

E-COMMENTS IN BUSINESS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<i>Article History:</i> Received: Revised: Accepted: Available Online:	<i>Internet and social media have dramatically changed the pattern of the business environment. People use several social media applications (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, etc.) to share their personal experiences by e-comments about products and services of the organizations. E-comments create radical effects on business management practices because it can reach millions of people within a short time. Therefore, customers prefer to review e-comments as a reference before making any purchasing decisions. That's why business practitioners are interested in online e-comments' review to identify the behaviour and intentions of their customers. Indeed, organizations also use such type of social media platforms to promote their products and services. However, there is limited research on the impact of e-comments on business management practices. Therefore, this theoretical study aimed to investigate and discuss the impacts of e-comments on business management practices.</i>
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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media technology has penetrated in all aspects of our daily lives, social media not only used for communication but also used for the purchase decision. Since social media provides the facility to purchase online, therefore, the adoption of online social media platforms has drastically increased among individuals and customers. So far different terms have developed to define this phenomenon, like, e-word-of-mouth, e-comments, word-of-mouth, e-complaints, user-generated contents and online comments (Ye, Law, & Gu, 2011a, p. 634). However, e-comments are more powerful as compare to the traditional word of mouth, because e-comments can be accessed by thousands of users within a very short period of time. Therefore potential consumers prefer to review e-comments for the evaluation of the required products (Ye et al., 2011a), and value of e-comments have attracted the attention of businesses practitioners. Some organizations are fully engaged with social media platforms to review their customers' e-comments. Whereas, mostly, organizations are highly interested in providing such online platforms to their customers so that customers can comment and share their personal experiences about their products. (Ren, Zhang, & Ye, 2015).

On the other hand, every day, millions of customers post offensive e-comments on social media. These unsophisticated e-comments directly address to the organizations and critics on the products and services of the organizations (Pfeffer, Zorbachb, & Carleya, 2014). One of the main reason for the offensive e-comments is the anonymity of the users on social media. This tracks back to the deindividuation theory, which explain that anonymity at social media platforms makes the users less responsible for their behaviour. This is the reason, in an online platforms make the users "say or do things that they would not say or do face-to-face" (Rösner & Krämer, 2016, p. 1).

Online social media platforms have achieved importance for cultural institutions. For instance, Tate and libraries maintaining their online web pages, manuscripts, at Facebook and other social media platforms such as Twitter, Flickr (Becker, Iterf, & Naaman, 2012). Social media platforms also provide the innovative feature to their user and also provide the facility to add more information to the existing resources by e-comments (Seki, Qin, & Uehara, 2010). For example, a photo that was published on Flickr by the Library of Congress was initially labelled as "Reid Funeral". A Flickr user added the e-comment "Photo shows the crowd gathered outside of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine during New York City funeral of Whitewall Reid, American Ambassador to Great Britain." This e-comment contains factual information that clearly goes beyond the initial label (Momeni, Tao, & Haslhofer, 2013). However, e-comments are useful to enhance metadata records because users have different intentions and expertise level to contributing e-comments. Resultantly, the quality of e-comments ranges from very useful to totally useless. Usefulness



depends on a number of factors including media types and the entity type of the object (Siersdorfer, Chelaru, & Nejd, 2010).

The term “social media” refers mainly to online applications (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Blogs etc.) that allow users to share e-comments (Kwak, Lee, & Park, 2010). This is linked to web 2.0 in which “content and application are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In spite the availability of large amount of data on social media, the industrial practitioners are still fail to extract and get benefits from data (H. K. Chan & Lacka, 2017, p. 5028). Thus, in this theoretical study, the use of e-comments in business management practices was discussed.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. E-Comments

E-comments defined 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 institution via the internet” (Chu & Sung, 2015, p. 252). Such e-comments tend to move fast, are relatively permanent, and come at a minimum search cost to the potential customer. Customers who seek e-comments want to reduce risk, get lower prices and easy access to the information before making a purchase decision. However, e-comment is often unsolicited by recipients. Many studies are connecting the e-comments with brand reputation, trust, products, customers’ preferences, sale, and cultural differences (Zhang & Daugherty, 2010, p. 294). Wang and Rodgers (2010) identified two categories of context for e-comments. The first is information-based that includes websites such as consumer rating forums and products’ feedback pages. While the second one is emotion-based and includes online communities and non-product social networks. Whereas social networks are defined as “virtual communities created for people to connect with others by means of popular web-based tools” (Wallace, Walker, & Lopez, 2009, p. 102). These web-based tools are web 2.0 applications for creating and exchanging e-comments within social networks (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The implications for the exchange of brand-related e-comments are important because research suggests that e-comments recipients trust their network peers and even the opinions of the people outside their network. For example, sales are most effectively driven by acquaintance generated e-comments (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014, p. 84).

The Internet offers numbers of online social media platforms by which individuals can exchange their ideas and experience. Conversations at social media among individuals and e-comments have a significant effect on the customers' decision. (Stringam & Gerdes, 2010). Therefore, businesses should consider the importance and power of e-comments available at social media platforms. Positive e-comments about any organization plays the role of advertisement, which is an opportunity for the organization. Whereas negative e-comments may tarnish the image of the organization and may change the purchase behaviour of potential customers (Sparks & Browning, 2010).

Previous studies have identified the characteristics of e-comments as "low cost, wider scope and increased anonymity". In addition to these characteristics, in terms of impact, e-comments have great influence over traditional comments. Furthermore, e-comments at social media enhance the customers' awareness about businesses and products and help to a selection of product among alternate (Ye, Law, & Gu, 2011b).

With the increasing amount of literature, e-comments have gained broad attention of the researchers due to its different approaches and investigation. Such as some studies examined the contents of e-comments either positive or negative while some studies were found about its impact on business practices (Stringam & Gerdes, 2010). In addition, many researcher examined the credibility of e-comments in their studies (Xiea, Miao, & Kuo, 2011).

2.2. Type of E-Comments

E-comments on social media platforms may contain slang, emoticons, and meaningless phrases. Most of the e-comments have positive, negative, or both sided opinions. (Allen, 1991, p. 391) defined one-sided comment as “a comment that presents only those arguments in favour of a particular proposition” and two-sided comments as “a comment that presents the arguments in favour of a proposition but also consider the opposing arguments”. Past studies indicated that one sided and two sided comments are effective in changing the customer’s mind. However, two-sided comments were considered more effective in persuading customers, especially who initially opposed to the opinion. Two-sided comments are further categorized into two categories named as a "refutational" and "non-refutational" comment. “Comments that mention counterarguments to the position advocated and then refute them”. While the non-

refutational "comments that only mentioned the counterarguments without offering a refutation of them" (Allen, 1991).

2.3. Patterns of E-Comments

Zahao, Wanga, and Weia (2013) in their research analyzed the large number of e-comments and identified four patterns of e-comments into two-dimension: affirmative and overwhelming. Affirmative can be positive or negative, indicates how positive the e-comments are toward the organization. Whereas, overwhelming indicates the strength of tone among a group of e-comments. Generally, the browsers read e-comments and make judgments on overall perception (Zahao et al., 2013, p. 486).

There may be negative, positive or neutral tones within the e-comments' group. If the group of e-comments is completely dominated by a tone, called overwhelming, otherwise, non-overwhelming. Hence the four patterns of e-comments are: *Overwhelmingly positive* when e-comments occur positive or affirmative. *Overwhelmingly negative*, when all of the e-comments are negative. *Non-overwhelmingly positive*, the situation in which the tone of the e-comments is mostly positive, although many different tones coexist and compete in the comment group. *Non-overwhelming negative*, the situation in which the tone of comment is mostly negative, although several different tones coexist and compete in the group of e-comments (Zahao et al., 2013, p. 486).

2.4. Profanity and Persuasion

Incivility refers to as "flaming" is a common issue to e-comments and its reviews. The uncivil language found the more used language in online communications as compared to face-to-face situations (Kushin & Kitchener, 2009). Flaming is common among e-commenters who used offensive language because they perceive flaming as normative (Moor, Heuvelman, & Verleur, 2010, p. 1536). Customers sometimes reluctant to post comments and upload videos to avoid inflaming e-comments. Incivility has been shown to decrease the trust, credibility of commenter (Shi, Messaris, & Cappella, 2014, p. 977).

3. Online Participation

The Pew Internet and American Life Project's "Understanding the Participatory News Consumer: How Internet and Cell Phone Users Have Turned News into a Social Experience" found that users obtain information from online sources. The report concludes that 52% of online reader share links through email and social networking sites, while the 75% of the online readers used these links to find contents (Purcell, Rainie, & Mitchell, 2010). Among the several different features of online social media sites. E-comments are the most common forms of online participation (Chung, Munno, & Moritz, 2015, p. 452). (Santana, 2011, p. 67) found that 95% of American online websites allow commenters to comment on websites. However, the commenters are relatively low, 25% of the online readers in Pew study, whereas the large number of consumers who just read e-comments.

Diakopoulos and Naaman (2011, p. 2) found offensive e-comments on the Sacramento Bee's online site, while the Journalists express their concerns about personal attacks on reports, flaming propagation of misleading information and damaging the reputation. "In theory, the ability to comment gives readers, bloggers and citizen journalists the chance to chime in a story: to check facts, clarify points, share personal experiences, even pick a site and argue their case. While increasing the number of clicks on the paper's website, making it more appealing to advertiser". The importance of e-comments goes well beyond the evolving digital business model for organizations. E-comments are dialogical, different from other online behaviour commonly called participatory, such as sharing, tagging and liking. Participatory behaviour such as e-comments create new challenges and opportunities and open the new horizon for customers. It also provides new boundaries for developing and challenging traditional communication theories (Chung et al., 2015, p. 452).

Before the advent of Internet technology, the public used to write letters and made telephone calls to communicate. In this technological era, with the rapid growth in internet-based technology, the way of communication has changed and people have the right to express their views on social media. (McCluskey & Hmielowski, 2011, p. 305). Although this online mechanism is an easy and fast source to communicate, participate and to engage the public in an online conversation at any social media platform (McMillen, 2013, p. 8), digitization has made it much easier to post comments but in a controlled manner (Ellis, 2015, p. 47).

A large variety of online applications have been developed with the expansion of the Internet worldwide. This new technological advancement includes the new technological devices and the organizations within which they are



produced. These advance technologies provide the facilities to their users to create their own online social group, discussion forums or blogs (Briggs & Burke, 2009).

‘Liberated’ and ‘empowered’, individuals could begin designing their own websites, blogs, forums, discussion groups and eventually new sites through easily navigated, free applications downloads (Briggs & Burke, 2009). New communication technologies arise in many ways the greatest significance of the new communication technologies. The Internet was designed for commerce, but became available to anyone with access; in essence, a tool for business also became a tool for pleasure (Ellis, 2015, p. 48).

4. E-Comments in Business

Organizations are moving forward by using social media platforms and technology. It is expected that almost in all fields there will be nearly 26 billion devices by 2020. In today’s era technology-driven information revolution in the business management practices (Bi & Member, 2014, p. 1537) Consumers are found the most connected to the internet. When the organizations show their presence on social media, consumers cite and recommend product and services to the other consumer by e-commenting. Therefore it is important for the organizations to create the initial momentum and to gain a foothold in the marketplace. Since consumers are connected, often share information with others about products, brands by e-comments on discussion forums, blogs, Facebook etc. Thus, e-comments generated by consumers providing opportunity to expand more quickly and innovative way. To be innovative and gaining competitive advantage over competitors by interaction and acquiring information from customers. Thus, it is important for the organization to participate in commentary conversation among customers and other stakeholders to get more information (Yu, Roy, & Quazi, 2017, p. 269).

Rapid growth in social media applications have led to increasing ratio of e-comments on internet (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014, p. 177). Internet sites allow customers to post e-comments, photos, stories, experiences. Consumers are consulting these sites to determine which products to buy, which hotels they choose, where they eat and which destinations to visit. E-comments provide the facility to the customers for decision making (Sparks & Browning, 2011). In addition, e-comments have the potential to enhance the business profitability, or conversely, damage the brands and business reputations. For these reasons, online reviews are ongoing concerns for organizations (Floyd, Freling, & Alhoqail, 2014). In addition to their business impacts, e-comments reviews may have adverse consequences for the psychological wellbeing and job satisfaction of the workers (Weber, Bradley, & Sparks, 2017, p. 2848). E-comments may have some practical impacts on business management. These impacts are discussed below.

E-comments as a Competitive Advantages for Marketer: Social media technology has made it easy and cheap for the marketer to promote their products using the online application. Marketers use social media application to promote their products and services. To make a successful marketing strategy, organizations must collect information about their customers by analyzing their e-comments on social media platforms. Currently, market research on sentiment analysis is flourishing because of its wide range of applications. Sentiment analysis is essential to identify customers’ opinions about products and thereby the customer’ attitudes (Micu, Micu, & Geru, 2017, p. 1094).

Use of E-comments in E-commerce: Social media has significantly strengthened the e-commerce on the social network. Currently, the several applications are available thereby customers are able to trade in e-market via e-comments. Regardless the type of e-comments (Structured or unstructured), both these types of e-comments may benefits for organizations and customers in decision making in a more efficient way (X. Zhang, Yu, & Li, 2016, p. 120).

Trust Building Role of E-comments: Organizations are increasingly interested in reviewing the customers’ e-comments, online product review, and ratings to build the reputation and to reduce uncertainty in the online marketplace. Organizations expected that this mechanism not only captures the potential customer but also help to engage the existing customers (Liu & Tang, 2018, p. 667).

E-comments as a Marketing Tools: Marketing experts recommend online review as a tool to the organizations. Currently, e-comments have become important marketing tools. Customers post and share their opinions with other customers by commenting on company’ websites. While some customers only read e-comments posted by other customers. Nowadays organizations are providing vital space on their own websites to customers for sharing personal experiences about their product and services. For instance, Amazon.com and Booking.com are two of the most popular websites which are providing such facilities to their regular customers (Matute, 2016, p. 1091).

E-comments as the voice of the customer: Customers are increasingly posting e-comments on social media to share their experiences. Customer's e-comments are valuable opportunities for the organizations to analyze the factors which are directly concerning with the customers. As e-comments spread rapidly, therefore, customers encourage to comment on their experiences on social media. Past studies indicated two important findings; e-comments will be more reliable when a large number of customers contribute to a product. Second, relying on e-comments brings more confidence when commenter present detail of his evaluation (Memarzadeh, Blum, & Adams, 2015, p. 261).

E-comments as an advertising channel: Online social networks are the advertising channel for the organizations. Which provides the opportunity to join the conversation with millions of customers, in this way, organizations know who is talking about their product or services and organizations are able to identify the positive and negative e-comments. Online social networks enable practitioners to interact with the key audience and to identify further networks related to their business. Tapping such type of sources practitioners can improve their knowledge of their products and services, customer, and market trend. Hence the e-comments posted by customers on social networks assist in management knowledge for practitioners (Marqués, 2015, p. 1915).

Employee's E- comments and Posts: Courts judgements in connection to social media are related to disciplinary measures including dismissals adopted by employers as a reaction to insulting e-comments posted by employees on social media. It is lawful for the employer to dismiss such employee who posts offensive e-comments that can be damaging for the employer, the company or their workmates. For example, the labour court declared lawfulness of dismissal of aircraft employee of the company EasyJet, who indicated on her Facebook profile "FuckEasyJet". Similarly, an Airline Pilot who was degraded from the flight commander, who accused the serious irregularities concerning flight security. The dismissals have also been validated in regard to employees who had insulted other coworkers by sending WhatsApp messages to them or to their relatives, as it was revealed to the bosses by recipients. The dismissal was considered appropriate for an employee who made offensive e-comments on social media (Alonsot, 2018, p. 297).

Social media and public relations: Social media specialists have advised organizations regarding analysis of customer' e-comments with utmost care. Although customers are allowed to contribute to the companies' wall, are considered friends of the companies. However, fans may write negative e-comments about products and services of the organizations. N. L. Chan and Guillet (2011) suggested that "being unresponsive to customer' negative comments may put a company in a disadvantageous position as the company may lose the customer' business in the future". Leung, Law, and Hoof (2013) argued that managers should reply to their customers and described them why something negative has occurred (Sparks, So, & Bradley, 2016, p. 75). Indeed, Social media specialist have found the appropriate method for dealing with adverse e-comments: Suggested that don't delete adverse e-comments, rather try to respond to these remarks in a positive manner. The reasonable responses to unfavorable e-comments are intended to promote good public relations. Ensuring that customers are heard, their complaints are taken seriously and their issues are resolved. Unfavorable e-comments must not be ignored (Dekay, 2012, p. 290).

Sentiment Analysis: The widespread of social media tools has generated huge amount e-comments on social media platforms. Marketers can analyze these e-comments by using sentiment analysis to discover new insight about brand awareness, and customer's behaviour (He, Zha, & Li, 2013, p. 464). The main task of sentiment analysis is the sentiment extraction, sentiment classification, sentiment retrieval and reposting for decision-makers (Zhao, Qin, & Liu, 2010). As social media is an important media channel to access the customer for the organizations. Therefore the organizations should be able to predict how sentiment analysis may affect their business practices (Moro, Rita, Vala, 2016, p. 1095). Furthermore, e-comments review especially post-purchase experiences, considered more helpful than information created by the marketer. Positive e-comments increase the awareness and trust of the company among potential customers (Flanagin & Metzger, 2013, p. 1627). Hence the organizations must manage the online reviews in a way that leads to positive outcomes (Micu et al., 2017, p. 1095).

E-comments and online shopping: Online shopping has become an integral part of our lives because of its convenience and efficiency. Online shopping is unique with respect to time and space as compared to traditional shopping (Lu, Ba, & Zha, 2012). However, customers face some uncertainty when they go to purchase online. Therefore, e-comments have been considered one of the most popular sources of information about any organization and products. This is the reason, customers are turning to review e-comments to make more efficient decisions (Li, Liang, & Liu, 2014, p. 64). The relationships between e-comments and sales of products lead the organizations to make new online marketing strategy (Hong, Xu, & Xu, 2017, p. 30).



E-comments as a Source of Consumer Behaviour identification: Social media platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Blogs) are sources of a large amount of valuable information. Online social media platforms are huge repository of information which is always available for businesses. On the other hand, websites of businesses which are always openly available for customers, where customers can ask their queries by commenting. E-comments are useful tools for analyzing consumer behaviour and to develop the business strategy (H. K. Chan & Lacka, 2017, p. 5027).

Furthermore, consumers tend to rely on information provided by their fellows about product and services than information provided by business entities, because peer customers are more trustworthy. Furthermore, consumers are believed to have no vested patterns when posting e-comments, similarly, there is no structured pattern for them to share their experiences on the social media (X. R. Zhao, Wang, & Guo, 2015, p. 1344).

The Role of Webcare for E-comments Review: To prevent unsatisfactory customer experiences and having a negative impact on the wider audience, Organizations are appointing one or more representatives to monitor the online conversations at social media platforms. This type practice of businesses is known as webcare, “the act of engaging in online interactions with (complaining) consumers, by actively searching the web to address consumer feedback (e.g. questions, concerns and complaints)” (Noort & Willemsen, 2011, p. 133). By doing so, webcare addresses to those individuals who always post negative comments about organization (Noort, Willemsen, & Kerkhof, 2014, p. 79).

Webcare influences the reputation of the organization directly as well as indirectly. Many other customers, not just the complainant, are observing the responses of webcare. Webcare can influence people’s impressions by posting positive e-comments. Organizations are showing, they are taking care of their customer’s concerns. Thus, from the public relation perspective, webcare manage reputation and relationship before negative e-comment spread (Noort et al., 2014).

E-comments and innovation: Online user innovation communities (OUICs) can post e-comments for new ideas about innovation. Organizations choose those relevant ideas for their innovation development or improve existing products. The OUICs also support the organizations to propagate developed innovation in the market by e-comments. For instance, e-comments posted by dell’s OUIC “Improved the look of Inspiron laptop by removing some of the rubber nubs from the screen”. The other customers also extend this idea by e-commenting. Dell accepts these ideas and improved the design, removed rubber buttons. After successfully launching the innovative model to the market, dell announced in IdeaStrom to inform its customers this innovation (Dong & Wu, 2015, p. 114).

5. Conclusions

Currently, the trend of e-comments review on social media platforms has drastically increased. Customers follow e-comments to make purchase decisions and share their experiences by posting e-comments. Therefore, organizations review e-comments on most frequently used social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc.) to determine their customers’ attitude about products and services. It can be said that in this competitive business environment e-comments have brought a substantial change in business management practices.

It was concluded that well-established organizations are continuously engaged with social media to review customer’ e-comments. Purpose of this online interaction with their customer is to retain their customers as well as attract potential customers. In short, organizations are obtaining benefits from e-comments analysis, improve their business practices, and ultimately increase their profitability. For example, an organization used e-comments as advertising and new e-marketing tools in online shopping platform. Resultantly, organization improve their efficiency and effectiveness, direct communication with customers, quick response to the customer’ complaints, cost reduction, ultimately organizations achieve its organizational goal.

It was also concluded that positive e-comments increase the customers’ expectation of product quality and attitude toward the products. While the negative e-comments generally have a negative impact on customers’ attitudes (Hong et al., 2017, p. 31). Organizations should regard the negative e-comments of their customers otherwise negative e-comment put the organization in a disadvantageous position. Well-equipped organizations with social media are well known about how to deal with negative or unfavorable e-comments. Organizations are now hiring social media specialists to deal with negative e-comments. These specialists always maintain online relationships with their customers.

Finally, it was concluded that online e-comments contributes to organizational innovative practices. Customers comments their experiences about product or service experiences on social media platforms, which may lead

organizations to catch innovative ideas and improve their products. Furthermore, e-comments have become one of the important topics for organizations to be more progressive. It can be said that e-comments has become the emerging topic to research, so there is a need to identify its effects on services providing sectors.

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