



Electronic word of mouth 2.0 (eWOM 2.0) – The evolution of eWOM research in the new age

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ABSTRACT

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has evolved dramatically in the past 20 years, and is substantially shaping modern consumer behaviors and altering marketing management dynamics across both consumer and industry markets. We call this evolution “eWOM 2.0”, as captured in this Special Issue. Ten research articles advance our understanding in how eWOM drives the continued development of digital communication across B2B and B2C sectors. This Special Issue further contributes to understanding the constantly evolving landscape of eWOM research and practice, and points to the future directions for eWOM investigation and usage. In this editorial, we first outline the reasoning behind this special issue, followed by the summary of the articles, and the reflections on eWOM 2.0. We conclude by outlining future research opportunities that will propel the field further forward.

1. Introduction

Word of mouth (WOM) as a marketing concept was introduced in the 1950s (Brooks, 1957), and has been reinvigorated in the Internet age (Dellarocas, 2003). Two decades ago, in their seminal article, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explored how the Internet age had allowed individual consumers to engage in electronic word of mouth (eWOM) via consumer-opinion platforms. Despite these early efforts and the ongoing attention devoted to the examination of eWOM by both academics and practitioners, there have been renewed calls for a more nuanced understanding of eWOM in order to maximize its business value (Babić Rosario et al., 2020). These calls have been legitimized in light of ever-emerging and -evolving phenomena in the market – technological advancements, consumers’ attitudes toward marketing activities and online information, rising privacy concerns in the digital age, amongst others.

The evolution of Web 2.0 technologies in particular has changed the landscape of marketing communications across Business-to-Consumer, Business-to-Business and Consumer-to-Consumer (Liu, Jayawardhena and Shaalan, 2022). With the advent of text, voice, and video-based

social media, eWOM has increased multi-fold. Previously eWOM tended to be one-to-one communication, however, has now evolved into many-to-one and even many-to-many interactions, leading to the evolution of eWOM 2.0. Such changes pose interesting interactions among customers, organizations and other stakeholders involved in eWOM 2.0.

Against this backdrop, this Special Issue contains ten articles and focuses on exploring the latest developments in eWOM research and practice beyond the prototype developed almost two decades ago (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This Special Issue addresses the following questions: 1) What are the implications of the expansive and rapid changes driven by the latest digital technological evolution?; and 2) What are the eWOM practices in the modern marketplace for consumers, marketers’ and other stakeholders. Given the rapid developments and wider implications of the topic in an information age, the articles in this Special Issue not only reflect the current development of the eWOM phenomenon, but also capture the latest eWOM practices.

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2. Special Issue highlight: What is happening in eWOM research and practice?

This Special Issue captures the modern view of researchers in addressing the big issues in the information age in order to advance our understanding of eWOM in digital marketing. Ten research papers contribute to two research streams: assessing the eWOM research landscape (Bartschat et al., 2022; Delre and Luffarelli, 2023; Donthu, Kumar, Pattnaik, & Pandey, 2021; Verma et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023) and identifying new eWOM phenomena (Arabiah et al., 2022; Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2023; Lim et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022). In what follows, we highlight the contributions of each study. In Fig. 1, we visualize how the Special Issue articles build on some influential past works in eWOM to advance the field towards emergent sub-themes, such as eWOM in the metaverse.

2.1. Assessing the eWOM research landscape

2.1.1. Beyond the eWOM research landscape – The past, present and future of eWOM research

Bibliometric analysis is a valuable tool for gaining insights into research patterns, trends, and characteristics within a specific subject area (Donthu, Kumar, Pattnaik & Pandey, 2021). In the case of eWOM, the analysis conducted by Donthu, Kumar, Pandey et al. (2021) focuses on publication trends, methodologies, research focuses, and thematic clusters. The growing significance of eWOM makes this analysis timely and relevant. Donthu, Kumar, Pandey et al. (2021) identify that a significant number of eWOM publications originates from North America and Europe, aligning with the increasing impact of the internet and social networks. The analysis also reveals that mixed research designs, combining conceptual and empirical approaches, dominate the field. Although surveys are the primary method for data collection, alternative sources are used in a smaller number of studies. The research in the field primarily focuses on theory building, reflecting the evolving nature of eWOM.

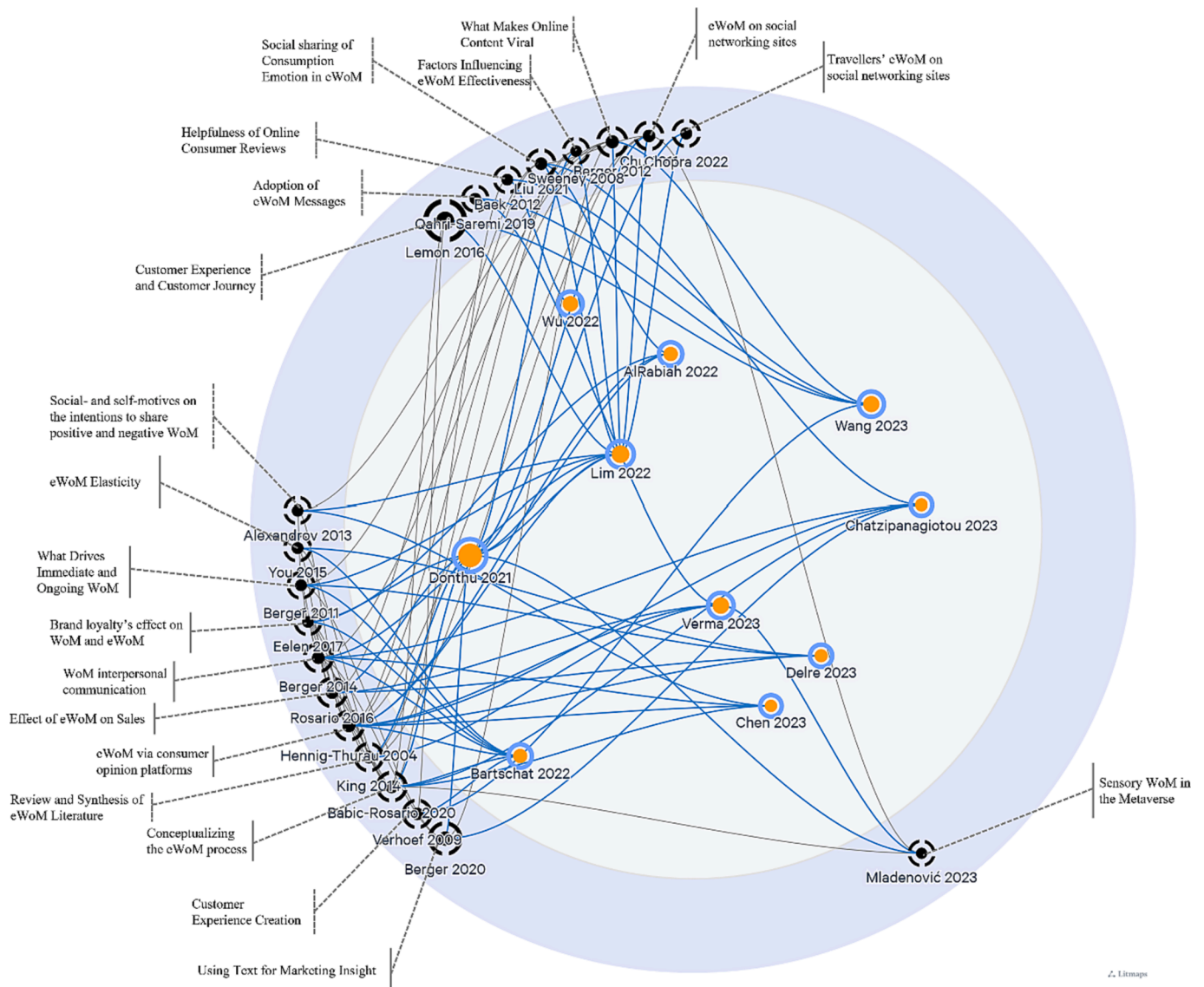


Fig. 1. How the Special Issue Articles Bridge the Past and Future of eWOM Research. *Notes.* Articles are indicated by nodes; orange nodes represent Special Issue articles. Unbroken lines represent associations between the articles, and blue lines indicate associations with the Special Issue articles. The momentum (i.e., citations of articles adjusted for recency) increases along the diagonal from bottom left to top right of the map. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

Keywords co-occurrence analysis can be used to identify major topics explored by authors in eWOM research including negative WOM consumer behavior and trust WOM in social networks online reviews and ratings brand loyalty social media service failure and recovery corporate social responsibility (CSR) user-generated content and viral marketing service quality and services marketing. Notably four prominent research fronts are shaping the current discourse: determinants of eWOM eWOM in the hospitality industry cognitive aspects of eWOM and service failure and recovery. In summary Donthu, Kumar, Pandey, et al.'s (2021) bibliometric analysis provides valuable insights into the development of the eWOM field drawing attention to publication trends and contributions from various stakeholders. Their analysis identifies the prevailing methodologies research focuses and thematic clusters offering guidance to scholars navigating the topic of eWOM. The analysis concludes by presenting research directions that can guide future investigations in this dynamic field.

2.1.2. Beyond online reviews – Expansion of the communication scope

EWOM is traditionally viewed as a form of customer-to-customer (C2C) communication due to its voluntary and non-commercial nature (Libai et al., 2010). Historically, word of mouth was driven by face-to-face interactions (Engel et al., 1969). However, the advent of digital technologies opened avenues, such as internet opinion sites (e.g., Amazon, Feefo, TripAdvisor, and Yelp) and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter), through which consumers could engage in disseminating and receiving WOM. These different forms of WOM vary greatly with regard to how consumers connect, interact, and rely on them (Berger, 2014; Berger & Iyengar, 2013). Bartschat et al. (2022), in this special issue, argue that it is insufficient simply to categorize WOM as online or offline, and a more profound understanding of its diverse functions is required. Thus, a need has arisen to capture how consumers traverse the boundaries of offline and online domains to identify the information they seek.

The digital domain has revolutionized product information searches. Bartschat et al. (2022) in this Special Issue conceptualize and empirically test a framework that simultaneously captures product and consumer characteristics and specific WOM-type resources as determinants of how consumers use face-to-face interactions, internet opinion sites, and social media platforms based on WOM. Using a quota sample of more than 2,000 consumers from the Kantar Lightspeed GMI panel, the authors find that customers juggle between WOM types, which involves cost-benefit analysis, and choose between these platforms carefully, rather than arbitrarily. Moreover, customers regularly use a number of different types of WOM platforms as complementary to, rather than substitutes of, each other. The power of the face-to-face type of WOM was also observed, as it remained one of the first-used sources for product information, rather than the commonly held notion of social media searches being customers' primary methods. With the continuously evolving nature of digital WOM, this remains an area of fruitful inquiry for the future.

2.1.3. Beyond a bunch of online reviews – The power of big data

The cumulative reviews on [Yelp.com](https://www.yelp.com) reached 265.29 million in the U.S. at the end of 2023, and [Yelp's](https://www.yelp.com) website visitors turned out above 141.4 million (Elad, 2024). There is no doubt that the increased eWOM messages generates a pool of big data. Previous research is replete with studies that focus on the various facets of online reviews. For instance, some researchers focus on diagnostic features, such as review length (Ghasemaghaei et al., 2018; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010) and valence (Purnawirawan et al., 2015; Zablocki et al., 2019), whereas others examine the affective aspects attached to reviews using a variety of data analytical approaches (Filiari et al., 2021; Salehan & Kim, 2016). Another stream of research investigates online reviews and their social contagion effect by considering what drives the perceptions related to review popularity and helpfulness (Akpınar & Berger, 2017; Wang et al., 2019). Reviews are not examined by readers just for their affective or

social information, but holistically. Thus, capturing the simultaneous and integrative influence of the various facets of online reviews is warranted.

Online customer reviews offer multifaceted insights relating to customer experiences and, in turn, drive the future purchases of other, potential customers. However, the domain remains somewhat fragmented. In this Special Issue, Wang et al. (2023) integrate sensory, cognitive, affective, and social information that can be gleaned from reviews on Amazon. The researchers provide useful insights into how the various information types that are captured within these reviews can influence the diagnostic value that other customers perceive. Using a large-scale dataset of Amazon product reviews, the authors identified four product categories (i.e., Appliances, Beauty, Office Products, and Software) that contained 124,008 reviews of 27,745 products and show how contextuality and valence within a review further moderate the diagnostic value. Examinations such as this, which investigate the multidimensional nature of the information contained within online reviews, will offer rich insights in moving the field forward.

2.1.4. Beyond the snapshot of product development – Consumer reviews and product life cycle

Although there is a well-established body of literature on eWOM, relatively little attention has been paid to how eWOM evolves over a product's life cycle. Understanding how eWOM changes over the course of a product, the consumption of which can itself be expected to change drastically over time (e.g., movies and music videos), is even more important, since the marketing related to the product needs to be tailored accordingly. For example, the existing literature highlights that the impact of eWOM on the box office performance (i.e., sales) of movies in the first week of launching is different to that in later weeks (e.g., Fan et al., 2021; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2012; Marchand et al., 2017). Furthermore, how consumers react to eWOM and how they provide or create it can also change over the course of a product's life cycle (Li & Hitt, 2008).

In this context, Delre and Luffarelli (2023) observe in this Special Issue that there are, somewhat surprisingly, only a few studies investigating the over-time changes in eWOM, particularly those focusing on the entertainment sector. In addressing this gap, Delre and Luffarelli (2023) examine the temporal dynamics of eWOM over the life cycle of movies, especially in relation to their box office performance. Importantly, their statistical model takes into account that when individuals read an online movie review or visit a site to write a product review, they are also exposed to previous eWOM in the process. By analysing data relating to 3,000 movies from the United States and Canada, the researchers shed light on how current and cumulative eWOM valence and volume interact over time. They also show that the positive effects of cumulative eWOM volume and valence on box office sales decline quickly over a movie's life cycle. The paper also provides some useful additional analyses to account for the influence of pre-released eWOM on the first week of release, as well as adding further strength to their analyses through robustness checks and alternative model specifications. The study has implications for marketers working on promoting movies, particularly in terms of managing what the authors call "the anticipation effect" (i.e., whereby sales are concentrated at the beginning of a release without subsequent improvement in overall performance).

2.1.5. Beyond information trustworthiness – The role of culture and platform type in eWOM credibility

There are certain subfields in marketing that have advanced rapidly, accumulating a rich compendium of theoretical and empirical insights over the years. This is particularly true of eWOM research (Donthu Kumar, Pattnaik, and Pandey, 2021). In parallel, meta-analytic approaches to synthesizing and evaluating the progress made in marketing research have been gaining in both popularity and relevance (Eisend, 2015; Grewal et al., 2018).

Given this background, it would be a timely enterprise to employ *meta*-analyses to chart and evaluate the course of empirical research on eWOM published in the past decade. Verma et al. (2023) rise to the challenge in this Special Issue. Deploying a *meta*-analysis of 51 studies that include 124 effect sizes, Verma et al. investigate the antecedents, consequences, and moderators of eWOM credibility in the current body of literature. Their paper provides a useful overview of previous works of a similar vein and builds on their insights. Accordingly, the authors systematically searched for and selected key works on the topic of eWOM. Adopting a dual-processing theoretical basis (i.e., the Elaboration Likelihood Model; Petty et al., 1986), their investigation finds that review- and reviewer-related factors have a significant positive influence on eWOM credibility, whereas purchase intention, eWOM adoption, and product-related attitudes are found to be significant consequences of eWOM credibility. Their analysis also finds evidence for the moderating roles of culture, type of product, and platform type. The authors also conduct additional analyses to establish the robustness of their statistical model, including a resampling procedure based on Higgins and Thompson (2004), and further moderation analyses, the results of which can be accessed via the web appendices. Some notable takeaways from this paper include the observation that there is still only limited research examining visual eWOM in the form of images and videos (as opposed to written eWOM), and the role of immersive technologies (e.g., augmented or virtual reality) on eWOM is yet to be fully explored.

2.2. Identifying new eWOM research phenomena

2.2.1. Beyond “positive and negative statements” – The diversity of eWOM communication

The conceptualization of eWOM 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” is still widely acknowledged (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). However, as an ever-changing online phenomenon, eWOM messages can take various forms (e.g., text, image, or video).

Wu et al. (2022) in this Special Issue capture the latest trend of emojis being widely used in eWOM across various social media communications. Beyond the “words” that are used in eWOM communication, these researchers focus on the impact having multiple meanings in terms of review helpfulness and highlight the boundary condition of its effect on perceived helpfulness by revealing the underlying mechanisms. Through two experiments, Wu et al. (2022) show that emojis with multiple meanings reduce the perceived helpfulness of eWOM, although users’ expertise with emojis moderates such effects. They also find that processing fluency plays an irreplaceable mediating role, which explains the relationship between multiple meanings embedded in emojis and perceived review helpfulness. With the ever-increasing use of emojis in online communication, Wu et al. (2022) innovatively shed light on the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions of the effective use of emojis in eWOM communication. As one of the first studies to focus on this new form of eWOM (Maiberger et al., 2023), the findings of Wu et al. (2022) also capture the increasing use of emojis as an ever-developing new trend in eWOM communication and highlight the effectiveness of emoji use in online communications.

2.2.2. Beyond the consumer decision-making process – Information-shaped consumer behaviors

The traditional view is that eWOM takes place throughout the consumer decision-making process (e.g., pre-purchase eWOM-seeking and post-purchase eWOM-giving). Although mobile technology dominates today’s market, it is now much easier for consumers to access and/or be fed an abundance of consumption-related information at any moment in their daily lives. Consumer behavior has also been shaped dramatically due to information overloading. Consumers’ eWOM-engaging behaviors (e.g., interactions between different parties regarding different

information at different points in time) is becoming increasingly diverse (Liu et al., 2020) and the psychological mechanisms behind such behaviors are also different (Tran et al., 2021a,b).

eWOM was traditionally seen as the communication provided by the eWOM sender after a purchase to the eWOM receiver, who considered the information before deciding whether to make a purchase (Lim et al., 2022). However, eWOM-giving and -receiving is actually a much more complicated phenomenon (see, for example, Liu et al., 2020). For instance, Babić Rosario et al. (2020) conceptualize the stages of eWOM creation, exposure, and evaluation that eWOM senders and receivers go through and emphasize that these do not have to be linear. Specifically, consumers may shift between the stages and roles identified. Nonetheless, eWOM has rarely been considered outside the traditional constellation of eWOM-giving in the post-purchase and eWOM-receiving in the pre-purchase stages. Moreover, considering the complex phenomenon eWOM often represents, past research did not sufficiently acknowledge that purchase decisions are not always made by individuals; rather, they represent joint decisions as we can find them in online group buying. Online group buying requires individuals who are interested in a purchasing deal to coordinate among themselves in order to reach their purchase goal (e.g., price reduction), which is activated once a specific threshold of purchase numbers has been reached (Wu et al., 2015). Famous marketplaces for online group buying have substantial active customer bases (e.g., Groupon: 25 million; Pinduoduo: 788 million) (Chow et al., 2022). However, what role does eWOM-giving play in a pre-purchase situation and particularly when online group buying is concerned?

Lim et al. (2022) in this Special Issue address these questions and show that eWOM-giving in the pre-purchase stage is an important phenomenon for online group buying because consumers want to help each other and share the information they have. This often represents an altruistic act because consumers do not necessarily expect individual benefits from sharing their information. Furthermore, pre-purchase eWOM-giving in online group buying in terms of affective messages and larger discount prices is more likely when utilitarian (e.g., personal technology) rather than hedonic (e.g., travel) products are concerned (Filiari, Acikgoz & Du, 2023). Taken together, these findings underline the importance of considering eWOM beyond eWOM-receiving in the pre-purchase and eWOM-giving in the post-purchase stages, as well as acknowledging the nuanced roles eWOM-giving has in group buying decisions.

2.2.3. Beyond consumers’ product/service recommendations – A multi-stakeholder and interdisciplinary view of eWOM

Naturally, consumers are key players in eWOM communication and conversations are usually around the products or services of a particular brand. However, beyond real-life consumers, professional reviewers and influencers (see Bzzagent.com) increasingly engage in eWOM activities (Stubb & Colliander, 2019). Traditionally, eWOM was considered a form of communication between consumers, meaning that it is deliberate, voluntary, and non-commercial (Libai et al., 2010). However, as the influence of eWOM on consumer behavior becomes stronger, businesses are increasingly interested in exploring other eWOM sources. Today, (social media) influencers are a very important eWOM source. Influencers represent opinion leaders who provide and distribute eWOM about brands, products, and services (Casaló et al., 2020). Influencers have a strong impact on the purchase decisions of consumers around the world, including major emerging markets such as Brazil and India, as consumers tend to perceive influencers as trustworthy sources (Statista, 2023). Thus, marketing managers increasingly make use of the broad networks influencers have by collaborating with them in influencer marketing (Sundermann & Raabe, 2019). Indeed, it has been proven that influencer marketing can lead to positive returns on investment in certain conditions (Leung et al., 2022).

However, what characteristics differentiate more successful influencers from less successful ones? Alrabiah et al. (2022) in this Special

Issue address this question by focusing particularly on the role of social self-disclosure in consumers' responses to influencers and promotions. Their findings show that social self-disclosure is not necessarily favorable. In particular, consumers perceive both high degrees of depth (e.g., the intimacy of disclosed information) and breadth (e.g., the amount of shared personal information) in social self-disclosure as inappropriate when social media influencers promote a product, which ultimately reduces trust and purchase intention. Post context (sponsored vs. non-sponsored) and intensity of social media usage by the audience act as boundary conditions, suggesting that social self-disclosure may nonetheless be favorable in specific situations, such as in the case of non-sponsored posts seen by lower-intensity social media users. Taken together, these findings help us better understand how consumers view social media influencers and the underlying relationship mechanisms; that is, consumers respond to social media influencers in the contexts investigated more as they would salespersons, rather than friends.

2.2.4. Beyond fake reviews – The ethicality of eWOM communication

The introduction of ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence (AI) applications in the consumer market has underlined the need to consider the ethicality marketing practices and revolutionized eWOM communication dynamics (Law et al., 2023). As the information-generation process in the digital age becomes increasingly unclear (information generation parties, timeliness, authenticity, etc.), the ethicality and credibility of eWOM communication have been emphasized in particular. In a competitive market, some businesses commit “review fraud,” and creating fake reviews and eWOM messages across different media for themselves or their competitors has become the most significant ethical issue in eWOM communication (Luca & Zervas, 2016). Justifiably, in today's society, ethicality is attracting increasing attention in relation to both business practices and internet use.

In their work, Chen et al. (2023) in this Special Issue focus on the phenomenon of incentivized eWOM. Against a background in which marketing managers frequently provide incentives to customers in order to encourage their eWOM-sharing, Chen et al. conducted three experiments to examine the effectiveness of different incentives (economic vs. altruistic) on customers' eWOM-sharing intentions. Chen et al. (2023) show that altruistic incentives are more likely to trigger consumers' eWOM-sharing than economic motivations. Chen et al. also reveal the mediating roles of customers' perceptions of warmth and skepticism toward the relationship between incentive type and eWOM-sharing intention. Taking a managerial perspective, Chen et al. also focus on identifying the target customers of incentivized eWOM programs and evaluating the effectiveness of various such programs. More precisely, compared to those who are with fellow consumers, altruistic incentives are more effective with customers who are alone. However, if customers have a weak tie with the company, altruistic incentives are less effective than economic incentives in eliciting consumers' eWOM-sharing intention. Chen et al. echo the importance of identifying an ethical bottom line in eWOM communication and business ethics and of using an effective eWOM strategy while maintaining that core aim.

2.2.5. Beyond C2C communication – eWOM in the business-to-business (B2B) context

Ever since the seminal conceptualization of eWOM by Hennig-Thurau and colleagues in 2004, there have been many refinements, which have primarily focused on the B2C context (e.g., Babić Rosario et al., 2020). This emphasis is to be expected, as eWOM embodies the dynamic spread of consumer sentiment, endorsements, and assessments in digital domains. However, considering the significant differences in the B2B context, such as the number of individuals involved in purchases, the buying process itself, and the duration of buying cycles and decisions (Hartmann et al., 2018), there is a need for a fresh conceptualization. The inherent contextual differences also give rise to distinctions in eWOM, including its nature, content, length, direction, dimensions, drivers, potential impacts, receivers' objectives, target

audience, and even the viewing environment (Iankova et al., 2019).

Employing a three-stage systematic literature review, Chatzipanagiotou et al.'s (2023) insightful inquiry reveals a significant research gap in the realm of eWOM pertaining to B2B contexts in this Special Issue. The resulting work suggests an innovative framework based on stakeholder perspectives to elucidate online B2B communicative networks. Chatzipanagiotou et al.'s work in this regard is interesting, because they delve into the intricate nature of B2B environments. They categorize three specific networks in this regard: social, organizational, and external. These networks overlap with each other, and the resulting intersections give rise to seven distinct forms of eWOM. Their work contributes a refined conceptualization of eWOM that acknowledges its contextual adaptability, empowering organizations to navigate relationships with diverse eWOM actors in the digital realm more effectively. The authors also provide a forward-looking research agenda, fostering continued scholarly progress and practical applications in the domain of B2B eWOM. Overall, this scholarly work fills a significant research gap, offering valuable insights and paving the way for future investigations and industry practice.

3. Introducing eWOM 2.0

EWOM originates from the concept of WOM that was introduced in the middle of the 20th century (Brooks, 1957) and refers to any “oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product, or a service” (Arndt, 1967, p. 3). When WOM was introduced into marketing practices, it often focused on an informal advertising and promotional tactic to boost new product penetration (see Brooks, 1957; Katz, 1957). The allure of WOM began to be recognized by practitioners and consumers, and WOM activities were observed throughout the decision-making process in the 1960 s and 1970 s, from the triggering of needs to post-purchase reflection (see Liu et al., 2022). In the following decades, however, increasing numbers of academics and practitioners revealed the underside of WOM communication, highlighting the latent harm that negative WOM may bring to the seller network (see Richins, 1983, 1987). The penetration and extension of WOM marketing reveals several important features of WOM activities. Beyond complimenting and/or criticizing products or services, WOM was seen as an informal exchange of positive or negative information between two parties and drew on non-commercial evaluations (Silverman, 2001; Westbrook, 1987). Among the definitions of WOM, scholars stress that it involves communication- and conversation-based activities and emphasize the two-way interactive nature of WOM communication between information-givers and -receivers (Liu & Jayawardhena, 2023).

Stepping into the 21st century, internet technology revolutionized people's lives, WOM communication started transferring to the online environment, and Web 2.0 reset the landscape of WOM activities. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) first conceptualized eWOM communication 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” (p. 39). The definition by Hennig-Thurau et al. emphasizes the static informational features, rather than the interactive nature of digital communication. Compared to offline WOM, this shift of focus was reflected in the volume of the information and the information conveyance mechanism (i.e., sender-platform-receiver) (Liu & Jayawardhena, 2023). With the interactive nature of the latest technologies, eWOM practices further emphasize “interaction” rather than “information.”

Adhering to the essence of WOM communication and focusing on the interactive nature of the latest eWOM practices, electronic word of mouth 2.0 (eWOM 2.0) is introduced here: *eWOM 2.0 communication refers to digital interactions occurring between consumers and various stakeholders (e.g., including brands, experts, and fellow consumers), which are initiated by consumer-generated online content concerning a product,*

service, or brand. Here, in eWOM 2.0, the emphasis is given to the interactions and conversations that are triggered by product-, service-, or brand-related information. eWOM 2.0 goes beyond one-directional behavior (i.e., eWOM-seeking, -transmitting, and -giving) and emphasizes the dynamics between the various parties involved in the interactions, which largely depend on the eWOM media. Different eWOM media offer distinctive structures, interfaces, and user bases, thereby supporting various types of eWOM-elicited interactions (Liu et al., 2021).

4. Future research directions in eWOM 2.0

The new conceptualization of eWOM 2.0 showcases the interactive nature of eWOM communication, focusing on the dynamics between the different parties through that communication. However, academic research usually lags the pace of technological innovation and marketing practice. Based on the fresh conceptualization and practices captured in eWOM 2.0 outlined in this paper, a series of important inquiries emerged that urgently need to be addressed by academic researchers. We categorize these inquiries into five themes: technological forecasting and eWOM 2.0; eWOM 2.0 in the B2B market; business ethics and eWOM 2.0; consumer interactions in eWOM 2.0; and an eWOM 2.0-elicited digital revolution. We summarize the future research directions of eWOM 2.0 in Table 1 and elaborate them below.

First, in this Special Issue, we highlight the significance of analyzing big data through the use of various tools (e.g., social listening, lexical analysis, and statistical programming) that allow academics and practitioners to understand the hidden clues that consumers leave in the online environment and to interpret the deeper meanings behind consumers' words (Wang et al., 2023). The availability of big data also facilitates applications of machine learning in eWOM research and practices (Aakash & Gupta, 2022). As AI is increasingly being applied in the consumer market, understanding how "word of machine" reshapes consumers' information adoption and decision-making processes is crucial (Longoni & Cian, 2022). Although snapshots of eWOM behavior can be captured through big data, how the interactive nature of eWOM 2.0 is demonstrated in big data needs further exploration. More specifically, the types of interactive behaviors (e.g., eWOM replies and eWOM-triggered conversations) and the predictive power of such behaviors need to be further examined. Future research should also further explore how such techniques enable businesses in the sustainable identification of useful information that serves specific analytical purposes and enlightens business decisions.

Second, B2B endeavors increasingly embrace social media channels, including social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), blog sites (e.g., TypePad), social stream sites (e.g., app.net), professional networking sites (e.g., LinkedIn), review sites (e.g., Glassdoor), and video sites (e.g., Vimeo) (Cartwright et al., 2021). EWOM has also been observed in industrial marketing and plays an increasingly important role in the selling-purchasing mechanism in the B2B marketplace. The dynamics of the interactivities in the B2B market are significantly different from those in the consumer market and Chatzipanagiotou et al. (2023) emphasize the uniqueness and complexity of eWOM practices in the B2B domain. Research that further conceptualizes, theorizes, and contextualizes eWOM 2.0 in the B2B market is particularly important (Cartwright et al., 2022). Longitudinal studies also have the potential to further explore the effects of eWOM 2.0 throughout the customer journey in the B2B market.

Third, in terms of business ethics, a series of important questions remain underexplored, such as how ethicality-related eWOM influences consumers' perceptions and brands' performance, how eWOM enhances the effectiveness of brands' CSR activities and ethical practices, and how media owners and policy makers address and prevent vicious competition through eWOM (Chu et al., 2020). From the perspective of cyber- and techno-ethics, eWOM communication also draws attention to various ethical concerns. For example, eWOM messages as digital

Table 1

Future research directions for eWOM 2.0.

Future Research Directions	Potential Research Questions
Technological forecasting and eWOM 2.0	How does AI affect and shape consumers' eWOM 2.0 behaviors? How does eWOM 2.0 advance the incorporation of interactive technology in marketing communications? What are the mechanisms and paradigms of eWOM 2.0 practices? How could eWOM 2.0 be implemented in service robots to improve the customer experience? How do service robots affect consumers' eWOM 2.0 communication, and vice versa? How does interaction triggered by eWOM 2.0 reshape consumers' information adoption and decision-making process? How is the interactive nature of eWOM 2.0 demonstrated and captured using big data? How do eWOM 2.0-triggered interactive behaviors (eWOM replies, eWOM-triggered conversations, etc.) shape consumers' purchase and evaluation? How can the effectiveness of eWOM 2.0 be measured? How will the enhanced transparency and security of blockchain technologies influence the nature of eWOM 2.0 behaviors? How will immersive technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) be used to create more engaging and personalized eWOM 2.0 experiences?
eWOM 2.0 in the B2B market	How do practices of eWOM 2.0 vary across B2B, B2C, C2C, and B2B2C markets? What are the mechanisms of eWOM 2.0 that shape B2B communication? How does eWOM 2.0 communication work throughout the customer journey in the B2B market? How does eWOM 2.0 facilitate digital servitization in the B2B market? How do omnichannel management capabilities affect the eWOM 2.0 communication, vice versa?
Business ethics and eWOM 2.0	How do data protection and privacy legislation affect eWOM 2.0 practices and perceptions across different cultures? How do ethicality-related eWOM 2.0 interactions influence consumers' perceptions and brands' performance? How does eWOM 2.0 enhance the effectiveness of brands' CSR activities and ethical practices? How do media owners and policy makers address and prevent vicious competition through eWOM 2.0 communication? How will businesses avoid bias in the use of eWOM 2.0 technologies? How will businesses avoid the spread of misinformation through eWOM 2.0? What steps can they take to verify the accuracy? How can eWOM 2.0 facilitated by new technologies affect marginalized, or vulnerable consumers? How could eWOM 2.0 facilitated by new technologies be used to manipulate or deceive consumers? What ethical implications does AI-generated eWOM 2.0 content have?
Consumer interactions in eWOM 2.0	How does eWOM 2.0 affect consumer behaviors and experiences throughout the decision-making process? How does eWOM 2.0 contribute to consumer loyalty-building with a business, brand, or platform? How does eWOM 2.0 facilitate or ease the consumer resistance mechanism? How does eWOM 2.0 shape consumers' autonomy and affect well-being?

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Future Research Directions	Potential Research Questions
	How does eWOM 2.0 integrate with the other digital marketing tactics of a brand to enrich the consumers' digital experience with the brand?
	How does eWOM 2.0 contribute to value co-creation in B2C and/or C2C interactions? How do individual differences shape consumer involvement in eWOM 2.0 practices? How do different consumer groups (e.g., Generation Z, Silver Generation etc.) engage in eWOM 2.0 differently?
EWOM 2.0-elicited digital revolution	How does eWOM 2.0 facilitate the development of digitalization across different disciplines (digital human resource management, digital finance, digital politics, etc.)? How do eWOM 2.0 practices evolve in the tourism and hospitality industry and shape trends in the industry? How does human-technology interaction shape consumers' eWOM 2.0 behaviors? Which role does AI-generated content play in eWOM 2.0? Beyond the consumer market, how does eWOM 2.0 shape stakeholder-specific behavior (investors, employees, suppliers, etc.)?

footprints left by consumers raise privacy concerns (Liu et al., 2022; Nam et al., 2020). From a business ethics standpoint, the dark side of eWOM 2.0 raises ethical concerns regarding its potential to disproportionately affect marginalized or vulnerable consumers. Additionally, there is an ethical dimension to the susceptibility of eWOM 2.0, facilitated by new technologies, to be exploited for manipulative or deceptive purposes by businesses. Aggressive eWOM conversations (eWOM 2.0) could also trigger online bullying (Israeli et al., 2019). As the conceptualization of eWOM emphasizes interactive communication, it is suggested that future research could also investigate eWOM 2.0 from the perspectives of consumer, business, and cyber ethics. In this Special Issue, Chen et al. (2023) reveal the ethical issues in eWOM communication and consider potential culture-specific eWOM practices. This should perhaps remind future researchers to keep a close eye on the cultural elements when investigating eWOM 2.0 practices.

Fourth, digital media disseminates eWOM and facilitates online interaction, yet research on eWOM media/platforms remains fragmented. Early eWOM research tended either to focus on online review sites and investigate the antecedents and outcomes of review-based eWOM (e.g., Gretzel & Yoo, 2008) or to emphasize brands' virtual communities (e.g., Facebook fan pages), in which social identity is key (Dholakia et al., 2004). Media differences in respect of eWOM activities, consumers' eWOM media preferences, and cross-media eWOM engagement are underexplored (Liu et al., 2021). The introduction of eWOM 2.0 further reveals the media-specific interactions given the various parties involved on different platforms. More specifically, the continued technological development and changes in consumer trends catalyze the emergence of new social media platforms, such as video-based social networking sites (e.g., TikTok and YouTube), photo-based social networking sites (e.g., Instagram and Pinterest), multimedia mobile applications (e.g., Snapchat), and alternative approaches to content sharing, such as temporary sharing (e.g., Instagram Stories), live streaming (e.g., Facebook Live), and photo filters (e.g., Snapchat's sponsored filter) (Roy et al., 2019). The interactions elicited on different platforms are distinctive and we urge pioneering researchers to further investigate the effectiveness of eWOM 2.0 using the latest functions on new platforms.

Fifth, eWOM 2.0 emphasizes the interactive nature of eWOM communication and focuses on consumers' post-sharing and -receiving

behaviors (Izogo et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2019). Therefore, future research should focus on how eWOM 2.0 affects consumer behaviors throughout the decision-making process and how such eWOM-triggered interactions contribute to consumers' loyalty-building. The side effects of eWOM 2.0 interactions are also unclear and future research could examine how eWOM 2.0 shapes consumers' autonomy and affects well-being. Meanwhile, the kind of role eWOM 2.0 plays in digital marketing practices and how such interactions contribute to the customer experience are underexplored. Given the interactive nature of eWOM 2.0, future research could further unpack the value co-creation mechanism across different markets (Aker et al., 2023). Beyond co-creation, how eWOM 2.0 reflects and captures consumers' digital footprint throughout the customer journey is particularly important and needs further exploration. Furthermore, different consumer groups may have distinct attitudes and approaches towards online information and technology (e.g., Generation Z vs. Silver Generation) (Liu et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2022). Therefore, future research should investigate how different consumer groups engage in eWOM 2.0 differently.

Finally, moving even further from the consumers' perspective, recent observations suggest that eWOM 2.0 communication involves different parties and has an impact on multiple stakeholders, such as current and prospective employees (Stamolampros et al., 2019), suppliers (Tóth et al., 2022), competitors (Lee et al., 2022), and local communities (Hanks et al., 2022). In addition to the propensity towards digital marketing, digitalization has accelerated the transformation of various disciplines. The power of eWOM has also been recognized across different disciplines, such as digital finance (Calderon-Monge & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2023), digital human resource management (Osburg et al., 2020), and 'digital politics' (Liu & Jayawardhena, 2023). In addition, this Special Issue shows that the tourism and hospitality industry (e.g., Alrabiah et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2023) has been heavily reliant on eWOM practices. It is important to develop industry-specific insights and demonstrate the latest eWOM 2.0 practices. Future research on eWOM 2.0 should take alternative stakeholders' perspectives and/or investigate interdisciplinary phenomena led by eWOM information and interactions.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Hongfei Liu: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Chanaka Jayawardhena:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Paurav Shukla:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. **Victoria-Sophie Osburg:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Vignesh Yoganathan:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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