

The Power of Buzz Marketing

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Abstract

An important tool of promotion in the subject of marketing is word-of-mouth marketing or Buzz Marketing, which relies on the added credibility of person-to-person communication, which is a personal recommendation. The Persons or Institutions that seem to have more influence on the buying decisions of consumers are family, friends and acquaintances. It is obvious that a consumer's bitter experience with products or services can create problems for the company as it is the major source for negative word-of-mouth. Recent technological advances have enabled consumers to easily access real time information and exchange opinions about companies, products and services on an unprecedented scale. The emergence of online communities, discussion groups, blogs and opinion websites has changed how consumers interact with one another and provided them the new avenues for word-of-mouth communication. Though advertisements are reaching out every nook and corner of the world through different types of media, it was evident from the survey that almost 60% of the respondents rely more on word-of-mouth than advertisements. Positive word-of-mouth has an influential effect in the buying decision making of majority of the consumers. It has been suggested through the study that good social networking sites shall be maintained by marketers in order to interact with consumers and provide prompt answers to their queries. Improving customer service is also a way by which consumers will spread a good word-of-mouth about the products and services.

Keywords: Buzz Marketing, Word-of-mouth, Media, Social Net workings, Person-to-person Communication.

1. Introduction

“Words are sounds of the heart”

1.1 Word-of-Mouth

Word-of-mouth is the passing of information from person to person by oral communication, which could be as simple as telling someone the time of day. Storytelling is a common form of word-of-mouth communication where one person tells others a story about a real event or something made up. Oral tradition is a cultural material and traditions transmitted by word-of-mouth through successive generations. Storytelling and oral tradition are forms of word-of-mouth that play important roles in folklore and mythology. An important area of marketing is called word-of-mouth marketing, which relies on the added credibility of person-to-person communication, a personal recommendation. When this is mediated through electronic means, the resulting electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) refers to any statement that consumers share via the Internet (e.g., web sites, social networks, instant messages, news feeds) about a product, service, brand, or company.

1.2 Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM), also called word-of-mouth advertising, is an unpaid form of promotion - oral or written in which delighted customers tell other people how much they like a business, product, service or event. According to Entrepreneur Media, word-of-mouth is one of the most credible forms of advertising because people who do not stand to gain personally by promoting something put their reputations on the line every time they make a recommendation.

1.2.1 History

George Silverman, a psychologist, pioneered word-of-mouth marketing when he created what he called 'teleconferenced peer influence groups' in order to engage physicians in dialogue about new pharmaceutical products. Silverman noticed an interesting phenomenon while conducting focus groups with physicians in the early 1970s. One or two physicians who were having good experiences with a drug would sway an entire group of skeptics. They would even sway a dis-satisfied group of ex-prescribers who had negative experiences!

With the emergence of Web 2.0, many web start-ups like Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, and Digg have used buzz marketing by merging it with the social networks that they have developed. With the increasing use of the Internet as a research and communications platform, word-of-mouth has become an even more powerful and useful resource for consumers and marketers.

In October 2005, the advertising watchdog group, Commercial Alert petitioned the United States FTC (Federal Trade Commission) to issue guidelines requiring paid word-of-mouth marketers to disclose their relationship and related compensation with the company whose product they are marketing. The United States FTC stated that it would investigate situations in which the relationship between the word-of-mouth marketer of a product and the seller is not revealed and could influence the endorsement. The FTC stated that it would pursue violators on a case-by-case basis. Consequences for violators may include cease-and-desist orders, fines or civil penalties.

Despite the belief that most word-of-mouth is now online (or on mobile) the truth is the very opposite. The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science has shown that to achieve growth, brands must create word-of-mouth beyond core fan groups - meaning marketers should not focus solely on communities such as Facebook. According to Deloitte further research has shown that 'most advocacies take place offline' - instead it happens in person. According to the Journal of Advertising Research, 75% of all consumer conversations about brands happen face-to-face, 15% happen over the phone and just 10% online. This is backed up by research by WOM specialists, Keller Fay, who also claim that TV advertising creates the majority of brand related word-of-mouth, followed by Public Relationship (PR).

1.3 Types of Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Word-of-Mouth Marketing (WOMM) is arguably one of the most credible forms of advertising. It is any business action that earns a customer recommendation. Here is how you can use WOMM to generate brand awareness.

1.3.1 Buzz Marketing

Marketing buzz or buzz refers to the interaction of consumers and users of a product or service serve to amplify the original marketing message. Some describe buzz as a form of hype among consumers, a vague but positive association, excitement, or anticipation about a product or service. The term refers both to the execution of the marketing technique, and the resulting goodwill that is created. An endorsement is expensive but it can have a long-lasting effect, just take a look at Grand Slam winner Maria Sharapova and her brand Sugarpova. Tennis and candies have no relevance but when you are a superstar like Maria, it does not matter.

1.3.2 Viral effects

Viral marketing and viral advertising are buzzwords referring to marketing techniques that use pre-existing social networks to increase brand awareness or to achieve other marketing objectives (such as product sales) through self-replicating viral processes, analogous to the spread of virus or computer viruses. It can be word-of-mouth delivered or enhanced by the network effects of the Internet. Viral promotions may take the form of video clips, interactive Flash games, e-books, brandable software, images or even text messages. The goal of marketers interested in creating successful viral marketing programs is to identify individuals with high Social Networking Potential (SNP), have a high probability of being taken by another competitor, and create viral messages that appeal to this segment of the population.

1.4 Sources of Word-of-Mouth

1.4.1 Experience Driven Word-of-Mouth

The hidden trigger to any word-of-mouth campaign is the customer and user experience. One can brag all he wants about how good he is through the traditional communication structures - but he has to follow this through with the experience. When this experience is positive, maybe even surprising, the customers are going to talk about him. This is really a simple logic and is why over 70% of the natural organic word-of-mouth out there comes through this process.

1.4.2 Second Hand Word-of-Mouth

Strangely enough up to 35% of word-of-mouth will come from customers who have never experienced a brand. People take on other people's opinions that they trust. They adopt as their own opinions and share them. As a marketer this is scary. The marketers work so hard at controlling what people say yet up to 35% of their word-of-mouth comes from people indirectly associated with marketers' brand. The path to marketing wisdom for any marketer is to accept that they no longer control what others say about their brand is.

1.4.3 Created Word-of-Mouth

The above two points are based on a natural organic conversation. Yet a business can create its own word-of-mouth. It can set up Buzz Agents to get out there to promote its product in a contextual environment. It can sponsor people to talk about it. It is a valid strategy but must be done with caution and full disclosure.

1.4.4 The Experts

The expert can be a paid food critic, a local blogger, the businesses exert whom people admire and emulate. These people's opinions count and it counts big time. The marketers look up to these people to help qualify their decisions, as a way to create a mental short cut to simplify their buying decision process. Of course, the marketers may sponsor these people but when they recommend them off the bat, it just carries so much more weight.

1.4.5 Peer Review and Crowd-sourced

Amazon and other e-tailers have a peer review system that is responsible for millions of additional sales. Trip advisor will advise anyone interested on the best spot to travel to and what peoples experience are. This simplifies the decision making process of the interested. The customers no longer have to spend hours on evaluation in the complete landscape and the cluttered noisy environment.

1.5 Objectives of the study

1. To ascertain the influence of buzz marketing on the purchase decision of consumers
2. To identify the products which are most sought after through word-of-mouth influences
3. To understand whether the consumers express their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of using a product or service with others
4. To learn whether word-of-mouth is just offered voluntarily by the consumers or solicited by the fellow consumers

2. Review Of Literature

2.1 Word-of-Mouth in Consumer Decision-Making

Tax Stephen et al. (1993) have stated that word-of-mouth plays and will play an important role in the consumer buying decision-making. It acts as a primary source of information which influences the pre-purchase decision making of customers and also acts as a mode of vehicle for expressing the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of using a product or experiencing a service. They also stated that as the use of electronic communication increases among consumers, it is more likely that word-of-mouth would go viral and play even a predominant role in the purchasing behaviour of consumers. Word-of-mouth is a mechanism through which consumers convey both informational and influential factors in the product evaluation and purchase intention of fellow customers. The amount of negative word-of-mouth will depend upon the severity of problem, the factors for product failures and the individual's level of social integrations. Managers are very much interested in the movement of word-of-mouth (positive or negative) because of its impact on consumer acquisition and retention.

2.2 The Word-of-Mouth Effect on the Web

Kuwashima Yufu (2006) has narrated that the buying behaviour of consumers are always affected by others as they live in groups. From 1950s, many market studies have propounded that the word-of-mouth effect exists. Now a days, many online communities have their role in spreading the word-of-mouth effects.

Whyte (1954) compared the private goods of which consumption is invisible and the public goods of which consumption is visible and showed that reference group has much more effect on public goods. There is always a jinx that “people are not always affected by those who have direct relations”. As the internet users increases day by day, many on-line communities emerges and it is possible that the consumer hears users’ opinion on product and service. He also stated that there is always a network formed between group of people who are working in the same office, who live in the same flats and also among students who are studying in the same school or college. In this case, if any one buys a product and whether he had a good or bad experience will spread quickly among the members in the network, which in turn will spread to others in geometric progression. This might be useful to the manufacturers of a product if it is a positive word-of-mouth. But in this way, if the negative word-of-mouth spreads, then there will be a greater decline in the reputation of the manufacturer and the reliability of the products. The head of every network will be the opinion leader to whom other members in the link of network will blindly listen.

2.3 Effect of Word-of-Mouth on Consumer Buying Behaviour

Aslam Saad et al. (2011) have proposed that consumers mainly rely on word-of-mouth for the purchase of everyday items as well as long-term goods. The persons who seem to have more influence on the buying decisions of consumers are family, friend and acquaintances. Further, they stated that a bitter experience with products or services can create problems for the company as it is the major source for negative word-of-mouth. Finally, a negative word of mouth travels faster than positive comments. Word of mouth is shared opinion about a product or services between two or more people. Someone shares honest opinion, and he / she is creating word of mouth (Balter, 2004). In their article, they have also defined the term “Market mavens as, individuals who have information about numerous products and locations and that motivate dialogue with other customers”. They have also mentioned three fundamental concerns that a word-of-mouth would expose namely, a) The frequency and types of word-of-mouth behaviour, b) The effect of word-of-mouth behaviour on product evaluation, and c) The impact of word-of-mouth information on social relationships. Finally, the consumer buying decision process is affected by number of complex influences. Some influences might relate to the wider environment in which the buying decision is made while some relates to the individuals who makes the decisions.

2.4 The Impact of Word-of-Mouth on Purchase Decisions: The Case of Motion Pictures

Pai Seema et al. have stated that word-of-mouth or buzz marketing have created several legends which include several cartoon characters of Dic Comics, Marvel Studios, Walt Disney’s Characters, etc. These were some examples of world-renowned cartoon characters, which have been largely successful among the children. The success of these cartoons on an international level was a positive word-of-mouth that was spread across the globe. Many children became addicted to the cartoon created by the above-mentioned well-known producers. On the other hand, people like to share their experiences with one another in the restaurant where they ate lunch, the movie they watched over the weekend, the computer they just bought and when those experiences are favorable, the recommendations can snowball, resulting in runaway success. They have mentioned that word-of-mouth has been recognized as one of the most influential sources of information transmission since the beginning of society, especially for experience goods. Recent technological advances have enabled consumers to easily access real time

information and exchange opinions about companies, products and services on an unprecedented scale. The emergence of online communities, discussion groups, blogs and opinion websites has changed how consumers interact with one another and provided new avenues for word-of-mouth communications. In context with the motion pictures, opening weekend forecasts are crucially important because they typically represent the largest proportion of overall box-office revenues and because these forecasts influence important decisions such as advertising and distribution.

3. Research Methodology

The scope of the study is to completely bring out how word-of-mouth can influence the purchase decision of consumers, the products that are most sought after through word-of-mouth influences and the benefits for a marketer to make effective use of opinion leaders. This study is based on primary data. Questionnaire was used to collect the primary data from the respondents in Chennai. It was circulated both personal and through online with the help of Facebook™.

3.1 Sample Design and Sample Size

A random sampling was followed to select the respondents. The sample size of the survey is 300 respondents of 3 groups based on age which were classified as follows:

- a) Age Below 25 years,
- b) Age Between 25 - 60 years and
- c) Age Above 60 years

3.2 Statistical Tools

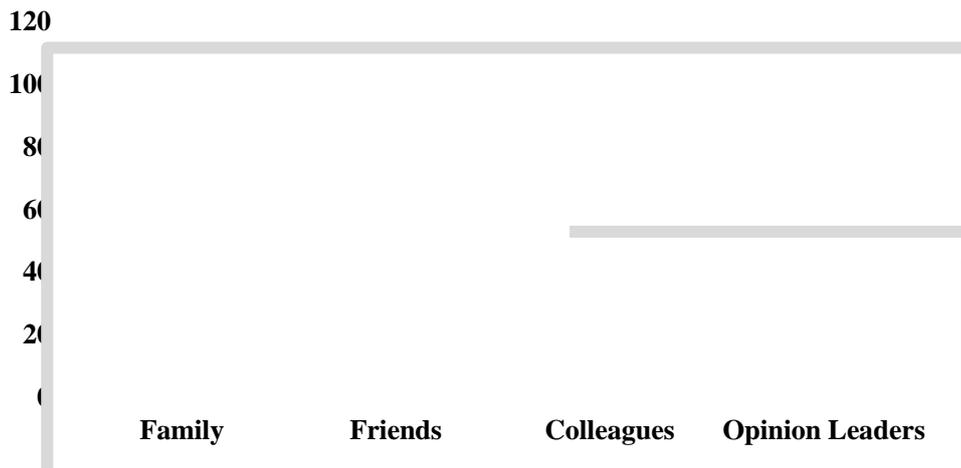
SPSS 16.0 was used in order to analyze the data to get their mean, median, standard deviation values, frequencies, percentages and cumulative percentages. Pie charts, bar charts were made use to analyze and interpret the data collected.

4. Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Table - 4.1.1 Influencers in Buying Decision Making

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Family	120	40.0	40.0	40.0
Friends	99	33.0	33.0	73.0
Colleagues	48	16.0	16.0	89.0
Opinion Leaders	33	11.0	11.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Chart 4.1.1 Influencers in buying decision-making



From the above chart 4.1.1, it could be interpreted that the buying decision making of 120 respondents were influenced by family members, 99 of them were influenced by their friends, another 48 respondents were influenced by colleagues and the remaining 33 were by the other opinion leaders.

Table 4.1.2 Reliability of Word-of-Mouth when compared with Advertisements

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	150	50.0	50.0	50.0
Disagree	30	10.0	10.0	60.0
Strongly Disagree	48	16.0	16.0	76.0
Neither agree nor disagree	72	24.0	24.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

From the table- 4.1.2, it could be understood that 50% of the respondents believe in word-of-mouth promotions, whereas 24% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree, 16% strongly disagree and 10% disagree regarding reliability of word-of-mouth.

Table 4.1.3 Influential Effect of Positive Word-of-Mouth on Consumer Buying Process

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	159	53.0	53.0	53.0
No	141	47.0	47.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Chart 4.1.2 Influential Effect of Positive Word-of-Mouth on Consumer Buying Process



The chart- 4.1.2 presents that 53% of the total respondents are influenced by positive word-of-mouth, whereas 47% are not influenced by positive word-of-mouth.

Table 4.1.4 Reluctant to use the products or services that are negatively judged by the family, friends and colleagues

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	195	65.0	65.0	65.0
No	105	35.0	35.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

As per table- 4.1.4, it is found that 65% of the total respondents are reluctant in using the products or services that are negatively judged by family, friends and colleagues, whereas 35% are not reluctant to use such products.

Table 4.1.5 Sharing positive experience of using a Product or Service

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	231	77.0	77.0	77.0
No	69	23.0	23.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Table- 4.1.5 presents the data that 77% of the total respondents share their positive experience and 23% of them are not willing to share their positive experience after the consumption the products and services.

Table 4.1.6 Sharing Negative Experience of using a Product or Service

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	204	68.0	68.0	68.0
No	96	32.0	32.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

As per table- 4.1.6, it is understood that 68% of the total respondents share their negative experience and the remaining 32% of them are not willing to share their negative experience of using a product or service.

Table 4.1.7 Percentage distribution of seeking others' opinions or comments online for making purchase decision

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	141	47.0	47.0	47.0
Strongly Agree	39	13.0	13.0	60.0
Neither agree nor disagree	54	18.0	18.0	78.0
Disagree	36	12.0	12.0	90.0
Strongly Disagree	30	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Table- 4.1.7 interprets that 60% of respondents seek for others' opinions or comments while 22% do not seek for others' opinion; but, there are 18% who may or may not seek others' opinion.

Table 4.1.8 Browsing on internet for different opinions and customers reviews of a product

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Frequently	60	20.0	20.0	20.0
Often	66	22.0	22.0	42.0
Sometimes	66	22.0	22.0	64.0
Rarely	66	22.0	22.0	86.0
Never	42	14.0	14.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Table- 4.1.8 depicts that 20% of the total respondents browse on internet frequently; 22% do often; 22% sometimes and another 22% rarely depends on internet for different opinions and customers' reviews; whereas the remaining 14% does not browse internet for different opinions and customer's reviews.

Table 4.1.9 Whether word-of-mouth is just given or Solicited

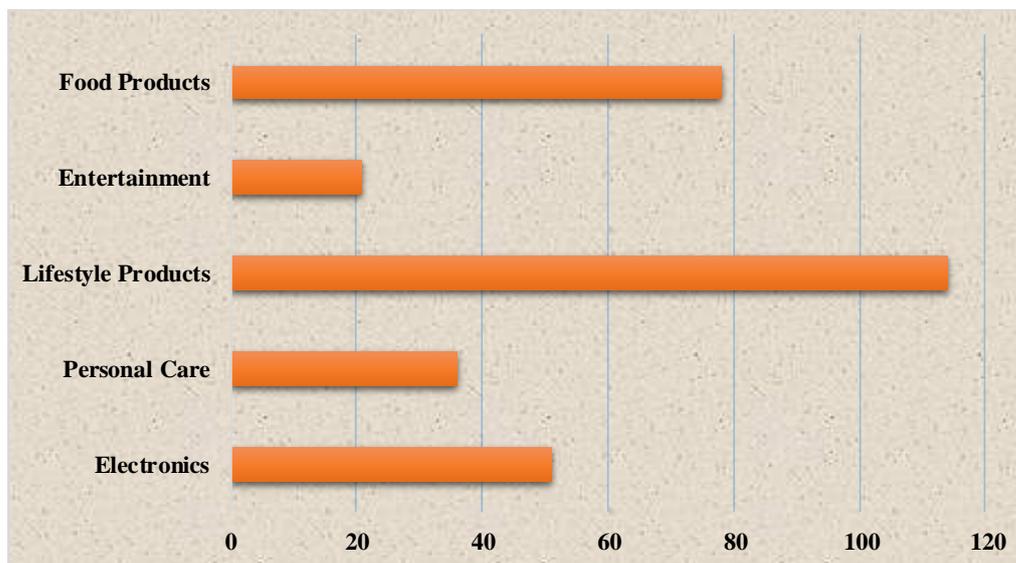
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Asked for it	174	58.0	58.0	58.0
Just given	126	42.0	42.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

As per table 4.1.9, it could be understood that 58% of the total respondents solicit word-of-mouth opinion on or before their purchase, but for 42% of respondents, word-of-mouth was just given to them by others voluntarily.

Table 4.1.10 Purchase of product categories based on friend’s recommendation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Electronics	51	17.0	17.0	17.0
Personal Care	36	12.0	12.0	29.0
Lifestyle Products	114	38.0	38.0	67.0
Entertainment	21	7.0	7.0	74.0
Food Products	78	26.0	26.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Chart 4.1.3 Purchase of product categories based on friend’s recommendation



From chart 4.1.3, it is obvious that 51 respondents stated that they value their friends’ recommendations for the purchase of electronics. The recommendations of friends have influenced 36 respondents in their selection of personal care, 114 in their selection of lifestyle products, another 21 in their selection of entertainment and the remaining 78 in their purchase of food products. The recommendations of friends have a greater influence in the choice of lifestyle products by the respondents.

Table 4.1.11 Involvement in e - WOM

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Useful	90	30.0	30.3	30.3
Very useful	45	15.0	15.2	45.5
Neutral	129	43.0	43.4	88.9
Useless	33	11.0	11.1	100.0
Missing	3	1.0		
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Table- 4.1.11 explains that 30% and 15% of the total respondents feel that involving in e-WOM is useful and very useful respectively; while 11% of the total respondents feel that involving in e-WOM is of no use to them; whereas another 43% of the total respondents feel that involvement in e-WOM can either be useful or useless to them.

4.2 Hypothesis

4.2.1 Positive Advice and its Strength

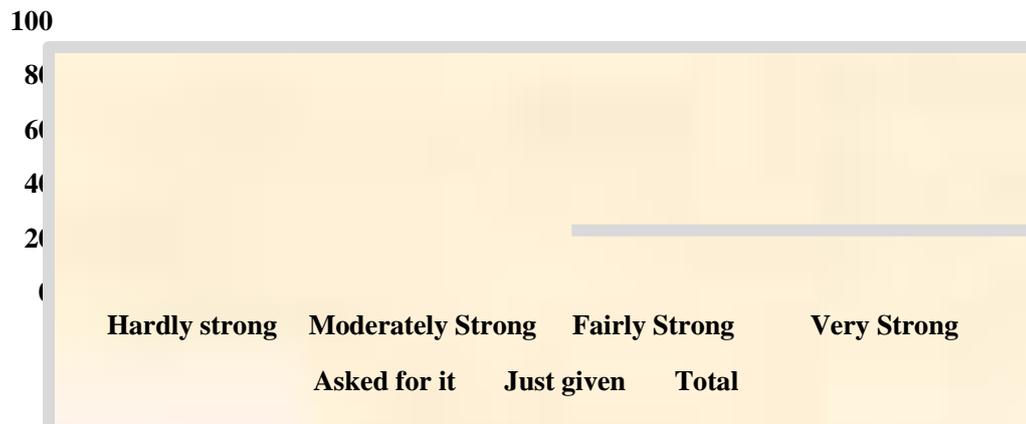
H₀: There is no significant relationship between a positive advice and its strength.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between a positive advice and its strength.

Case Processing Summary					
Valid		Missing		Total	
N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
100	100.0%	0	.0%	100	100.0%

Cross Tabulation			
	Asked for it	Just given	Total
Hardly strong	51	39	90
Moderately Strong	36	39	75
Fairly Strong	69	24	93
Very Strong	21	21	42
Total	177	123	300

Relationship between a positive advice and its strength



Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.745 ^a	3	.191
Likelihood Ratio	4.889	3	.180
Linear-by-Linear Association	.315	1	.575
N of Valid Cases	100		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.74.

Interpretation

The calculated value of Pearson's Chi-Square in a two-tailed test is 0.191, which is greater than 0.05 or 5%. So Null Hypothesis (H₀) is rejected, which means Alternative Hypothesis (H₁) is accepted (i.e.), there is a significant relationship between a positive advice and its strength.

5. Findings and Suggestions

5.1 Findings

1. 40% of the respondents only believe in their family member's word-of-mouth for making purchase decision.
2. Though advertisements are reaching out every nook and corner of the world through different types of media, it was evident from the survey that almost 60% of the respondents rely more on word-of-mouth than advertisements.
3. Positive word-of-mouth has an influential effect in buying decision making of the 53% of the consumers.
4. Negative word-of-mouth has no influential effect in buying decision making of the 65% of the consumers.
5. 77% of the respondents are willing to share their positive experience of using a product or service, while 68% of the respondents are willing to share their negative experience of using a product or service.
6. Majority of the respondents feel that word-of-mouth may or may not help the companies to promote their products and gain competitive advantage over their competitors.
7. 64% of the respondents depend upon word-of-mouth to purchase foreign brands.
8. There was an equitable distribution among the respondents view on the effective usage of word-of-mouth by ITC, HUL and P&G.
9. More than 90% of the respondents feel that Johnson & Johnson has very effectively used word-of-mouth as one of its effective promotion tools.

5.2 Suggestions

The world has become a global village and it has become easy for the people to connect themselves with others in any part of the world. Many companies want to capture or to retain their market share to maintain their profit earning capacity and to increase their demand for the products. The suggestions of this study are:-

1. The marketers should identify the opinion leaders who could influence the people to buy products or services and retain those opinion leaders through maintaining a good relationship with them.
2. The Companies should identify the testimonials for each region or area that could attract the consumers through advertisements.
3. Good social networking sites shall be maintained by marketers in order to interact with consumers and provide prompt answers to their queries.
4. Improving customer service is also a way by which consumers will spread a good word-of-mouth about the products and services.
5. If a negative word-of-mouth has been spread about the products or services, the marketers should put off them by way of consumers' participations (i.e.) with the help of Public Relationship Officers (PRO) conduct meeting or seminars and provide adequate knowledge to the consumers about the attributes of the product or services.

6. Conclusion

“The word of the king is the king of words” or “Words are like an arrow released from a bow, yes obviously, both cannot be taken back.” Both these annoctodes depict the importance of words. Word-of-mouth was / is / will be an effective promotion tool for all the companies. Spreading of information among people in this modern era is like a siege fire. So, companies must take utmost care to keep a check on the word-of-mouth. As having a user account in social networking sites has become an order of the day for the individuals, information will spread fastly and it will be difficult for the companies to prevent spread of negative word-of-mouth. Hence, the marketers should create more opinion leaders who are delighted consumers, motivated leaders and experts and make use of them for spreading a positive word of mouth either conventionally or through the use of technological advancements. If the marketers are able to create and offer more and more value to the customers through their market offers, they are turned to become opinion leaders who volunteer themselves to involve in Buzz Marketing and bring in many more new customers to the business at no cost. Let the Marketers enjoy the power of Buzz Marketing which would guarantee sustained growth and success.

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