate overview of the paper. The first sentence does not seem relevant here. Also, the methodology and data sources can be elaborated a bit more.
8. The introduction of the paper is too long. Surely, you can at least half it to make it more concise to entice the reader to read on.
9. “Consumer electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is a dual-edged sword ..., while negative eWOM may be a nightmare” used in the first page is repeated exactly in page 2. This does not look good.  
【The actual expression is “double-edged sword,” not “duel-edged sword.”】
10. p.3, ... personal motives (e.g., Chan and Misra 1990; Engel et al. 1969; Feick and Price 1987; Hamilton 1971; Henning-Thurau et al. 2004; Myers and Robertson 1972; Sun et al. 2006; Weimann 1991) Cite only the most important and relevant references. Two to three will be fine.
11. Same notations should be used throughout. The notation used for the Social Network Density in page 9 is (SD), but in the beginning of page 14 it is (D).
12. Mathematical ideas need to be explained with more detail. For example, the connections between equations 1, 2, and 3 in page 9 and the equation of Social Network Density in the beginning of page 14 were not explained clearly enough.
13. “A group’s network density is a ratio of the sum of the strength of existing social ties in a network and the sum of the maximum strength of all possible social ties, which ranges from 0 to 1: ...” I suspect that the value of social network density in page 14 should be ranging from 0.2 to 1, as the lowest value of the five-point rating scale is 1, not 0.
14. In the references, you need to offer the page number of paper by Bagozzi & Dholakia (2002). Also, the page number of Sun *et al.* (2006).
15. Smith, Stephen M. and Richard E. Petty (1996), “Message Framing and Persuasion: A Message Processing Analysis,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 22 (3), 257-68. The journal should be ***Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin***.

I hope you find my comments useful. Good luck!