

## **Inspired Employees Encourage eWOM**

### **Abstract:**

This pilot examines whether employees in SMEs within the food and drinks sector promote their business through eWOM. Another consideration is whether employees adopt and use eWOM because they are motivated by their job and/or because they are using Social Media in their personal life. The research avails of qualitative and quantitative methods and applied elements from the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) model to a random sample of SMEs with the food and drinks sector. Data from 99 online questionnaires were analysed using partial least squares structural equations modelling (PLS-SEM) software Smart-PLS. This paper examines three constructs: employee motivation, employee habit and eWOM intention and use. The findings confirm employees promote their business through eWOM because they are both encouraged by their employer and have a habit of using social media. Further results confirm that employee habit outweighs employee motivation to use eWOM for businesses.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Employee Engagement, Technology Adoption, SMEs, eWOM, Smart-PLS

## **INTRODUCTION**

Social media have produced valuable opportunities for electronic word of mouth (eWOM) conversations. Online users are now able to deliberate over products and services of brands with their friends and acquaintances on social media (Torres & Kennedy, 2017). In contrast to traditional word of mouth (WOM), electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is capable of including positive and negative messages made by previous and future consumers about firms' products and services in a timely manner (Holmes & Lett, 1977).

Social media platforms are technology engagement platforms in a business network value co-creation process (Frow et al., 2015). Business employees that design and manage a social media campaign will need to contemplate on the extent to which customers will feel engaged by the platform or social media tool or website that deliver their communication (FDI, 2016). Employees who identify and understand the preferred brand image and feel psychologically safe and satisfied in their job roles are likely to use the business voice systems in a way that is consistent with the business guidelines and goals (Schwartz, 2016). However, establishing how employees are motivated to use social media, particularly eWOM, is the focus this pilot study.

In Ireland, the adoption of technologies, including social media, by businesses has been well documented in the literature. Statistics from Ipsos MRBI 2016 survey (RTE, 2016) indicate 93.26% of business' social media activity took place on Facebook, confirming it is the dominant social media platform. Although, the level of adoption of this platform is still considerably high and relevant amongst Irish businesses, the percentage of people on Facebook in Ireland fell by 3% to 64% during the three months from November to January (RTE, 2016).

Many theories are associated with the adoption and usage of technology in the literature: Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003), UTAUT2 (Venkatesh, & Xu, 2012), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985). The main relevance of these models is the constructs that are used. Behaviour intention and usage of technology has been evidence through TAM, UTAUT/UTAUT2 and TPB. Also cited are the factors particularly motivation and habit that cause behaviour adoption and usage emerging from these models. Based on these models, three research questions were developed:

1. Do employees in SMEs in the food and drinks sector promote their business through eWOM initiatives?
2. Do employees adopt and use eWOM initiatives because they are encouraged in their job?
3. Do employees adopt and use eWOM initiatives because they are accustomed to using social media?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Employee Engagement with Social Media**

With the evolving change in technology and advancement in social media, employees have significant power in the online marketplace. Employee voice can be directed and used for business reputation building and competitive advantage (Schwartz, 2016). There are many definitions of employee engagement with social media. Davis (2016) suggests businesses' competence and commitment to social media and to customer engagement are important factors of social media usage in sales. Calder et al. (p. 322) define engagement from an experience perspective as "*a collection of experiences that comprise social media user beliefs about how a site fits into his or her like.*" Kruse (2012, p. 1) explains it as "*Employee engaging is the emotional commitment an employee has to the organisation and its goal*".

Interestingly, Dessart et al. (2015) suggest the concept of social media engagement is still in its early stage and research is still needed around the factors that influence social media engagement. This pilot examines whether employees' motivation and/or habit are a significant factor in their adoption and usage of eWOM initiatives.

### **eWOM**

eWOM messages from friends and colleagues are commonly seen as more significant and trustworthy than social media blasts from business social media pages. As a consequence, a content message shared by employees, by one recent measure, achieves eight times more engagement than content shared by brand channels, and is re-shared twenty five times more frequently. Even more inspiring, leads developed through employee social marketing convert seven times more frequently than other leads. When employees share messages, firms not only expand their social media reach, they also get measurably better results. (Holmes, 2015).

If eWOM messages found online is perceived as valid, the message receivers will develop a positive approach towards the product/services related to these reviews. Therefore, the message is perceived as creditable (Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2017). This process is also supported by (Murray, 1991) who contents consumers consider eWoM as a more reliable source of information than messages from sales representatives and marketers. Consumers trust and depend more readily on the opinions from their family and friends than from promotional sources and businesses. eWOM information can be produced by almost every user on the Internet, therefore, credibility and quality of this information has now become more critical (Xu, 2014). So for businesses, having employees using their personal profiles to re-share the business eWOM is vital.

### **Technology Adoption and Usage Models**

Social media sets the platform for consumers to intermingle with both other consumers and businesses employees on an enormous scale, thereby, making the case for social media as the new hybrid element of the promotion mix (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Social media as a technology has opened an entirely new arena for employees to engage with customers, other employees and organisational constituents (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Numerous theories are associated with the adoption and usage of technology, Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003), UTAUT2 (Venkatesh et al., 2012), and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985). UTAUT has four key constructs, *Performance Expectancy*, *Effort Expectancy*, *Social Influence* and *Facilitating Conditions*, that influence behavioural intention to use a technology and /or technology use. UTAUT is applied to an organisational context.

The UTAUT2 embraces the same four main concepts as UTAUT (i.e., *Performance Expectancy*, *Effort Expectancy*, *Social Influence*, and *Facilitating Conditions*), which are direct factors of usage intention and behaviour. UTAUT2 adds new constructs, hedonic motivation, price value, and habit, in order to apply the UTAUT in a consumer context. For this paper the constructs of interest include: *Performance Expectancy*, *Effort Expectancy*, *Facilitating Conditions*, *Hedonic Motivation* and *Habit*. Having reviewed the literature on social media and technology adoption models the following three constructs were identified for this pilot study.

### ***Employee Motivation***

*Hedonic Motivation* relates to the degree to which the employee finds pleasure from using a technology (Brown & Venkatesh, 2005; van der Heijden, 2004). *Performance Expectancy* relates to the level to which an employee trusts that using the system will improve their job

performance. *Effort Expectancy* relates to the level of ease associated with the use of social media (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

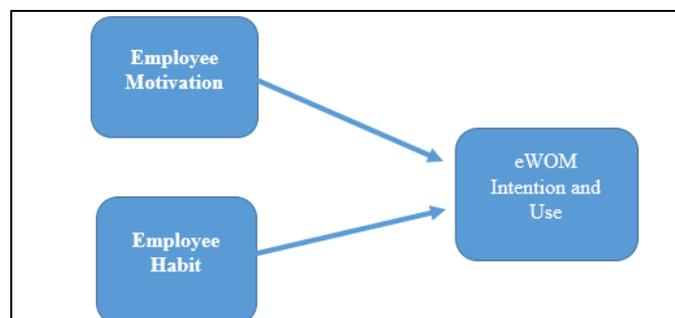
In a progressively disengaged world, businesses need to engage their employees, so as to boost employee productivity, satisfaction and loyalty (Davis, 2016). For businesses engagement plays a refereeing role between the different social media platform used and the set campaigns behavioural goals. The more employees engage with a media platform that carries a specific social media campaign, the increased chance employees will communicate about the campaign with other online users. For example, spreading the word about the campaign or engaging in further dialogs (FDI, 2016). Hence, are employees motivated to use eWOM for the business in which they work?

### ***Employee Habit***

*Habit* has been defined as the level to which people tend to perform behaviours automatically because of learning. People's general opinions regarding technology were the strongest determinants of system - specific perceived ease of use, particularly after substantial direct experience with the specific technology (Limayem, Hirt, & Cheung, 2007; Venkatesh, 2000). *Facilitating Conditions* relate to the level to which an employee trusts organisational and technical infrastructure to maintain the use of the technology. That is, whether there are aspects in an environment that make a specific task easy to accomplish (Thompson & Higgins, 1991; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Guesalaga (2016) believes individual competence in social media increases as an individual's habit becomes proficient and familiar with the social media tools. In addition, he understood the individual commitment to social media as the extent to which an individual actively engages in social media. These two factors should positively relate to the organisation use of social media (see Figure 1). Do employees use eWOM for their business because they have a habit of using social media?

### ***eWoM Intention and Use***

The internet has provided many valid platforms for eWOM, including blogs, discussion forums, shopping/review and social media websites (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). eWOM communication takes advantage of the value of trust in order to persuade how others users can think, act and feel. There is not another influential means of communicating information, including marketing messages, than from person to person (Fulgoni & Lipsman, 2017). Based on the two factors employee motivation and employee habit, will cause behavioural intention and usage of a eWOM? For this pilot, the question posed is: Do employees intend to use eWOM for their business?



**Figure 1: Inspired Employee Encourage eWOM**

## **METHODOLOGY**

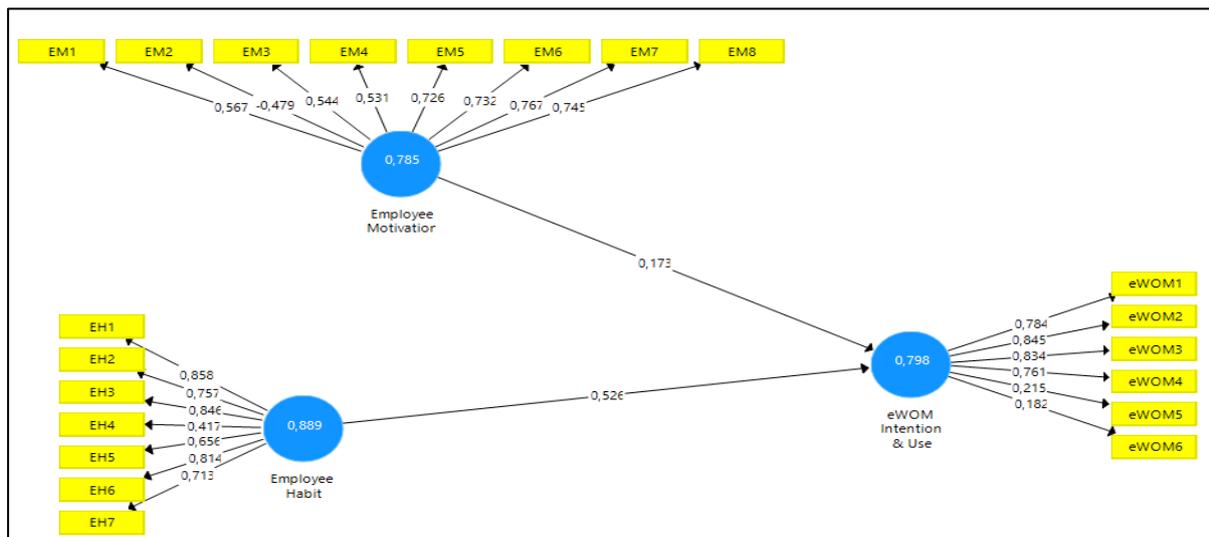
The primary research method was an online survey, was adapted from (Ali, Nair, & Hussain, 2016), in order to understand SMEs' adoption and usage of social media marketing (SMM). Businesses were carefully chosen based on their registration with Bord Bía. To be eligible for

selection, each company had fewer than 50 employees and an annual turnover and/or balance sheet total of less than €10 million (Enterprise, 2017). The sectors from the foods and drinks industry surveyed were: bakery, beverages, confectionery, and dairy.

Companies were contacted by phone to identify the person who was tasked with managing the business digital marketing efforts and permission was sought to email the survey to this individual. The participants' responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (i.e., strongly disagree) to 5 (i.e., strongly agree), except for the use behaviour which was measured on a five-point scale range from 1 (i.e., never) to 5 (i.e., many times). Three hundred companies were contacted and ninety nine answered the online survey, resulting in a response rate of 33%. Respondents were over-represented by males (57%) and females (43%). Sixteen of the ninety nine companies did not use social media. The reason why firms did not use social media included; “cost of using social media”, “employees do not have time to use social media”, “social media is not necessary for my business”, “I do not have social media skills” and “I do not like using social media”.

### Smart-PLS Results

PLS provides a more accurate explanation for complex relationships and it can accommodate a minimal sample size and a sample distribution (Xu, 2014). PLS is also widely adopted by business researchers. The PLS analysis was conducted using the Smart-PLS 4.0 software (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). The sample size of the study is relatively small, but using Smart-PLS mitigates this limitation because it can accommodate a minimal sample size (Arndt, 1967).



**Figure 2: SMEs Employees Motivation and Habit on Social Media – Path Coefficient, Outer Weights/Loadings and Composite Reliability Test**

The constructs assessed within this model include: *Employee Motivation*, *Employee Habit* and *eWOM Intention and Use*. The reliability of construct measurement was evaluated by examining the composite reliability (CR), and internal consistency reliability (ICR) with Cronbach's alpha for each itemised construct. The composite reliability values of .785 for Employee Motivation (EM), 0.889 for Employee Habit (EH) and, .798 for eWOM Intention and Use, all exceeded the 0.70 minimum values.

Having reviewed the outer loadings of the indicators in Figure 2, indicators that have an outer loading of greater than .40 and less than .70 were reviewed for impact on AVE and

Composite Reliability Hair, et al. (2017) see Appendix 2. Based on this the following indicators were removed: EM1, EM2, EM3, EM4, EH4, eWOM5, and eWOM6. However, Indicator EH5 (i.e., My interaction with Social Media is clear and understandable) is just below the .70 minimum and it is considered that this question is relevant for this study and is retained. Under the construct reliability and validity test in Table 1 the AVE values for EH5 indicator succeeds the .50 requirement and is at .621. So retaining of this indicator proved valuable. Figure 3 shows the updated model with bad indicators removed.

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Employee Motivation	0.837	0.843	0.889	0.668
Employee Habit	0.878	0.898	0.907	0.621
eWOM Intention and Use	0.828	0.848	0.884	0.657

Table 1: Construct Reliability and Validity

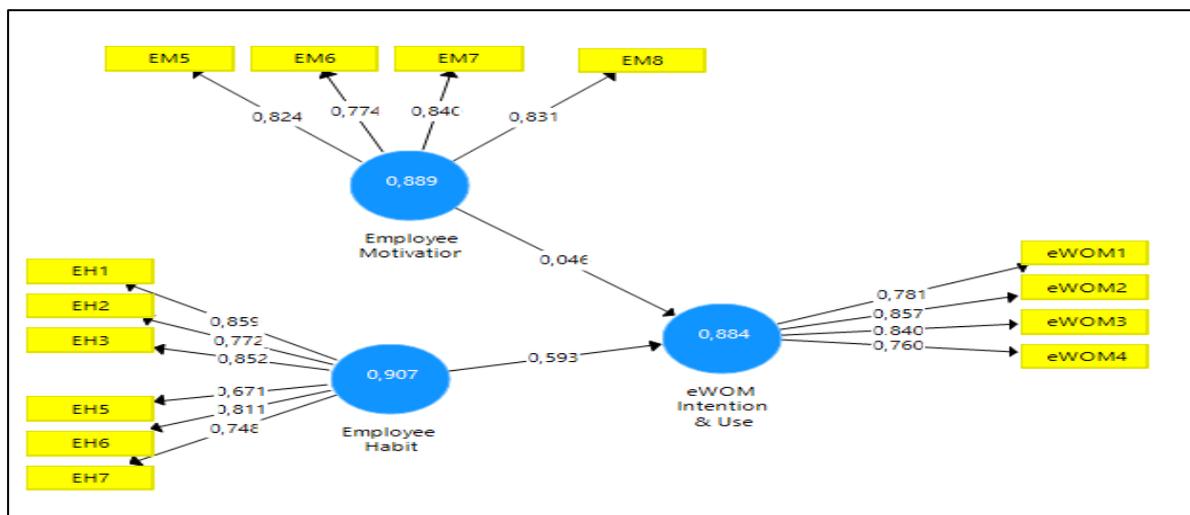


Figure 3: Updated Model SMEs Employees Motivation and Habit on Social Media – Path Coefficient, Outer Weights/Loadings and Composite Reliability Test

	Employee Motivation	Employee Habit	EWOM Intention and Use
Employee Motivation	1.000		
Employee Habit	0.784	1.000	
eWOM Intention and Use	0.511	0.629	1.000

Table 2: Latent Variable Correlations

## DISCUSSION

The online survey was composed of close-ended questions. Although PLS-SEM is not sensitive to data normality, it is still recommended to examine the data to detect outliers and assess its distribution (Hair et al., 2013). Partial least squares (PLS) was used to test the model because there numerous interactions terms and PLS is capable of testing these effects (Chin, Marcolin, & Newsted, 2003).

Reviewing Figure 3, as well as Tables 1 and 2, the respondents tended to associate high employee motivation, employee habit and eWOM Intention and Use. Considering construct reliability and validity for the three constructs the AVE is Employee motivation (0.668), Employee Habit (0.621), eWOM Intention and Use (0.657). These results are higher than the

0.50 minimum requirements. However, in reviewing Figure 3, Table 2 and Appendix 6 and 7 the Latent Variable Correlations, it is possible to see the path figures employee motivation (0.511) and employee habit (0.629). This finding confirms that employee habit has a greater influence and stronger path than employee motivation to adopt and use eWOM. Assessing the Collinearity of indicators result in Appendix 4, the VIF value is also lower than 5, which rules out the need to merge indicators, or creating higher order constructs to treat collinearity problems (Hair, 2013). Finally, Chin (1998) declares that to demonstrate meaningful predictive power of a structural model assessment in PLS model, one needs to show high R squared, and substantial/significant structural paths. To be substantial, standardised paths need to be close to, and ideally 0.30 or higher, to indicate that the model has meaningful predictive power. Having reviewed Appendix 3, this study's R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.397 confirms this model. The findings for the three research questions are outlined in Table 3.

<b>Do employees in SMEs in the food and drinks sector promote their business through eWOM?</b>	Reviewing Figure 3, the findings confirm eWOM Intention and Use of .884 which surpasses the .70 minimum requirements for validation confirms that employee's intention to adopt and use eWOM activities.
<b>Do employees adopt and use eWOM because they are encouraged in their job?</b>	Figure 3 indicates the Employee Motivation (EM) of .889 surpasses the .70 minimum requirements for validation and confirms employees who are motivated in their job, intend to adopt and use eWOM activities.
<b>Do employees adopt and use eWOM because they are accustomed to using social media?</b>	Figure 3 indicates the Employee Habit (EH) of .907 exceeds the .70 minimum requirements for validation and confirms employees who have a habit of using social media, intend to adopt and use eWOM activities.

**Table 3: Research Question Findings**

## CONCLUSION

This pilot provided a small sample to the different sectors of the food and drinks industry. The key contribution to literature is that employees promote their business through eWOM. Employees who are motivated and who have a habit of using social media are more likely to use eWOM. Also, employees who have a habit of using social media are more likely to engage with eWOM than employees who are motivated by their employers.

Recommendations for further research relate to the bootstrapping algorithm with Smart-PLS to analyse the significance of the constructs relationships and the inclusion of additional constructs in the area of employee engagement with social media. Further analysis on the construct employee motivation as well as the inner and outer loading results is required with the PLS software. Also, it would be worthwhile to analyse the difference between adopting and using social media for work, as opposed to personal use. Finally, future research could examine how employees can be creative with eWOM, as businesses that do not use social media indicated their employees do not have the skills or the time to work with social media.

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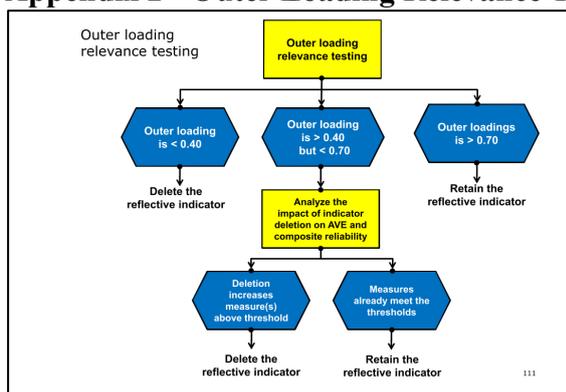
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## Appendix 1- Survey Questions, Constructs and Indicators / Indicators Removed Adapted Ali et al. (2016)

Construct	Indicators	Survey Questions
<b>Employee Motivation</b>	EM1	Using Social Media provides many advantages for my business
	EM2	Using Social Media provides many disadvantages for my business
	EM3	I am highly satisfied in working for my business
	EM4	I work at my full capacity in my work duties
	EM5	Using social media is fun for me
	EM6	I complete tasks from start to finish. The results of my efforts on Social Media are clearly visible and identifiable
	EM7	I find social media easy to use
	EM8	Learning to operate Social Media is easy for me
<b>Employee Habit</b>	EH1	I have the experience to use Social Media
	EH2	Social Media is a habit for me
	EH3	I am comfortable using Social Media
	EH4	I believe Social Media is essential for my job
	EH5	My interaction with Social Media is clear and understandable
	EH6	It is easy for me to become skilful using Social Media
	EH7	I have the necessary knowledge to use Social Media
<b>eWOM</b>	eWOM1	I intend to continually use Social Media
	eWOM2	I would recommend my colleagues to use Social Media in the next few years
	eWOM3	I view Social Media positively
	eWOM4	I intend to use Social Media in the next few years
	eWOM5	I try to be creative when crafting eWOM posts for my employer to encourage a response from the community
	eWOM6	I believe eWOM messages can influence our business customers intention to purchase

## Appendix 2 - Outer Loading Relevance Testing by Hair, et al. (2017)



## Appendix 3 - Collinearity Statistics (VIF) Inner Values

	Employee Motivation	Employee Habit	eWOM Intention and Use
Employee Motivation			2,598
Employee Habit			2,598
eWOM Intention and Use			

#### Appendix 4 - Collinearity Statistics (VIF) Outer Values

Indicator	VIF
EH1	2,775
EH2	1,959
EH3	2,384
EH5	1,830
EH6	2,310
EH7	1,878
EM5	1,815
EM6	1,486
EM7	3,817
EM8	3,857
eWOM1	1,668
eWOM2	1,968
eWOM3	1,871
eWOM4	1,712

#### Appendix 5 - Outer Loadings Test

Indicator	Employee Motivation	Employee Habit	eWOM Intention and Use
EH1		0,859	
EH2		0,772	
EH3		0,852	
EH5		0,671	
EH6		0,811	
EH7		0,748	
EM5	0,824		
EM6	0,774		
EM7	0,840		
EM8	0,831		
eWOM1			0,781
eWOM2			0,857
eWOM3			0,840
eWOM4			0,760

#### Appendix 6 Discriminant Validity – Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Fornell- Larcker Criterion			
	Employee Motivation	Employee Habit	eWOM Intention and Use
Employee Motivation	0,817		
Employee Habit	0,784	0,788	
eWOM Intention and Use	0,511	0,629	0,811

#### Appendix 7 - R<sup>2</sup> Test

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
eWOM Intention and Use	0.397	0.384