

Inspired Employees Encourage eWOM

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Presenting at the 52nd Academy of Marketing Conference 2-4 July 2019, Regents University London

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) messages, can be defined as: “Any positive or negative statements 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” (Henning–Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39).

The agri-food and drink sector had a total value of €13.6bn in 2018 and accounted for 12.7% of Ireland’s exports. The agri-food sector has a rich heritage and is Ireland’s largest indigenous industry (CSO, 2018). Businesses can maximise their businesses brands by using social media. However, most Irish food and beverage businesses spend less than 3% (Deloitte, 2018)

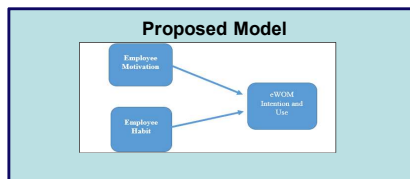
The onus is on the employer to support/train their employees to maintain and update an active social media presence. The organisational theories pertinent to this study are: strategic management (Hackler & Saxton, 2007).

Three Research Questions

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?

Four IS theories are associated with the adoption and usage of technology for this study:

- Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989)
- UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003)
- UTAUT2 (Venkatesh et al., 2012)
- Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985)



Methodology

The primary research method included an online survey, was adapted from (Ali, Nair, & Hussain, 2016), in order to understand SMEs’ adoption and usage of social media marketing (SMM). Structural Equational Modelling - Partial Least Squares (SEM-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). Three hundred companies were contacted and ninety nine answered the online survey, resulting in a response rate of 33%.

	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

	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

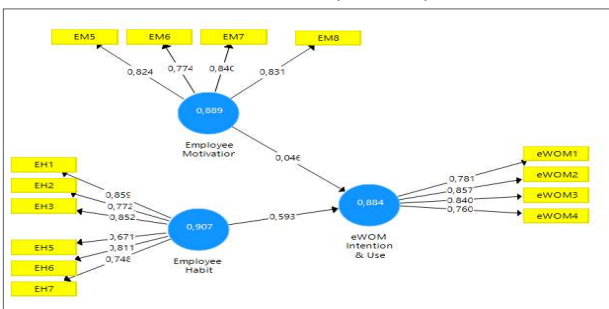


Figure 3: Updated Model SMEs Employees Motivation and Habit on Social Media – Path Coefficient, Outer Weights/Loadings and Composite Reliability Test

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

Research Findings

Contribution to Literature & Additional Findings

Employees believe they were not allocated enough time in their job to work with social media. Less than half of the employees were encouraged to upskill via training courses on social media. The majority of employees stated that their employer did not have a social media strategy. Further results confirm that employers do not provide employees incentives for achievements made on social media or discuss their business goals for social media

Further Research

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.