

# Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)

## How eWOM platforms influence consumer product judgement

Mira Lee  
*Michigan State University*  
Seounmi Youn  
*Emerson College*

This study explores whether and how different online platforms to which electronic word of mouth (eWOM) communication is posted influence consumers' judgements of reviewed products. Additionally, this study examines the moderating role of the valence of eWOM on the platforms–consumer product judgement relationship. Our findings indicated that, other things being equal, participants exposed to the review posted on the personal blog were more likely to attribute the review to circumstances and less likely to recommend the product to friends than those who were exposed to the review either on the independent review website or the brand's website. The effect of the eWOM platforms on consumer willingness to recommend the product to friends was found only when the review was positive. When the review was negative, however, there were detrimental effects on consumer willingness to recommend the product to friends regardless of the eWOM platform. Practical and theoretical implications of the findings were discussed.

### Introduction

Word of mouth (WOM) – interpersonal communication about products and services between consumers – is one of the most influential sources of marketplace information for consumers (Arndt 1967; Alreck & Settle 1995). It is so influential because consumers generally trust peer consumers more than they trust advertisers or marketers (Blackshaw 2006; Sen & Lerman 2007). WOM is typically independent of marketers' selling intents and is thus considered to be more trustworthy and credible (Bone 1995; Bickart & Schindler 2001; Lau & Ng 2001). Prior researchers have

found that WOM influences judgement of products (Herr *et al.* 1991; Bone 1995; Laczniak *et al.* 2001).

The power of WOM to influence consumers' decision-making processes has long been known to researchers and practitioners; the power of WOM has recently become even more important with the advent of the internet (Bickart & Schindler 2001; Dellarocas 2003; Hennig-Thurau *et al.* 2004; Sun *et al.* 2006). Product review websites (e.g. consumerreview.com), retailers' websites (e.g. amazon.com), brands' websites (e.g. forums.us.dell.com), personal blogs, message boards and social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace) are all examples of the types of online WOM platforms (Bickart & Schindler 2001). Although similar to the traditional form, electronic WOM (eWOM) has several unique characteristics. eWOM often occurs between people who have little or no prior relationship with one another (e.g. strangers or fellow consumers) and can be anonymous (Dellarocas 2003; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006; Sen & Lerman 2007). This anonymity allows consumers to more comfortably share their opinions without revealing their identities (Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006). The unique characteristics of eWOM encourage consumers to share their opinions with other consumers, thus increasing the volume of eWOM (Chatterjee 2001). As a result, there is a greater likelihood that consumers will find other consumers with product expertise on the eWOM platforms (Duhan *et al.* 1997).

However, the anonymous nature of eWOM can make it difficult for consumers to determine the quality and credibility of the eWOM (Chatterjee 2001; Schindler & Bickart 2005). Determining the quality of online posts has become even more difficult now that marketers have attempted to influence eWOM by compensating consumers to review products and even going so far as to post their own reviews about their products (Chatterjee 2001; Werde 2003). Because of this, consumers often look for a variety of cues when determining the quality of the online information (Greer 2003). Because eWOM platforms are not all influenced by marketers to the same degree, a few studies have begun to explore whether the specific platforms to which the eWOM is posted influence consumers' attitudes towards the reviewed products (Bickart & Schindler 2001; Xue & Phelps 2004). However, the exploratory nature of previous studies makes it difficult to draw solid conclusions.

The purpose of the current study is to more fully explore whether and how the different platforms to which eWOM is communicated influence consumers' decision-making processes, drawing insights from attribution theory (Kelley 1971, 1973). Specifically, we attempt to examine the impact of a product review website and a brand's website on causal attributions about a reviewer's intention and product judgements, along with a personal blog, which has received far less attention in academic research than the other two platforms. Additionally, this study seeks to examine the moderating role of the valence of eWOM on the eWOM platforms–consumer product judgement relationship.

## Literature review

### *Theoretical framework: attribution theory*

Researchers have often used attribution theory to explain the impact of WOM and other marketing practices on persuasion (Mizerski 1982; Chatterjee 2001; Laczniaik *et al.* 2001; Rifon *et al.* 2004; Sen & Lerman 2007). Attribution theory explains how people make causal inferences regarding *why* a communicator advocates a certain position or behaves in a certain way (Kelley 1973; Mizerski *et al.* 1979; Folkes 1988). People often attribute the communicator's persuasive message about a stimulus to the stimulus (i.e. product performance) and/or to non-stimulus factors (i.e. dispositional characteristics of the communicator or circumstances) (Mizerski & Green 1978; Mizerski 1982; Sen & Lerman 2007). To illustrate this concept, suppose a consumer reads a product review of an apartment which asserts that the apartment has good living conditions. If the consumer feels that the communicator positively reviewed the apartment because it actually has good living conditions, then the consumer would attribute this review to the actual quality of the apartment being reviewed (i.e. a stimulus attribution). Additionally, the consumer may also perceive that the communicator reviewed the apartment in this manner because the communicator received incentives for posting positive reviews. In this situation, the consumer would attribute the review to the incentives given to the communicator (i.e. a non-stimulus attribution) (Mizerski & Green 1978).

Researchers have suggested that different types of consumers' attributions will have a different impact on persuasion (Laczniak *et al.* 2001). Specifically, attribution theory predicts that the more the consumer attributes the communicator's review about a product to that product's actual performance, the more the consumers will perceive that the communicator is credible, the more the consumer will have confidence in the accuracy of the review, the stronger the consumer's belief that the product has the attributes mentioned in the review, and the more the consumer will be persuaded by that review (Mizerski & Green 1978; Mizerski 1982; Sen & Lerman 2007). On the other hand, the *discounting* principle in attribution theory (Kelley 1973) predicts that when the consumer suspects that the communicator's review is caused by other non-stimulus factors, such as circumstances, the more the consumer will discount the product's actual performance as a reason for the communicator to write such a review, the more the consumer will perceive that the communicator is biased, and the less the consumer will be persuaded by that review (Mizerski 1982; Sen & Lerman 2007). Supporting the attribution theory, researchers have found that consumers' causal attributions mediate the effects of persuasive messages on the usefulness of the messages and attitudes towards the stimulus (Laczniak *et al.* 2001; Sen & Lerman 2007).

The discounting principle in attribution theory (Kelley 1973) has been used to examine the effects of source characteristics on persuasion. Wiener and Mowen (1986) found that participants receiving an endorsement about a used car from a low trustworthy source (e.g. a car mechanic who is part owner of a nearby automobile dealership) were less likely to be persuaded by the endorsement than those receiving the endorsement from a high trustworthy source (e.g. a car mechanic who has no relation to the automobile dealership). Additionally, Eagly and Chaiken (1975) proposed that the more a communicator's position advocated is expected on the basis of the communicator's personal characteristics, the more a recipient of the communication tends to attribute the position advocated to the communicator's personal characteristics and tends not to be persuaded by that position. Specifically, they found that, when an undesirable position was advocated in the information, an unattractive source (e.g. a source who has an anti-student orientation) was less persuasive in influencing subjects' opinion change than an attractive source (e.g. a source who has a

pro-student orientation). However, the unattractive source was as persuasive as the attractive source for a desirable position.

The discussions of the discounting principle in attribution theory touched upon in this section will serve as an underlying theoretical framework in this study.

### *Impact of eWOM platforms on product judgement*

The strength of the relationship between a communicator and a receiver is one of the most distinctive differences between WOM and eWOM (Chatterjee 2001). A communicator with strong ties to the receiver is someone who has a prior relationship with the receiver (e.g. family or friends); a communicator with weak ties to the receiver is someone who has little or no prior relationship with the receiver (e.g. strangers or fellow consumers) (Granovetter 1973, 1983; Brown & Reingen 1987; Duhan *et al.* 1997). The strength of the ties between the communicators and the receivers of eWOM is usually considered weak because anyone can post their opinions about a product to various online platforms (Granitz & Ward 1996; Chatterjee 2001). Because the identity of the eWOM communicators is not constrained by the receivers' social circle, researchers have argued that there is a greater likelihood of finding people with product expertise among weak-tie communicators (Duhan *et al.* 1997).

Despite this advantage, disadvantages also exist. Generally, it is difficult for consumers to determine the quality and credibility of the product recommendations when seeking advice from weak-tie communicators on the web (Chatterjee 2001; Schindler & Bickart 2005). eWOM communicators often do not feel much responsibility for the consequences of their recommendations because their postings will be read by complete strangers (Kadi 1995; Granitz & Ward 1996). Thus, there is a greater possibility for misinformation or inaccurate information to be passed on to consumers (Bailey 2004). More importantly, consumers often do not know the true identity of the eWOM communicators or their true motivation (Chatterjee 2001; Schindler & Bickart 2005).

Because it is difficult to determine the quality and credibility of the eWOM based on the characteristics of the communicators, consumers tend to use other cues to make causal inferences about the communicator's intention. One of the cues consumers use is the platform to which the

eWOM is posted (Senecal & Nantel 2004; Xue & Phelps 2004; Schindler & Bickart 2005). eWOM platforms can vary along marketer-generated and non-marketer-generated websites. The person or organisation who owns the website has control over the information, and can make additions or deletions to better serve their own interests. Thus, whether a website is marketer-generated or not seems to be important because consumers may suspect that consumer-generated product recommendations on marketer-generated websites have selling intents (Senecal & Nantel 2004; Xue & Phelps 2004; Schindler & Bickart 2005). It is assumed that persuasion of a consumer-generated product review is decreased to the extent that there is high possibility of a marketer's involvement that would influence the reviewer to provide a biased representation of the product's actual performance in the review.

A common example of a marketer-generated eWOM platform is a brand's website. When eWOM is posted on a brand's website, consumers may perceive a possibility of the reviewer being influenced by the marketer (Xue & Phelps 2004) and attribute the eWOM towards a certain circumstance (e.g. the communicator is compensated by the brand for reviewing the product favourably). Therefore, the discounting principle in attribution theory (Kelley 1973) suggests that consumers may discount the product's actual performance as a reason for writing the review and may not be persuaded by the reviewer's product recommendation. On the other hand, many of the independent product review websites are generally known to be free of marketers' ploys (Xue & Phelps 2004). The goals of such websites are to help consumers make informed buying decisions by providing a platform to share their product experiences. eWOM that is posted on an independent product review website may be more likely to be attributed to the reviewer's true feeling about the product's actual performance, making the eWOM on the product review website more persuasive than recommendations posted on a brand's website.

A few studies have compared consumers' processing of information on brands' websites to independent review websites, but the findings are not conclusive (Bickart & Schindler 2001; Xue & Phelps 2004). Bickart and Schindler (2001) found that subjects who gathered product information from online forums showed greater interest in the product topic than those who acquired information on corporate websites. However, Xue and Phelps (2004) found that the superiority of an online forum (versus a

brand's website) to influence brand attitudes appeared only when participants had more experiences with offline WOM and less involvement with the product.

Communicators also occasionally post product review information on weblogs, or blogs – websites that contain personal diaries or journals (Thorson & Rodgers 2006). Communicators usually write about their daily experiences and opinions on various issues, such as politics. Personal blogs have also been found to have an impact on consumers' buying decisions. A 2006 Ipsos MORI survey found that roughly half the respondents said they decided to buy a product after reading a positive review on a personal blog, while one-third of them decided not to buy a product after reading a negative review (Bulik 2007). When compared to marketers' websites, eWOM posted to personal blogs may be more likely to be attributed to the product's actual performance and thus more influential because personal blogs are supposed to be independent of marketers' selling intents. Consumers may also perceive eWOM on an independent product review website similarly to that which is posted to personal blogs because both are supposed to be independent of marketers' selling intents.

Based on the preceding discussion, we predict that, all other things being equal, consumers will be more likely to attribute eWOM on an independent product review website and a personal blog to a product's actual performance; and consumers will be more likely to attribute eWOM on a brand's website towards a particular circumstance. Consequently, we predict that eWOM on the independent product review website and the personal blog will have a greater impact on a consumer's product judgments than the eWOM on the brand's website. This discussion translates to the following hypotheses.

**H1a/H1b:** Consumers exposed to a review posted on an independent product review website and a personal blog will be (a) more likely to attribute the review towards the *product's actual performance* and (b) less likely to attribute it towards the *circumstance* than those exposed to the review on a brand's website.

**H2:** A review posted on an independent product review website and a personal blog should have a greater impact on a consumer's product judgement than a review posted on a brand's website.

### *Moderating role of eWOM valence*

Consumers are exposed to both positive and negative product experiences of fellow consumers on eWOM platforms. One factor that seems likely to moderate the effects of eWOM platforms on causal attributions and product judgement is the valence of eWOM. Researchers have found that unfavourable information is generally more influential than favourable information (Fiske 1980; Skowronski & Carlston 1987; Chiou & Cheng 2003). For example, Mizerski (1982) found that unfavourable (versus favourable) product information from a consumer led to a stronger affect towards products.

The greater impact of negative (versus positive) information on product judgements can be explained by the role of diagnosticity (Skowronski & Carlston 1989; Herr *et al.* 1991). Prior researchers have argued that, when forming overall product judgements, negative information tends to be weighed more heavily than positive information because consumers perceive negative product information as more diagnostic than positive information (Herr *et al.* 1991; Bone 1995). Negative product information helps consumers to categorise the product as low quality because negative attributes are held mostly by low-quality products (Skowronski & Carlston 1987, 1989; Herr *et al.* 1991; Bone 1995). On the other hand, positive (versus negative) product information is perceived as more ambiguous (Herr *et al.* 1991; Bone 1995). Because any products can have some positive attributes, it is difficult to categorise the product as high in quality as a result of reading the positive product information (Herr *et al.* 1991; Bone 1995). Additionally, because a growing number of consumers are aware of marketers' efforts to harness the power of eWOM, the absence of negative information about a product may make consumers suspect that the communicator may have a manipulative intent (Schindler & Bickart 2005). Hence, consumers may be less likely to attribute the positive eWOM towards the product's actual performance, and more likely to attribute it towards other plausible causes such as circumstance (e.g. the communicator's vested interest) compared to the negative eWOM.

Hypothesis 1 and 2 are predicted on the belief that consumers would consider the nature of the website when making causal inferences about the communicator's intention. This is generally true, but in some situations the review itself is so diagnostic that consumers may not need to



consider other cues. This can occur in situations where the review is negative. Due to the prevalence of the negativity effect (Baumeister *et al.* 2001; Rozin & Royzman 2001), we predict that when the review is negative consumers may infer that the product's actual performance motivated the communicator to write the negative review regardless of where the negative review is posted. On the other hand, when the review is positive, the circumstance attribution will be greater when the review is posted on a brand's website than when it is posted on an independent product review website and a personal blog. Consequently, we propose that the predicted main effects of eWOM platforms on product judgement discussed earlier should be obtained only when the review is positive (versus negative). Thus, we hypothesise:

- H3a/H3b:** When the review is positive, consumers exposed to the review posted on an independent product review website and a personal blog will be (a) more likely to attribute the review towards the *product's actual performance* and (b) less likely to attribute it towards the *circumstance* than those exposed to the review on a brand's website.
- H3c:** When the review is negative, causal attributions will not differ regardless of the eWOM platforms such that consumers will attribute the negativity of the eWOM towards the product's actual performance regardless of the eWOM platforms.
- H4a:** When the review is positive, the review posted on an independent product review website and a personal blog should have a greater impact on product judgements than one posted on a brand's website.
- H4b:** When the review is negative, product judgement will not differ regardless of the eWOM platforms such that the negative review will have detrimental effects on product judgement regardless of the eWOM platforms.

## **Method**

### *Overview*

Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions in a 3 (eWOM platforms: independent product review website, brand's website or personal blog)  $\times$  2 (eWOM valence: positive or negative) between-subjects experimental design.

### *Participants and settings*

A total of 247 undergraduates were recruited from a major Midwestern university in the United States. Each participant was compensated for her or his time with extra credit. The use of college students was considered appropriate for this study because they actively engage in eWOM communications about products and services (Bailey 2005). Most participants were between the ages of 18 and 25, with the average age being 21. A total of 70% of the participants were female. With regard to the use of consumer product reviews online, 46% of participants read reviews 'less than once a month', followed by '1–2 times a month' (31%), '3–4 times a month' (13%), and '5–6 times a month or more (9%)'. Students participated in this experiment online.

### *Product selection*

An apartment was chosen as the product category for the experiment for two reasons. First, renting an apartment is relevant to college students because they are usually away from home and need a place to live. Second, renting an apartment requires an extensive information search (e.g. reading consumer reviews online) because there are significant potential risks. An apartment has also been used in other advertising studies (Meyers-Levy 1991). A fictitious brand name, Maple Grove Towers, was selected for the apartment, to rule out possible confounding effects of prior attitudes towards the apartment on participants' responses.

## *Procedure*

Each participant was given a URL for a research introduction page via email and asked to visit the website. On the first page of the website, participants were asked to imagine they were looking for information about an apartment to rent and evaluate an apartment based on a consumer review posted either on an independent apartment review website, an apartment website or a personal blog. After being informed of their rights as subjects, participants were asked to go to the next page. This initiated a presentation of experimental stimuli corresponding to one of six randomly assigned conditions. Participants read the review about Maple Grove Towers at their own pace.

A professional web designer developed a site to post consumer product reviews. Six different versions of the website were developed. All versions were identical, except for two factors. First, they differed in regard to the manipulation of the eWOM platforms. The apartment review was posted either on the independent apartment review website, on the apartment website or on the personal blog. Second, for each eWOM platform, two different versions of the apartment review were posted. In half the versions the review was positive, while in the other half, the review was negative. A gender-neutral name, Pat, was selected as the reviewer's name for the experiment.

Immediately after reading the consumer review about the apartment, participants were directed to a questionnaire page and asked to answer a series of questions. A final question asked participants to indicate what they thought was the purpose of the study. None of the participants was aware of the hypotheses being tested in this study. All data were directly captured into the database.

## *Independent and moderating variables*

### *eWOM platforms*

Three versions of the website were developed. All three versions were identical in terms of the look and feel of the site, with the exception of three factors. Each version was identified as having a different owner, which was indicated on the top-left corner of the individual versions of the site. The identified owner was 'Maple Grove Towers Apartment'

for the brand's website, 'ApartmentReview.com' for the independent product review website and 'Pat's Blog' for the personal blog. Second, a different catchy phrase was placed along the top of each of the websites. The phrase 'Apartments for you' was included on the brand's website; 'Apartment Reviews by Real People' was included on the independent product review website; and 'You are welcome to visit here and post if you wish' was included on the personal blog. Finally, the versions also differed regarding navigational menus. The apartment website included 'Company Overview', among other options. The independent apartment review website included navigational options such as 'Rate Apartments' and 'Search Apartments'. The personal blog included 'About Me' and 'View My Complete Profile' as options.

### *Valence of eWOM*

A series of steps was taken to create both positive and negative reviews about the Maple Grove Towers apartment. First, the apartment reviews posted on various review websites were examined carefully to obtain key attributes that consumers care about when renting an apartment and to identify how consumers share both positive and negative experiences. The ten most frequently mentioned attributes were selected. Second, discussions with ten undergraduate students helped to identify five key attributes from the ten to be included in this study. Those attributes were 'maintenance', 'security', 'location', 'unit condition' and 'rent fee'. Both positive and negative apartment reviews included those same key attributes.

To reduce potential bias due to certain descriptive adjectives used for evaluating the apartment, this study manipulated the eWOM valence as suggested by prior researchers (Weinberger & Dillon 1980; Mizerski 1982). Among 50 descriptive rating adjectives (Myers & Warner 1968), this study carefully chose several positive and negative rating adjectives, which have opposite meaning and are almost equally distant from the neutral evaluation adjective (e.g. superb versus terrible). Additionally, for several other adjectives, bi-polar adjectives with opposite meaning (e.g. friendly versus unfriendly) or the word 'not' (e.g. reliable versus not reliable) were used. Transcripts of the eWOMs are provided in Appendix 1.

## *Dependent variables and control variable*

### *Causal attributions*

The measures for the causal attributions developed by prior researchers (Mizerski & Green 1978; Burnkrant 1982; Laczniak *et al.* 2001) were used and modified for the current study. Using a pretest ( $n = 61$ ), final items were developed to estimate product and circumstance attributions (see Appendix 2). Both product and circumstance attributions were measured with four items on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 being 'strongly disagree' and 7 being 'strongly agree'. For both positive and negative eWOM, Cronbach's alphas of causal attributions ranged from 0.80 to 0.88.

### *Product judgements*

This study assessed three variables relating to product judgements: attitude towards the apartment, intention to rent the apartment and willingness to recommend the apartment to friends. Attitude towards the apartment was measured with four items, which were borrowed from prior research (Holbrook & Batra 1987). Each was estimated on a five-point scale anchored by 'dislike/like', 'positive/negative', 'favourable/unfavourable' and 'bad/good' (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.96$ ). Intention to rent the apartment was estimated with three items, on a five-point scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.91$ ). The items were anchored by 'likely/unlikely', 'improbable/probable' and 'possible/impossible' (Bearden *et al.* 1984). Willingness to recommend the apartment to friends was measured with a single item, which used a five-point scale ranging from 1 being 'very unlikely' to 5 being 'very likely'. For subsequent analyses, the scores of the multiple items were aggregated to obtain an index score for each construct.

### *eWOM scepticism*

Consumers may differ with regard to scepticism towards eWOM. Consumers with different levels of scepticism may perceive the same eWOM differently, and therefore react to it differently (Friestad & Wright 1994). To control for this effect, eWOM scepticism was assessed with 15 items, which were modified from Obermiller and Spangenberg's (1998) advertising scepticism scale. The items were measured by a seven-point Likert scale anchored by 'strongly disagree' and 'strongly agree' (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

## Results

### *Manipulation checks*

#### *eWOM platform*

To assess whether participants correctly recognised an eWOM platform to which a review was posted, participants were asked to indicate where Pat's review of the Maple Grove Towers apartment was posted. Cross-tabulations revealed that the majority of participants correctly recognised the eWOM platform assigned to them,  $\chi^2 = 245.14$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

#### *Valence of eWOM*

To assess how successfully this study manipulated the valence of eWOM, participants were asked to indicate how positive or negative the review was. A  $t$ -test revealed a significant difference in the expected direction,  $t = 23.17$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Participants who were exposed to the positive review ( $M = 5.28$ ) perceived the presented review to be more favourable than did the participants exposed to the negative review ( $M = 1.74$ ).

### *Hypotheses testing*

A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was performed to test the previously stated hypotheses. The eWOM platforms were included as the independent variable in this analysis, and the valence of eWOM was included as the moderating variable. The influence of these variables was tested on the five dependent variables: product attributions, circumstance attributions, attitude towards the apartment, intention to rent the apartment and willingness to recommend the apartment to friends. eWOM scepticism was included as a covariate. Given that our sample is not gender balanced, participants' gender was also included as a covariate. eWOM scepticism was a significant covariate, Wilk's  $\lambda = 0.84$ ,  $F(5, 222) = 8.72$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , while gender was not, Wilk's  $\lambda = 0.98$ ,  $F(5, 222) = 0.85$ , n.s.

The results of MANCOVA revealed a significant main effect of the valence of the eWOM, Wilk's  $\lambda = 0.36$ ,  $F(5, 222) = 77.82$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . An interaction effect between eWOM platforms and the valence of eWOM approached, but did not reach, significance, Wilk's  $\lambda = 0.92$ ,  $F(10, 444) =$

1.82,  $p = 0.056$ . Contrary to our expectation, a main effect of eWOM platforms was not found.

#### *Main effect of eWOM platforms*

H1 predicted a significant main effect of eWOM platforms on causal attributions. Specifically, H1a posited that participants exposed to an independent product review website and a personal blog would generate stronger product attributions than those exposed to a brand's website. Unexpectedly, an effect of eWOM platforms on product attributions was not found,  $F(2, 234) = 0.13$ , n.s. This finding indicated that the different platforms to which the product reviews were posted did not influence participants' product attributions differently. Thus, H1a was not supported.

H1b stated that participants exposed to a brand's website would generate stronger circumstance attributions than did those who were exposed to an independent product review website and a personal blog. As shown in Table 1, the finding revealed a significant main effect of the eWOM platforms on circumstance attributions,  $F(2, 234) = 4.43$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 1: Effects of eWOM platforms and valence of eWOM on dependent measures**

Source	Mean square	df	F	Sig.
<i>eWOM platforms</i>				
Product attribution	2.77	2	0.13	n.s.
Circumstance attribution	106.09	2	4.43	0.02*
Attitude towards APT	9.68	2	0.49	n.s.
Intention to rent APT	4.71	2	0.36	n.s.
Willingness to recommend APT	2.04	2	2.52	0.08 <sup>†</sup>
<i>Valence of eWOM</i>				
Product attribution	0.04	1	0.00	n.s.
Circumstance attribution	1008.40	1	42.08	0.00***
Attitude towards APT	5340.14	1	268.28	0.00***
Intention to rent APT	2437.92	1	187.39	0.00***
Willingness to recommend APT	197.90	1	244.45	0.00***
<i>Platforms X valence of eWOM</i>				
Product attribution	16.72	2	0.78	n.s.
Circumstance attribution	11.76	2	0.49	n.s.
Attitude towards APT	2.64	2	0.13	n.s.
Intention to rent APT	16.95	2	1.30	n.s.
Willingness to recommend APT	3.82	2	4.71	0.01*

<sup>†</sup> $p < 0.10$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

Unexpectedly, however, the paired comparison test indicated that participants exposed to a personal blog ( $M = 15.18$ ) made significantly stronger circumstance attributions than those who were exposed to a brand's website ( $M = 13.56$ ),  $p < 0.05$  and to an independent product review website ( $M = 12.94$ ),  $p < 0.01$  (see Table 2). Circumstance attributions for the brand's website were not different from those for the independent product review website (n.s.). Thus, H1b was rejected.

H2 posited that a product review posted on an independent product review website and a personal blog would have a greater impact on product judgements than a review posted on a brand's website. The effects of the eWOM platforms on attitude towards the apartment and intention to rent the apartment were not statistically significant. The effect of the eWOM platforms on willingness to recommend the apartment to friends approached significance,  $F(2, 234) = 2.52$ ,  $p = 0.08$ , but in a different direction than we had predicted. As shown in Table 2, participants who were exposed to the product review on a personal blog ( $M = 2.36$ ) were *less* likely to recommend the apartment to friends than those who were exposed to the review on an independent product review website ( $M = 2.65$ ),  $p < 0.05$  or a brand's website ( $M = 2.64$ ),  $p < 0.06$ . There was no difference in the willingness to recommend the apartment to friends between those exposed to an independent product review website and those exposed to a brand's website (n.s.). Thus, H2 was rejected.

**Table 2: Means and standard deviations for effects of eWOM platforms on causal attributions and product judgements**

Hypotheses	Dependent measures	Company (a)	Review (b)	Blog (c)
		Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)
H1	Causal attributions			
H1a	Product attributions	19.97 (0.524)	19.61 (0.528)	19.72 (0.529)
H1b	Circumstance attributions	13.56 <sup>c</sup> (0.557)	12.94 <sup>c</sup> (0.561)	15.18 <sup>ab</sup> (0.562)
H2	Product judgements			
	Attitude towards APT	14.86 (0.503)	15.12 (0.508)	14.43 (0.508)
	Intention to rent APT	10.03 (0.407)	9.67 (0.410)	9.56 (0.411)
	Willingness to recommend APT	2.64 (0.101)	2.65 <sup>c</sup> (0.102)	2.36 <sup>b</sup> (0.102)

Note: Means with different superscripts are significantly different from each other at the  $p < 0.05$  level.



*Interaction between eWOM platforms and valence of eWOM*

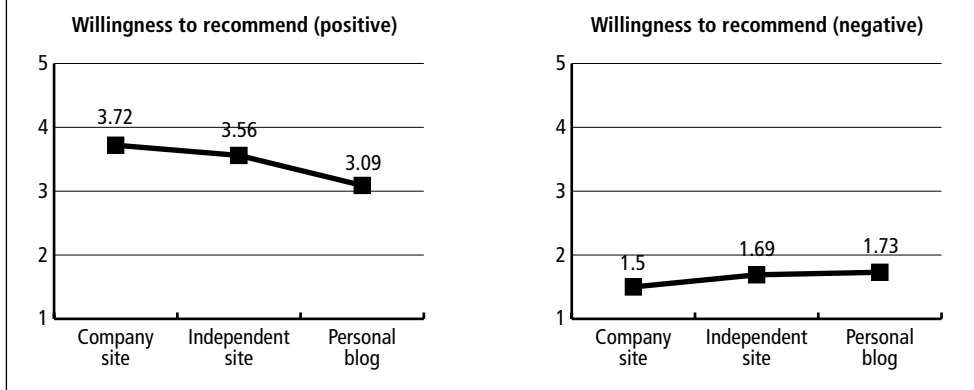
H3 predicted that the valence of eWOM would moderate the effects of eWOM platforms on causal attributions. This study did not find any interaction effects between eWOM platforms and the valence of eWOM on causal attributions (see Table 1). Therefore, H3 was not supported.

H4 proposed that when the product review is positive, the review on an independent product review website and a personal blog would have a greater impact on product judgements than a review posted on a brand's website. When the review is negative, however, it was hypothesised that product judgements would not differ across eWOM platforms because the negative review will have detrimental effects on product judgements regardless of the platform. The findings showed a significant interaction effect only for the willingness to recommend the apartment to friends,  $F(2, 234) = 4.71, p < 0.01$ . Unexpectedly, the contrast tests revealed that, when a review was positive, the participants exposed to the review placed on a personal blog ( $M = 3.09$ ) were less likely to recommend the apartment to friends than those exposed to the review posted on a brand's website ( $M = 3.72$ ),  $F(1, 240) = 8.78, p < 0.01$  and the review on an independent product review website ( $M = 3.56$ ),  $F(1, 240) = 5.76, p < 0.05$ . There was no difference in the willingness to recommend the apartment to friends between those exposed to an independent product review website and those exposed to a brand's website (n.s.) (see Table 3 and Figure 1). When the review was negative, however, eWOM platforms did not affect participants' willingness to recommend the apartment (n.s.). Therefore, H4 was rejected.

**Table 3: Means and standard deviations for interaction between eWOM platforms and valence of eWOM on willingness to recommend APT to friends**

Hypotheses H4	Valence of eWOM	eWOM platforms	Mean (SE)
H4a	Positive	(a) Company	3.72 <sup>c</sup> (0.14)
		(b) Review	3.56 <sup>c</sup> (0.16)
		(c) Personal blog	3.09 <sup>ab</sup> (0.15)
H4b	Negative	(a) Company	1.50 (0.14)
		(b) Review	1.69 (0.14)
		(c) Personal blog	1.73 (0.13)

Note: Means with different superscripts are significantly different from each other at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

**Figure 1: Interaction between platforms and valence of eWOM on willingness to recommend**

## Conclusion and discussion

The increase in the number of eWOM platforms has made it easier for consumers to connect with one another for product-related information. The first goal of this study was to examine whether and how various eWOM platforms – a brand's website, an independent product review website and a personal blog – affected consumers' product judgement. Unexpectedly, the findings demonstrated that participants exposed to the review posted on the brand's website and on the independent product review website did not differ with regard to causal attributions about the reviewer's intention and product judgements. Interestingly, however, participants who read the review posted on the personal blog were more likely to suspect that certain circumstances (e.g. the reviewer's vested interests) were behind the review than were those who were exposed to a review either on the independent product review website or on the brand's website. Consequently, participants exposed to the review on the personal blog were less likely to recommend the product to friends than those exposed to the review on other platforms, supporting the discounting principle in attribution theory (Kelley 1971, 1973).

Inconsistent with our earlier arguments, these findings seem to suggest that, whether the website is marketer-generated (e.g. a brand's website) or non marketer-generated (e.g. an independent product review website or a personal blog) does not seem to play a significant role in influencing

consumers' product judgement. This is somewhat consistent with Xue and Phelps' (2004) findings. Xue and Phelps found that the eWOM platform to which a review is posted (an independent online forum versus a corporate website), by itself, did not influence brand attitudes. An interesting question, then, is what other characteristics of the eWOM platforms mattered in the current study. It seems that the personal nature of a *stranger's* blog (versus the public nature of a brand's website and a product review website) might have highlighted the fact that the identity of the reviewer is unknown. This, in turn, might have led to the conclusion that something may be behind the review.

The second purpose of this research was to examine the interaction effect between eWOM platforms and eWOM valence on causal attributions and product judgements. The predicted interaction effects were found only for consumer willingness to recommend the product to friends. More specifically, the effect of the eWOM platform on consumer willingness to recommend the product to friends discussed earlier was found when the review was positive. When the review was negative, however, it had detrimental effects regardless of the eWOM platform. The interaction effects found here can be explained in terms of diagnosticity (Skowronski & Carlston 1989). Participants may have perceived the negative review as diagnostic and informative so, regardless of where the participants read the review, they were not willing to recommend the product to their friends (Skowronski & Carlston 1987). On the other hand, participants may have considered positive product recommendations to be ambiguous (Herr *et al.* 1991; Bone 1995). Due to the ambiguity of the positive review, participants may have looked for other cues such as the characteristics (e.g. personal or public) of the eWOM platform.

### *Theoretical and managerial implications*

Taken together, the findings suggest that, *to some degree*, the eWOM platform to which the review was posted influenced how participants made circumstance attributions about the communicator's intention and affected the way participants responded to the review. Although the findings of this study are inconsistent with our predictions, this study has potential implications for academic researchers as well as practitioners. Given that consumers have access to various eWOM platforms for product-related

information, the finding that the eWOM platform to which the review is posted can be a potential factor in influencing consumers' product judgement can add to what we know about consumers' processing of eWOM. Additionally, although it is still unclear *why* participants exposed to the personal blog made stronger circumstance attributions than those exposed to other platforms, this study suggests that the discounting principle in attribution theory (Kelley 1971, 1973) can be helpful in enhancing our general understanding of how eWOM platforms influence consumers' product judgement.

Further, the finding that participants exposed to the positive (versus negative) product review on the stranger's personal blog were less likely to recommend the apartment to friends will be useful to advertisers who seek to harness the power of eWOM. A growing number of advertisers compensate consumers to review their products in personal blogs (Werde 2003; Blackshaw 2006). On the *PayPerPost* website ([www.payperpost.com](http://www.payperpost.com)), for example, advertisers post their requests: topic (write blogs describing fun personal cheque design options and/or savings available online), pay rate (\$5), minimum words (100 words and a link to the company website), and tone (positive). Then, bloggers write reviews about products or services as requested. If the reviews are approved, the consumers post the reviews on their personal blogs and get paid by the advertisers. Our study suggests that advertisers will need to be careful of compensating consumers to write about their products on personal blogs because such practices may increase consumers' suspicions about positive product reviews on personal blogs. Given that, consistent with Xue and Phelps' (2004) findings, the positive review on the brand's website was as persuasive as the one on the independent review website, advertisers may want to use their own websites as a forum for consumers to share their product experiences.

### *Limitations and future research*

Although the findings of this study have potential implications, several limitations exist. This study focused on attribution theory to understand the effects of different online platforms to which eWOM communication is posted. Although this study provided a plausible explanation for the effect of eWOM platforms on product judgement by measuring causal attributions, it is still unclear *why* people tend to attribute eWOM posted

on personal blogs towards circumstances. Future research should examine how consumers view each eWOM platform as a source for consumer-generated product information, and why they do so. Additionally, this study may also benefit from examining consumers' cognitive responses (e.g. source derogation) to the product review on different eWOM platforms. Previous research has argued that the more the communicator is perceived to be biased or less credible, the more the consumer will generate higher levels of source derogation, and the less the consumer is persuaded by the information advocated by the communicator (Wright 1973). Applying correspondence theory, another attribution theory developed by Jones and Davis (1965), Kamins and Assael (1987) found that subjects exposed to a one-sided advertising appeal generated higher levels of derogation of the advertiser than those exposed to a two-sided advertising appeal. Future studies examining the mediating role of consumers' cognitive responses to a product review posted to different platforms on product judgement may help to improve our understanding of the mechanism underlying the effect of eWOM platforms.

Focusing on the nature of anonymous and weak-tie communications on the internet, the current study was primarily interested in examining consumers' responses to the product review written by an unknown communicator on different platforms. Reading eWOM from an unknown person is common for most people who have a situational involvement and visit a certain platform for the first time. As a reviewer mentioned, however, some people develop trusting relationships with some active posters whose eWOM communications they have observed over time despite never having met. Future research is needed to determine whether the findings in this study can be replicated in situations where the online identity of the communicator is known to consumers through repeated exposures to the communicator's product reviews. Moreover, this study examined the participants' *forced* exposure to a product review on different eWOM platforms. Although the forced exposure was necessary for experimental control purposes, it did not provide a natural eWOM processing environment in which consumers voluntarily choose eWOM communicators or platforms. Future research should provide more natural eWOM processing.

An apartment was used as the reviewed product in this study. Although the choice of the apartment was considered appropriate, as explained

earlier, it is not representative of all product categories about which consumers write and read reviews. In addition, although there are many platforms where consumers can post and read eWOM messages, this study examined only three types of eWOM platform. Our findings are also limited in that this study used a convenience sample of students from a Midwestern university in the United States. Since one of our goals was to test the discounting principle in attribution theory in the context of eWOM platforms, maintaining a high level of experimental control was critical. So, the use of a homogeneous sample of students was deemed appropriate for experimental control purposes. However, future studies need to determine whether these findings can be replicated in other types of products, other types of eWOM platforms, other non-student populations and other countries.

## **Appendix 1: Transcripts of eWOM**

### *Positive eWOM*

I have lived in Maple Grove Towers apartment for 7 months. This place is superb. Maintenance is reliable and fast in responding to complaints. My unit is clean and well kept up. This apartment is safe. There is a security entrance and separate apartment buzzers so there are no suspicious people trying to sneak in to the apartment. Maple Grove Towers is in a good location – within walking distance to a convenience store. The neighborhood is nice and the people in this building are kind and friendly. The rent is affordable. I love this place and would recommend this place to anyone.

### *Negative eWOM*

I have lived in Maple Grove Towers for 7 months. This place is terrible. Maintenance is not reliable and slow in responding to complaints. My unit is dirty and not well kept up. This apartment is not safe. There is a security entrance and separate apartment buzzers, but there are still suspicious people trying to sneak in to the apartment. Maple Grove Towers is in a poor location – not within walking distance to a convenience store. The neighborhood is bad and the people in this building are mean and

unfriendly. The rent is not affordable. I hate this place and I would not recommend this place to anyone.

## Appendix 2: Measures for causal attributions

Constructs	Items	Mean	SD	$\alpha$
Product attributions	<i>Positive review</i>	19.59	4.43	0.88
	This apartment is an excellent place			
	This is an outstanding apartment			
	This apartment provides the good features that most people want to have			
	This apartment's condition is good			
	<i>Negative review</i>	19.92	4.86	0.85
	This apartment is a horrible place			
	This is an awful apartment			
	This apartment provides the bad features that most people don't want to have			
	This apartment's condition is poor			
Circumstance attributions	<i>Positive review</i>	15.91	5.44	0.80
	Pat was asked to review this apartment in this manner			
	Pat works for this apartment			
	Pat was hired to write reviews in this manner by this apartment			
	Pat's friends asked him to review this apartment in this manner			
	<i>Negative review</i>	11.93	5.02	0.83
	Pat was asked to review this apartment in this manner			
	Pat works for the competitor apartment			
	Pat was hired to write reviews in this manner by the competitor apartment			
	Pat's friends asked him to review this apartment in this manner			

\*Each item was measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 7 = 'strongly agree'.

## References

- Alreck, P.L. & Settle, R.B. (1995) The importance of word-of-mouth communications to service buyers. *Proceedings of American Marketing Association*, Winter, pp. 188–193.
- Arndt, J. (1967) Role of product-related conversations in the diffusion of a new product. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 4(3), pp. 291–295.
- Bailey, A.A. (2004) Thiscompanysucks.com: the use of the internet in negative consumer-to-consumer articulations. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 10(3), pp. 169–182.

- Bailey, A.A. (2005) Consumer awareness and use of product review websites. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 6(1), available at <http://jiad.org/article71>, accessed 15 May 2008.
- Baumeister, R.F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C. & Vohs, K.D. (2001) Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(4), pp. 323–370.
- Bearden, W.O., Lichtenstein, D.R. & Teel, J.E. (1984) Comparison price, coupon, and brand effects on consumer reactions to retail newspaper advertisements. *Journal of Retailing*, 60(2), pp. 11–34.
- Bickart, B. & Schindler, R.M. (2001) Internet forums as influential sources of consumer information. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 15(3), pp. 31–40.
- Blackshaw, P. (2006) Commentary: consumer-generated media is fragile – don't mess it up, available at [http://adage.com/digital/article.php?article\\_id=111679](http://adage.com/digital/article.php?article_id=111679), accessed 16 September 2006.
- Bone, P.F. (1995) Word-of-mouth effects on short-term and long-term product judgment. *Journal of Business Research*, 32(3), pp. 213–223.
- Brown, J.J. & Reingen, P.H. (1987) Social ties and word-of-mouth referral behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(3), pp. 350–362.
- Bulik, B.S. (2007) Who blogs? Odds are marketers have no idea. *Advertising Age*, 4 June, p. 20.
- Burnkrant, R.E. (1982) Influence of other people on consumer attributions toward brand and person. *Journal of Business Research*, 10(3), pp. 319–338.
- Chatterjee, P. (2001) Online review: do consumers use them? *Advances in Consumer Research*, 28, pp. 129–133.
- Chiou, J.-S. & Cheng, C. (2003) Should a company have message boards on its web sites? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 17(3), pp. 50–61.
- Dellarocas, C. (2003) The digitization of word of mouth: promise and challenges of online feedback mechanisms. *Management Science*, 49(10), pp. 1407–1424.
- Duhan, D.F., Johnson, S.D., Wilcox, J.B. & Harrell, G.D. (1997) Influence on consumer use of word-of-mouth recommendation sources. *Academy of Marketing Science*, 25(4), pp. 283–295.
- Eagly, A.H. & Chaiken, S. (1975) An attribution analysis of the effect of communicator characteristics on opinion change: the case of communicator attractiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32(1), pp. 136–144.
- Fiske, S.T. (1980) Attention and weight in person perception: the impact of negative and extreme behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38(6), pp. 889–906.
- Folkes, V.S. (1988) Recent attribution research in consumer behavior: a review and new directions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(4), pp. 548–565.
- Friestad, M. & Wright, P. (1994) The persuasion knowledge model: how people cope with persuasion attempts. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(1), pp. 1–31.
- Goldsmith, R.E. & Horowitz, D. (2006) Measuring motivations for online opinion seeking. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 6(2), available at <http://jiad.org/article76>, accessed 15 May 2008.
- Granitz, N.A. & Ward, J.C. (1996) Virtual community: a sociocognitive analysis. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 23, pp. 161–166.



- Granovetter, M. (1973) The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, **78**(6), pp. 1360–1380.
- Granovetter, M. (1983) The strength of weak ties: a network theory revisited. *Sociological Theory*, **1**(1), pp. 201–233.
- Greer, J.D. (2003) Evaluating the credibility of online information: a test of source and advertising influence. *Mass Communication & Society*, **6**(1), pp. 11–28.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K.P., Walsh, G. & Gremler, D.D. (2004) Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: what motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the internet. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, **18**(1), pp. 38–52.
- Herr, P.M., Kardes, F.R. & Kim, J. (1991) Effects of word-of mouth and product attribute information on persuasion: an accessibility-diagnostics perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, **17**(4), pp. 454–462.
- Holbrook, M.B. & Batra, R. (1987) Assessing the role of emotions as mediators of consumer responses to advertising. *Journal of Consumer Research*, **14** (December), pp. 404–420.
- Jones, E.E. & Davis, K.E. (1965) From acts to dispositions. *Advances in Experimental Psychology*, **2**, pp. 219–266.
- Kadi, M. (1995) Welcome to Cyberia. *Utne Reader*, **68** (March/April), pp. 57–59.
- Kamins, M.A. & Assael, H. (1987) Two-sided versus one-sided appeals: a cognitive perspective on argumentation, source derogation, and the effect of disconfirming trial on belief change. *Journal of Marketing Research*, **24** (February), pp. 29–39.
- Kelley, H. (1971) *Attribution in Social Interaction*. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.
- Kelley, H. (1973) Processes of causal attribution. *American Psychologist*, **28** (February), pp. 107–128.
- Laczniak, R.N., DeCarlo, T.E. & Ramaswami, S.N. (2001) Consumers' responses to negative word-of-mouth communication: an attribution theory perspective. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, **11**(1), pp. 57–73.
- Lau, G.T. & Ng, S. (2001) Individual and situational factors influencing negative word-of-mouth behaviour. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Science*, **18**(3), pp. 163–178.
- Meyers-Levy, J. (1991) Elaborating on elaboration: the distinction between relational and item-specific elaboration. *Journal of Consumer Research*, **18** (December), pp. 358–367.
- Mizerski, R.W. & Green, S. (1978) An investigation into the causal links between attribution schema and decision-making. *Advances in Consumer Research*, **5**, pp. 126–130.
- Mizerski, R.W. (1982) An attribution explanation of the disproportionate influence of unfavorable information. *Journal of Consumer Research*, **9** (December), pp. 301–310.
- Mizerski, R.W., Golden, L.L. & Kernan, J.B. (1979) The attribution process in consumer decision making. *Journal of Consumer Research*, **6** (September), pp. 123–140.
- Myers, J.H. & Warner, G. (1968) Semantic properties of selected evaluation adjectives. *Journal of Marketing Research*, **5** (November), pp. 409–412.

- Obermiller, C. & Spangenberg, E.R. (1998) Development of a scale to measure consumer skepticism toward advertising. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, **7**(2), pp. 159–186.
- Rifon, N.J., Choi, S.M., Trimble, C.S. & Li, H. (2004) Congruence effects in sponsorship: the mediating role of sponsor credibility and consumer attributions of sponsor motive. *Journal of Advertising*, **33**(1), pp. 30–42.
- Rozin, P. & Royzman, E.B. (2001) Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, **5**(4), pp. 296–320.
- Schindler, R.M. & Bickart, B. (2005) Published ‘word of mouth’: referable, consumer-generated information on the internet, in Haugtvedt, C.P., Machleit, K.A. & Yalch, R. (eds) *Online Consumer Psychology: Understanding and Influencing Consumer Behavior in the Virtual World*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 35–61.
- Sen, S. & Lerman, D. (2007) Why are you telling me this? An examination into negative consumer reviews on the web. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, **21**(4), pp. 76–94.
- Senecal, S. & Nantel, J. (2004) The influence of online product recommendations on consumers’ online choices. *Journal of Retailing*, **80**(2), pp. 159–169.
- Skowronski, J.J. & Carlston, D.E. (1987) Social judgment and social memory: the role of cue diagnosticity in negativity, positivity, and extremity biases. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **52**(4), pp. 689–699.
- Skowronski, J.J. & Carlston, D.E. (1989) Negativity and extremity biases in impression formation: a review of explanations. *Psychological Bulletin*, **105**(1), pp. 131–142.
- Sun, T., Youn, S., Wu, G. & Kuntaraporn, M. (2006) Online word-of-mouth (or mouse): an exploration of its antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, **11**(4), available at <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol11/issue4/sun.html>, accessed 15 May 2008.
- Thorson, K.S. & Rodgers, S. (2006) Relationships between blogs as eWOM and interactivity, perceived interactive and parasocial interaction. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, **6**(2), available at <http://jiad.org/article79>, accessed 15 May 2008.
- Weinberger, M.G. & Dillon, W.R. (1980) The effects of unfavorable product rating information. *Advances in Consumer Research*, **7**, pp. 528–532.
- Werde, B. (2003) The web diarist as pitchman, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/27/technology/circuits/27blog.html?ex=1158552000&en=85f2f6ec883aa131&ei=5070>, accessed 16 September 2006.
- Wiener, J.L. & Mowen, J.C. (1986) Source credibility: on the independent effects of trust and expertise. *Advances in Consumer Research*, **13**(1), pp. 306–310.
- Wright, P.L. (1973) The cognitive processes mediating acceptance of advertising. *Journal of Marketing Research*, **10** (February), pp. 53–62.
- Xue, F. & Phelps, J.E. (2004) Internet-facilitated consumer-to-consumer communication: the moderating role of receiver characteristics. *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, **1**(2), pp. 121–136.

## About the authors

Mira Lee is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Advertising, Public Relations, and Retailing at Michigan State University. She received her PhD in Mass Communication from the University of Minnesota. Her research is in the area of interactive advertising and consumer information processing. Her research has appeared in the *Journal of Advertising*, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, *American Behavioral Scientist* and *Journal of Interactive Advertising*.

Seounmi Youn is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Marketing Communication at Emerson College. She received her PhD in Mass Communication from the University of Minnesota. Her research interests focus on interactive advertising effectiveness and adolescents' online socialisation, specifically privacy and security concerns. She has published papers in *Communication Research*, the *Journal of Advertising Research*, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, *Psychology & Marketing*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* and *Social Marketing Quarterly*. She has also co-authored chapters in *Sports Marketing and the Psychology of Marketing Communication and Advertising, Promotion, and New Media*.

Address correspondence to: Mira Lee, Assistant Professor, Department of Advertising, Public Relations & Retailing, Michigan State University, 324 Communication Arts & Science, East Lansing, MI 48824

Email: miralee@msu.edu

Copyright of International Journal of Advertising is the property of World Advertising Research Center Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.