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DOES WORD-OF-MOUTH'S EFFECT ON PRODUCTS/BRANDS DIFFER BETWEEN COUNTRIES? A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLAND AND RUSSIA

Adnane Alaoui[*]
Natalia Sulikashvili[**]

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate the effect that Word-Of-Mouth (WOM) could have on consumers in different countries, with respect to brand-choice, brand-image, product-category choice, the quantity purchased of a product/brand, and with respect to the likelihood of sharing a product/brand experience depending on a consumer's level of satisfaction with a specific product-category or brand (Satisfied, Dissatisfied, or Delighted). The hypotheses to be investigated were generated from the literature, and then used to define the variables that were later integrated in a Discriminant-Analysis, to help differentiate between the effects that WOM could have on the product/brand-related decisions stated above, in different countries.The effect of WOM on products categories and brands differs from one country to another on several facets, as illustrated here through the case of England and Russia. The findings of this paper advise marketers on whether to standardize their reliance on WOM to support their brands in different countries, or adapt its extent and manner to each specific country. Ability to predict consumers' country of origin, merely by analysing their answers to survey questions, and therefore foresee the differentiated effect of WOM on products and brands in each country.

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Keywords: Word-of-Mouth, Cross-Cultural, Consumer Behaviour, Russian consumers, English consumers

Introduction

The understanding of cross-cultural differences is crucial, especially when a company wishes to operate globally. Word-Of-Mouth (WOM) is one of the communications means, whose effectiveness in supporting product categories and brands' success, could be affected by the host country's Culture.

The effect of culture on WOM practices and how it reflects on product/brand success, has gained increased interest in research, as more businesses are operating globally. The main goal of this article is to contribute to this stem of research, by investigating the influence of culture on WOM-practices and effectiveness if any, and how that calls for adapting WOM-strategy to each country's culture. Russia and England were picked to illustrate, as they stand at opposite sides of the cultural dimensions' spectrums. Indeed, the former belongs to a Pyramid-Cluster, while the latter belongs to a Contest-Cluster [1].

The structure of this paper is as follows: First, the literature review covers the relevant work in the field of WOM in the cross-cultural context, which leads to generating the hypotheses to be tested. Second, the methodology adopted is rationalized, and the empirical study is depicted. Third, an interpretation of the findings is conducted to make sense out of the results. Finally, several managerial implications are suggested to marketers, to enable them to consider for differences in WOM practices across countries/cultures.

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[1] Wursten Huib, Fadrhonc Tom, *International Marketing and Culture", ITIM report,* [https://www.academia.edu/22416733/International_marketing_and_Culture], 17 December 2019.

Literature Review

Word-Of-Mouth (WOM)

Westbrook defined WOM as "informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular good or service"[2]. Previous research show that consumers generally view WOM as more trustworthy than corporate led marketing communications.[3] Silverman suggests that WOM is more successful than most forms of advertising as the message is tailored to the receiver[4]. Duffy adds that a message conveyed through a credible source is more powerful than using any other communication technique[5]. East et al. from their side, confirm that positive WOM enhances a consumer's attitude towards a product/brand, whereas negative WOM does the opposite[6]. Therefore, WOM plays a significant role in consumer opinion formation[7]. WOM also has an impact on the distribution and selling process of Products/brands, which explains

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[2] Westbrook, Robert (1987), "Product/Consumption-Based Affective Responses and Post Purchases Processes" in *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 24, no. 3, 258-270, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/3151636?origin=crossref&seq], 10 September 2019.

[3] Cf. Sweeney Jill C, Soutar Geoffrey N, Mazzol Tim, "Word of Mouth: Measurng the Power of Individual Messages" in *European Journal of Marketing*, vol .46, no. 1/2, 2012, pp. 237-257; Sicilia Maria, Delgado-Ballester Elena, Palazon Mariola, "The Need to Belong and Self-disclosure in Positive Word-of-mouth Behaviours: The Moderating Effect of Self-brand Connection" in *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol.15, no. 1, 2015, pp. 60-71.

[4] Silverman George, *Secret of Word-of-mouth Marketing: How to Trigger Exponential Sales Through Runaway Word of Mouth*, (2nd ed.), New York, AMACOM, 2010, p. 132.

[5] Duffy Andrew, "Friends and Fellow Travelers: Comparative Influence of Review Sites Friends on Hotel Choice" in *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, vol.6, no. 2, 2015, pp. 127-144.

[6] East Robert, Hammond Kathy, Lomax Wendy, "Measuring the Impact of Positive and Negative Word of Mouth on Brand Purchases Probability" in *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2008, pp. 215-224.

[7] Cf. Allsop Dee T, Bryce R. Basset, James A. Hoskins, "Word of Mouth Research: Principles and Applications" in *Journal of Advertising Research,* vol. 47, no. 4, 2007, pp. 398-409; Pongjit Chompunuch, Beise-Zee, Rian, "The Effect of Word-of-Mouth Incentivization on Consumer Brand Attitude" in *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, vol. 24, no.7, 2015, pp. 720-735.

why companies rely on it in their marketing[8] and companies that manage to build an "organic" customer-base (customers formed by WOM) gain customers with a longer life-time value[9].

WOM and Cross-Cultural Differences

Hofstede states that culture is "the software of the mind" which controls our affective, cognitive and behavioural patterns[10]. He established the cultural dimensions theory that allocates a single score to each country based on the following dimensions: Power-Distance (PD), Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty-Avoidance (UA), Long-Term Orientation (LTO), and Indulgence. Therefore, this theory has some limits as it pays no attention to sub-cultures within a country[11], with the exception of Italy where a difference was made between the north and the south. Notably, for a country as heterogeneous as Russia with different ethnicities, dialects, and religious beliefs, it is difficult to allocate to each dimension one single score to represent the whole Russian population[12].

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[8] Berger Jonah, Schwartz Eric M, "What Drives Immediate and Ongoing Word of Mouth?" in *Journal of Marketing Research*, no. XLVLLL, October 2011, pp. 869-880.

[9] Cf. Villanueva Julian, Shijin Yoo, Dominique M. Hanssens, "The Impact of Marketing-Induced Versus Word-of-Mouth Customer Acquisition on Customer Equity Growth" in *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. XLV, February, 2008, pp. 48-59; Hauge Wien, Anders Ottar, Olsen Svein, "Evaluation Context's Role in Driving Positive Word-of-Mouth Intentions" in *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol.11, no. 6, 2011, pp. 504-513; Becerra Enrique P, Badrinarayanan, Vishag, "The Influence of Brand Trust and Brand Identification on Brand Evangelism" in *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, vol. 22, no. 5/6, 2013, pp. 371-383.

[10] Hofstede Geert (2001), *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (2nd ed.), London, Thousand Oaks CA, Sage Publications, 2011, pp. 134.

[11] Kwek Dennis, "Decolonizing and Re-presenting Culture's Consequences: A Postcolonial Critique of Cross-Cultural Studies", in Prasad A (Eds.) Postcolonial Theory and Organisational Analysis: A Critical Engagement, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 121-146.

[12] Bezuglova Natalia, *Teoria Kultury*, Vestnik MGUKI, no. 5, 2018, pp. 29-32, [https://cyberleninka.ru/article/v/model-chetyreh-parametrov-kultury-girta-hofsteda], 15 January, 2021.

Wursten and Fadrhonc grouped Countries in clusters based on their shared values[13]. Thereby, the Russian culture belongs to the *Pyramid*-Cluster that is characterized by having high cultural index scores on "PD", "UA", and the "LTO", while it has low scores on Individualism and Masculinity. On the other hand, the English culture belongs to the *Contest*-Cluster that is characterized by a high index scores for Individualism and Masculinity, while it has low scores on "PD", "UA", and the "LTO". Given these opposite cultures, according to the cultural indexes, it is expected that WOM effect on product/brand choice, image, etc. in these two countries would potentially differ, and that's what justifies selecting England and Russia to highlight the effect of culture on online shopping for products/brands. For instance, Doran suggests that Chinese consumers as part of a collectivist culture (like the Russians), search for and rely on personal recommendation more than their North American counterpart that are part of a more individualistic culture (like the English)[14]. They are also less likely to make individual decisions, and are influenced by reference groups, contrary to American consumers who are more likely to make decisions based on their own experiences.

With respect to e-WOM, Christodoulides at al. found that Chinese consumers, as part of a high "UA" culture, were sensitive to recent e-WOM regardless of their connotation[15]. Contrarily, English consumers, as part of a *low* "UA" culture, anchor on negative information. In addition, Dobele et al. argue that various nationalities differ in their emotional responses to and acceptance of *viral*

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[13] Wursten Huib, Fadrhonc Tom, *International Marketing and Culture", 2012, ITIM report*,[https://www.academia.edu/22416733/International_marketing_and_Culture],   17 December, 2019.

[14] Doran, Kathleen Brewer, "Lessons Learned in Cross Cultural Research of Chinese and North American Consumers" in *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 55, no.10, 2002, pp. 823-829.

[15] Christodoulides George, Michaelidou Nina, Argyriou Evmorfia, "Cross-National Differences in E-WOM Influence" in *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 46, no. 11/12, 2012, pp. 1689-1707.

marketing campaigns[16]. For example, what Americans may perceive as a positive viral marketing message, Japanese may find negative and offensive. In the same vein, Tseng and Stern found that Asian consumers favour interpersonal communication, as they find it more credible[17]. Schumann et al. add that WOM has more effect on consumer's perception of service quality, in *high* "UA" cultures (Mexican, Russian, German, Polish, or Thai), than in *low* "UA cultures (Australian, Dutch, Chinese, Indian, or American). They also confirm that WOM has greater effect on customers from *collectivist* cultures (Polish, Mexican, Russian, or Indian) than on customers from *individualist* cultures (American, Dutch, or German)[18].

The examples set up-forth, illustrate how culture could have an effect on WOM practices. In the section below, the research hypotheses to be investigated, are formulated and justified.

Hypotheses Definition

In this section, several hypothesis are defined. The objective of the paper is either to prove that the *Null*-Hypothesis (H_0) of no-difference between English and Russian consumers is true, and therefore accept it, or to prove that the *Alternative*-Hypothesis (H_A) of significant differences between English and Russian consumers is true, and therefore reject (H_0) and accept (H_A).

As Russians score lower on individualism than English people, the former are considered as part of a collectivist culture characterized

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[16] Dobele Angela, Lindgreen Adam, Beverland Michael, Vanhamme Joelle, Van Wijk Raymond, "Why Pass on Viral Messages? Because They Connect Emotionally" in *Business Horizons*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2007, pp. 291-304.

[17] Tseng Douglas, L.P Stern, Bruce. L, "Cultural Difference in Information Obtainment for financial Decisions-East Versus West" in *Journal of Euro-Marketing*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1996, pp. 37-48.

[18] Schunamm Jan H, Wangenheim Florian V, Stringfellow Anne, Yang Zhilin, Blazevic Vera, Praxmarer Sandra, Shainesh G.. Komor Marcin, Shannon Randall, M, Jiménez Fernando R, "Cross-Cultural Differences in the Effect of Received Word-of-Mouth Referral in Relation Service" in *Journal of International Marketing*, vol.18, no. 3, 2010, pp. 62-80.

by a high communication context[19]. According to Hofstede people from collectivist cultures with low Power-Distance and Uncertainty-Avoidance such as Russian, are more likely to acquire information via implicit interpersonal communication[20]. They are also more likely to share verbal messages compared to people in individualistic cultures, with low Power-Distance and uncertainty avoidance, such as English consumers. The higher likelihood of Russians to share could be explained by a higher Collectivism in Russia, where people are not supposed to look after their family only, but also after their friends, and neighbours. Even if it may not sound grammatically correct in English, Russians would say "We, with friends" instead of saying "Me, and my friends", which reflects the importance that the group takes over the individual. Therefore, one would anticipate Russians to be more likely to make other people benefit from an experience they had with a product-category or brand, by sharing it with them. Consequently, we can expect that:

H₁- *Alternative:* The frequency of engaging in WOM activity differs for Russian vs for English consumers.

1) Credibility of WOM vs Alternative Communication Means

In cultures with a High Uncertainty-Avoidance (UA) such as Russia, people think "Deductively", and a higher appreciation is given to experts' opinion, while in cultures with a Low (UA) such as England, statements by practitioners are more appreciated than statements by experts, as the thinking is "Inductive" [21]. Given that the Russian culture has higher (UA) than the English, one would expect that:

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[19] Mooij Marieke, Hofstede Geert, "Cross Cultural Consumer Behaviour: a Review of Research Findings" in *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, vol. 23, 2011, pp. 181–192.

[20] Hofstede, Geert (2001), *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (2nd ed.), London, Thousand Oaks CA, Sage Publications

[21] Mooij Marieke, Hofstede, Geert, "Cross Cultural Consumer Behaviour: a Review of Research Findings" in *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, vol. 23, 2011, pp. 181–192

H₂- *Alternative*: English consumers perceive *WOM* to be more *credible* than Russians do.

According to Nielsen's survey in 2017, 60% of Russians and 56% of English people did not trust traditional advertising. The Russian society scores high on long-term orientation, and has pragmatic orientation, where people believe that truth depends on the context[22].

As a result, Russians would perceive an advertising as a desperate call to sell non-desired products, and therefore would not trust it. On the other hand, despite the fact that the English society scores low on the long-term orientation, they will also be reluctant to trust an advertising, because they expect quick results (here and now), and could perceive an advertising as a promise for future delivery of a benefit that may never be redeemed. We could therefore expect that:

H₃-*Null*: The credibility of *traditional advertising* is similar in both England and Russia.

Other sources of information such as the *News* evoke a little more confidence among Russian and English people with 61% and 62% of them respectively confirming that they view it as a credible source of information[23]. As Russians score high on Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) that is "95", according to Hofstede, they feel susceptible to ambiguous situation, and find a message from an official source such as the news to be credible and comforting[24]. The English on the other hand have an intermediate score on (UA), but still show more confidence in messages from official sources such as the news, than from advertising, and the physical isolation of Great-Britain as an

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[22] Hofstede Geert, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (2nd ed.): London, Thousand Oaks CA, Sage Publications, 2001, p. 38.

[23] Austin Shaun, Newman Nic, Attitudes to Sponsored and Branded Content, 2016, *Native Advertising* [http://www.digitalnewsreport.org], 30 October 2020.

[24] Hofstede Geert, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (2nd ed.), London: Thousand Oaks CA, Sage Publications, 2001, p.46.

island provides some reason for this position, as places that are geographically isolated may become less outward looking, with ethnocentric residents, that are less exposed to people from other cultures and ethnicities[25]. This could explain the importance of the news as a mean to keep an eye on a foreign threat for this type of societies, and therefore the news stands as a more credible source of information. This case applies to England, since it was physically separated from the rest of Europe about 8000 years ago, after the water submerged the land that used to link it to Europe. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H₄-*Null*: The credibility of the *News* is similar in England and Russia.

2) WOM's Effect on Consumers' Choices

This section covers hypotheses related to the effect WOM has on consumers' choices, namely on *where* to shop, *what* product categories, brands, or quantities of a product/brand to buy, and on brand-image.

According to Mooij and Hofstede collectivist cultures have a higher level of Power-Distance (PD) and Uncertainty-Avoidance (UA) than individualist cultures, as is the case for the Russian (PD-Index = 93), relatively to the English culture[26]. This combination of high collectivism on one hand, and high (PD) on the other hand, pushes Russian consumers to seek information about where their aspirational group shops, with the belief that shopping in the same stores would give them a higher status. In addition, as Russians shop for the extended family, they prefer stores that provide a wide variety of

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[25] Carter Rosie, Hope Not Hate, National Conversation Special: Rosie Carter Discusses her Crusial Research on Attitudes to Immigration, 2018 [Video file, [https://www.buzzsprout.com/170425/810647-national-conversation-special-rosie-carter-discusses-her-crucial-research-on-attitudes-to-immigration], 10 February, 2020.

[26] Mooij Marieke, Hofstede Geert, "Cross Cultural Consumer Behaviour: a Review of Research Findings" in *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, vol. 23, 2011, pp. 181–192.

products for a "One-Stop-Shop", and any information that helps them locate these types of stores is welcomed[27]. Moreover, the higher (UA) in Russia seems to increase the effect of WOM on where to shop, as people give/take advice from others about what shops sell better quality products for instance, which becomes crucial in a society where quality lacks standardization.

One could therefore expect that:

H₅-*Alternative*: WOM has more effect on *where to shop* for Russian than for English   consumers.

Concerning WOM's Effect on what *Product Category* to Buy, Russia and England significantly differ in terms of their *Individualism-*Index ("39" and "89", respectively), which could result in more pressure on Russian consumers, to conform to consumption habits of the Russian society. Similarly, the fact that Russia scores higher on uncertainty-Avoidance (UA) than England ("95" and "35", respectively), also contributes to putting pressure on Russian consumers to adhere to consumption traditions, as societies with high UA such as Russia, and in an effort to control the unknown, tend to be less tolerant of deviations from an agreed norm of conduct. To illustrate, the high consumption of buckwheat in Russia is partially explained by the fact that Russians actively advise their friends and relatives to purchase it, because of its believed health benefits [28]. In the same vein, the consumption of offal porridge, green tea, or cabbage is very high in Russia, and Russian consumers actively advise each other to purchase them for their health benefits as well [29]. As a result, one would expect that:

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[27] Nielsen, *The Nielsen Global Trust in Advesrtising Report,* 2013 [available at: https://www.nielsen.com/id/en/press-room/2013/WORD-OF-MOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS-REMAIN-THE-MOST-CREDIBLE.html], 23 November, 2019
[28] Rahmanova Karina, *Продукты питания,* 2018 [https://plus.rbc.ru/news/5c0f56f07a8aa97cd4254d25], 4 December, 2021
[29] Milevsk Iskander, *Правильное питание. Самые полезные продукты для здоровья россиян,* 2018 [https://meduniver.com/Medical/profilaktika/poleznie_produkti.html MedUniver], 23 November 2019.

H₆-*Alternative*: WOM has more effect on *Product-Category* choices for Russian than for English consumers.

With respect to WOM's Effect on *Brand-Choice*, cultures with high Power-Distance and Long-Term Orientation tend to have a pragmatic orientation [30]. The English culture fits less this description than the Russian, for whom status is important and believe that purchasing brand-names would help them climb the status hierarchy. Therefore, they rely on personal networks called "blat" in Russian[31], to acquire information about brands that would help them gain status. Indeed, taking on-board what this network suggests reinforces the consumer's long-term belonging to it, while ignoring the network's suggestions would loosen the consumer's thighs with it, which is perceived as a high cost, especially that these thighs take a long time to build[32]. One would then expect that:

H₇-*Alternative*: WOM has more effect on *Brand-Choice* for Russian than for English   consumers.

As to WOM's Effect on the *Quantity* to Purchase of a product/brand, Russian consumers score high on the long-term orientation and can be considered as a culture with a pragmatic mind-set, where people believe that truth depends on situation, context and time. Therefore, an inherited phenomena from the Soviet times, is when WOM accelerates the buying process, and people would purchase higher quantities of a product and store it, once they learn through WOM that it is available, fearing a shortage on that item in the future [33]. On the other hand, due to saving motives, Russians

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[30] Mooij Marieke, Hofstede Geert, "Cross Cultural Consumer Behaviour: a Review of Research Findings" in *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, vol. 23, 2011, pp. 181–192.

[31] Ledeneva Alena, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 89.

[32] Low George S, Lamb Charles W, "The Measurement and Dimensionality of Brand Associations" in *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, vol.9, no. 6, 2000, pp. 350-368.

[33] Zemtsov Ilya, *Encyclopedia of Societ Life*: New Brunswick (USA) & London (UK), Transaction Publishers, 1990, pp. 79.

would usually purchase in small quantities, which moderates the increase due to the acceleration above. Indeed, according to Levada-Center survey in 2017, 57% of Russians rely on WOM due to an economical drive[34]. As to English consumers, they don't buy products in big quantities, since the size of their pantries is limited contrasted with that of American houses' pantries for instance, which leave little room for storing goods [35]. As a result, WOM cannot significantly increase the quantities purchased in England.

One could therefore expect that purchased quantities of a product/brand for both English and Russian consumers, would not to be much affected by WOM, as the former cannot store much due to the limited pantries size, while the latter has historically constrained the quantity purchased due to a limited purchase power. Which leads to the eighth hypothesis, that is:

H8-_Null_:. WOM affects moderately only, the _Quantity_ bought of a product/brand for both Russian and English consumers

Regarding WOM's Effect on _Brand-Image_, it is important to note that the _Masculinity_ index of England is higher than that of Russia (66 versus 36, respectively), And since assertiveness is a characteristic of a masculine culture[36], WOM would have less influence on the position that brands occupy in English consumers' mind, as they will stick to their preconceived perceptions of brand-images. On the other hand, as Russians are part of a less masculine culture, they are more likely to reach consensus among them, which sets a fertile ground for WOM to have an effect on their perception of brand-images.

The effect of a low _Individualism_-Index on pressuring individuals to adhere to a norm of conduct or thought, could be counterbalanced in some societies by their relatively moderate UA-index, such as in Brazil

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[34] http://www.levada.ru/2014/02/17/potrebitelskie-predpochteniya

[35] LaBarbera-Twarog, Emily, _Politics of the Pantry, Housewives, Food and Consumer Protest in Twentieth Century_: New York City, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 97.

[36] Hofsted, Geert, "Attitudes, Values and Organizational Culture: Disentangling the Concepts" in _Organization Studies,_ vol.19, no .3, 1998, pp. 477-493.

("38" and "74", respectively), given that a decrease in the UA-Index of a culture increases its tolerance for differences, as stated above.

But the fact that Russia has both a low Individualism and a high UA Indexes ("39" and "95", respectively)fuels the already high pressure of Collectivism (low Individualism) on Russian consumers to conform to the group's perceptions and believes. We thus expect that:

H₉-*Alternative*: WOM would have more effect on *Product/Brand Image* on Russian than on English consumers.

3) Effect of Product/Brand Satisfaction-Level on Likelihood to Share through WOM

With reference to the likelihood of *sharing* a product/brand experience when *Satisfied* or *Delighted*, and given that Russia is a collectivist culture[37], family, and friends are central, and one could therefore assume that Russians are more likely to share information with them. In addition, Russians score higher than English people on the UA-index, and are more pessimistic [38], as societies with higher UA-indexes tend to be relatively more pessimistic [39]. Therefore, one would expect that a satisfying product/brand experience would generate more positive reactions from Russian than from English consumers, as the gap between a positive product/brand experience and what a *pessimistic* person expects, is more pronounced than the gap between a positive product/brand experience and what a *non-pessimistic* person would expect. This leads to the following hypothesis:

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[37]Hofstede Geert, "Attitudes, Values and Organizational Culture: Disentangling the Concepts" in *Organization Studies,* vol.19, no. 3, 1998, pp. 477-493.

[38] Hofstede Geert, "Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context" in *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, vol.2, no. 1, 2011, pp. 1-26.

[39] Schunamm Jan H, Wangenheim Florian V, Stringfellow Anne, Yang Zhilin, Blazevic Vera, Praxmarer Sandra, Shainesh G.. Komor Marcin, Shannon Randall M, Jiménez Fernando R, "Cross-Cultural Differences in the Effect of Received Word-of-Mouth Referral in Relation Service" in *Journal of International Marketing*, vol.18, no. 3, 2010, pp. 62-80.

H₁₀-*Alternative*: When *Satisfied*, Russian consumers are more likely to share a Product/Brand experience, than their English counterparts.

And

H₁₁-*Alternative*: When *Delighted*, Russians consumers are more likely to share a Product/Brand exprerience, than their English counterparts.

Vis-à-vis the likelihood of *Sharing* a product/brand Experience if *Dissatisfied*, since prevention of losing face is important in countries that are part of the Pyramidal Cluster, which includes countries with a low level of *Individualism* such as Russia, some Russian consumers are reluctant to admit having a negative product/brand experience[40], as it may reflect negatively on their status, in the sense that it would tarnish the image they create of their own standards of living, and lifestyle[41]. On the other hand, societies with high UA and therefore low Tolerance such as Russia would tend to be relatively pessimistic as stated above, and would be more likely to expect and accept a Non-positive product/brand experience. As a result, when dissatisfied, it's not much of a surprise, and wouldn't generate significant WOM communication for most Russians [42].

Nevertheless, being part of a culture with a *Low* UA as in England where positive attitudes are more prevalent, people tend to ignore negative experiences, and therefore a dissatisfaction would generate less WOM as well. All the above leads to the following hypothesis:

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[40] Guryeva Elena, "Social Status and its Impact on Consumer Behaviour of Actor in the Market of Tourist Services" in *Социология и Социальные Технологии*, vol.16, no. 4, 2017, pp. 24-32.

[41] Sulikashvili Natalia, *Consommation et consommateurs en Russie soviétique et post-soviétique: une contribution à l'approche des marchés russes*, doctoral thesis ; Hassan, Louise; Shiu, Edward; Parry, Sara (2016), "Addressing the Cross-Country Applicability of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB): A structured Review of Multy-Country TPB Studies" in *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol.15, no. 1, 2006, pp. 72-86.

[42] Demidov Alexandre, *GfK, Rossijskij Potrebitel, 2015 Monitoring*
[https://www.gfk.com/fileadmin/user_upload/dyna_content/RU/Documents/Press_Releases/2016/GfK_RussianConsumer_2015_Report.pdf.], 3 November 2019.

H$_{12}$-*Null*: When *Dissatisfied*. Russian and English consumers are equally likely not to share a Product/Brand experience.

Conceptual Model

The figure below depicts what this article seeks to achieve, that is collecting consumers' answers to questions that fall under three different factors, and merely by analyzing the aggregated answers to these questions, predicting each consumer's country of origin, and classifying them as English or Russian consumers. This is accomplished through the use of Discriminant-Analysis. The results of this study would allow to predict and contrast, the effect that WOM could have on consumers both in Russia and England, with respect to *brand-choice*, to *brand-image*, to *product-category* choice, to the *quantity* purchased of a product/brand, and with respect to the likelihood of *sharing a product/brand experience* depending on the consumer's level of satisfaction with a specific product-category or brand.

Figure 1 Conceptual model
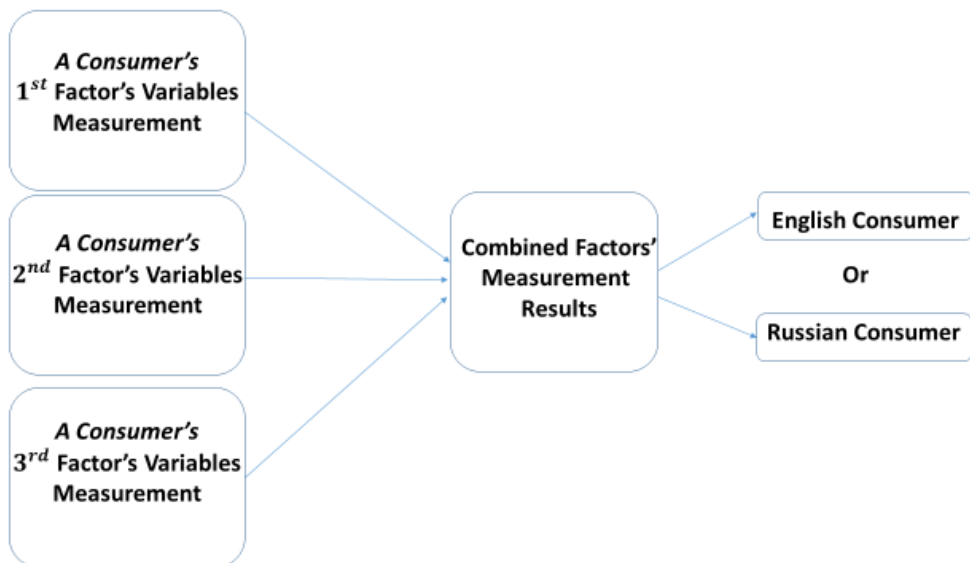
Methodology

The objective of this research is twofold, *descriptive* and *causal*. It is *descriptive* in the sense that it describes WOM practices and its effectiveness among English and Russian consumers, but it is also *causal*, as it shows how WOM practices and effect on consumers (Independent variables), can help predict the latter's country of origin (Dependent variable) for both Russian and English consumers, through a *Discriminant analysis*. Nobre, et. al, (2016) used Discriminant-Analysis in a cross-cultural context to study differences in risk-tolerance, between Brazilian and American consumers of financial products., while, Swerdlow and Cummings used Discriminant-Analysis, to better understand cross-cultural differences between U.S. and Russian lodging employees[43]. In addition, Discriminant analysis was used by Alaoui and Vianelli, (2018) to investigate differences in online shopping habits between English, Italian, and Chinese consumers[44]. Discriminant-Analysis will enable us to guess a consumer's country of origin, merely by analysing the answers that s/he provides to the survey questions. By doing so, it will be possible to describe and therefore forecast consumers' behaviour, and also foresee what to expect in each country, based on the 12 independent behavioural variables considered in this study.

The *type* of data collected is primary, where respondents were asked questions that reflect each of the twelve hypotheses generated above. These questions are the twelve independent variables considered in this study, and that will be simmered down to the

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[43] Swerdlow Skip, Theodor Cummings, Toward a Better Cross-Cultural Understanding of U.S. and Russian Lodging Employees: A Discriminant   Journal of Tourism Research and Hospitality Analysis Approach, vol, 24/3, 2000, pp. 336-349.

[44] Alaoui Adnane, Vianelli Donata, "Does Culture Affect Consumer Behaviour, When Shopping On-Line?" Lopez, F.J.M, Abad, J.C.G and Chevnev, A. (ed.) *Advances in National Brand and Private Label Marketing,* Springer, Switzerland, 2018, pp. 105-113.

following three factors, through *Factor Analysis*: 1) The *frequency* and *likelihood* of *sharing* a product/brand experience via WOM (when satisfied, dissatisfied, or delighted); 2) The *credibility* of different sources of information (WOM, Advertising, and the News); and 3) The likelihood of *Word-of-Mouth's effect* (on *Where*, *What* and *How Much* to buy of a product/brand). This Factor Analysis gives more structure and visibility to the nature of the independent variables considered in this study. Concerning the measurement scales used, the *likelihood* of *sharing*, as well as the *likelihood of Word-of-Mouth's effect* on a variety of consumers' decisions regarding products/brands experience, were measured using a 5-points Likert-scale, where "1" stands for "Very Unlikely", and "5" for "Very Likely". On the other hand, the *credibility* of different sources of information was measured using a "0" to "10" scoring scale, where "0" stands for "Not credible at All", and "10" for "Very Credible".

A *survey* was chosen as a research *approach,* whereby a mixed method was adopted in collecting data by email, and through administering questionnaires face-to-face. The sample studied was demographically balanced between English and Russian respondents, where 200, and 306 respondents were picked in -Russia and in England respectively, using a *probabilistic* method, and more specifically the *simple-random* procedure. This sampling procedure was used, because the phenomena being studied is common, and anybody could relate to it and would have the aptitude to answer the questions being raised. Because of the heterogeneity of the Russian population, we choose to interview people that are in the Moscow area only, because Hofstede's theory has some limits as it rarely pays attention to sub-cultures within a country, as was the case in Russia where only people that

lived in the Moscow area were included in his study (Cray, Mallory 1998; Tayeb 2001; Holden 2002; Kwek 2003)[45].

Empirical Study

As justified above, a Discriminant analysis was the most appropriate method to use. In general, the discriminant function is as follows:

$$D = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + \ldots + b_kX_k$$

Where, D stands for the Discriminant Score, the X_i are independent variables called predictors because they allow us to predict group belonging for each consumer, and the b_i are the discriminant function's coefficients or weights allocated to each variable X_i.

The criterion used by the Discriminant analysis to conduct comparisons in this case, is the "Country of Origin", and the twelve independent variables considered can be found under the three *factors* stated above. Indeed, given the number of independent variables considered, a factor analysis is run to categorize them under a smaller number of mutually exclusive and totally exhaustive factors. To be more specific, the *Extraction* Method used is *Principal Component* Analysis, and the *Rotation* Method used was *Varimax* with *Kaiser Normalization*, which converged in 13 iterations.

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[45]Cf. Cray David, Mallory Geoff, *Making Sense of Managing Culture*, London: Thomson, 1998, pp. 245; Holden Nigel, *Cross-cultural Management: A Knowledge Management Perspective*, Harlow, Prentice-Hall, 2002, pp. 321; Tayeb M, Conducting Research Across Cultures, Overcoming Drawbacks and Obstacles, *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, April 1, 2001, pp. 91-108; Kwek Dennis (2003), "Decolonizing and Re-presenting Culture's Consequences: A Postcolonial Critique of Cross-Cultural Studies", in Prasad A (Eds.) Postcolonial Theory and Organisational Analysis: A Critical Engagement, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 121-146.

Table-I Tests of Equality of Group Means

Variable Name	Variable Definition	England Mean	Russia Mean	F-Value	Sig.
X_1	Frequency of sharing a product/brand experience via WOM	3.10	2.13	58.380	.000
X_2	Credibility of WOM as a source of information	7.14	5.96	18.932	.000
X_3	Credibility of Advertising as a source of information	5.66	5.33	1.658	.199
X_4	Credibility of the News as a source of information	6.18	5.92	1.034	.310
X_5	WOM's Effect on Store-Choice	2.87	3.35	6.954	.009
X_6	WOM's Effect on Product-Category Choice	2.83	3.13	5.574	.019
X_7	WOM's Effect on Brand-Choice	2.91	3.19	7.232	.021
X_8	WOM's Effect on the Quantity to Buy of a product/brand	3.06	2.91	1.191	.276
X_9	WOM's Effect on Product/Brand Image	2.89	3.45	16.759	.000
X_{10}	Likelihood of Sharing a product/brand experience if *Satisfied*	3.41	4.01	24.624	.000
X_{11}	Likelihood of Sharing a product/brand experience if *Delighted*	3.68	4.23	22.802	.000
X_{12}	Likelihood of Sharing a product/brand experience if *Dissatisfied*	3.40	3.38	.025	.875

A one-way analysis of variance test (ANOVA) was run as part of the Discriminant analysis, in order to test the *Null* or *Alternative* Hypotheses (H_0 vs H_A), that the mean of each variable studied for the Russian consumers is, or is not significantly different from that of their English counterpart. These hypotheses tests rely on the F-test. In Table-1 above, the calculated F-values are compared to the theoretical F-values with "1" and "402" degrees of freedom for the numerator and the denominator respectively, and with 5% margin of error, that is $F_{(df_1=1;\ df_2=402;\ \alpha=5\%)} = 3.84$. Then, the *Null*-hypotheses (H_0) is rejected (the Alternative-Hypothesis accepted) if the latter is smaller than the former. For instance, the frequencies' mean of sharing a product/brand experience (X_1) for a Russian vs for an English consumer, are 2.13 and 3.10 respectively, where "2" stands for once a week and "3" stands for once a month. In this case, the F-test revealed that this difference was significant at $\alpha = 5\%$, because the calculated F-value is 58.38, which is larger than the theoretical value stated above that is 3.84. As a result, the *null*-hypothesis of no differences between Russian and English consumers with respect to the frequency of sharing a product/brand experience is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, that is the two cultures differ in the frequency of engaging in Word-of-Mouth activity. More specifically, Russians engage in Word-of-Mouth more frequently than English consumers.

Using a similar procedure, other F-tests were conducted to study the differences between Russian and English consumers with respect to the other variables. Out of the twelve variables studied, eight were significant in discriminating between the two country's consumers namely, X_1, X_2, X_5, X_6, X_7, X_9, X_{10}, and X_{11} (see Table-1 above for details). Therefore, the *Alternative*-hypotheses for H_1, H_2, H_5, H_6, H_7, H_9, H_{10}, and H_{11} were accepted, as their means for Russian and English consumers respectively, differed significantly.

Table-II Unstandardized Discriminant Function's coefficients

Variable Name	Variable Definition	Function Coefficients
X_1	Frequency of sharing a product/brand experience via WOM	.356
X_2	Credibility of WOM as a source of information	.144
X_3	Credibility of Advertising as a source of information	.012
X_4	Credibility of the News as a source of information	.019
X_5	WOM's Effect on Store-Choice	.006
X_6	WOM's Effect on Product-Category Choice	.326
X_7	WOM's Effect on Brand-Choice	-.360
X_8	WOM's Effect on the Quantity to Buy of a product/brand	-.024
X_9	WOM's Effect on Product/Brand Image	.157
X_{10}	Likelihood of Sharing a product/brand experience if Satisfied	-.184
X_{11}	Likelihood of Sharing a product/brand experience if Delighted	-.149
X_{12}	Likelihood of Sharing a product/brand experience if Dissatisfied	.204
	(Constant)	-1.100

Based on the *Unstandardized* coefficients stated in Table-II above, the *discriminant function* (which yields the *D*-score), is defined as follows:

D = -1.1 + 0.356* (Frequency of Sharing) + 0.144*(WOM Credibility) + 0.012*(Ads-Credibility) + 0.019*(News Credibility) + …..+ …..

This function will best discriminate between Russian and English consumers in the following manner: After replacing the variables in the equation above by each respondent's answer, a discriminant score (*D*) for each respondent was computed, then the discriminant scores' averages for Russian and for English respondents

(called *Centroids*) were calculated (-1.106 and 0.781, respectively; See Table-III below).

Table-III Group Centroids

Country of Origine	Function
England	0.718
Russia	-1.106

Hence, if the discriminant score (D-score) is positive after inputting the answers of a specific respondent to each variable into the equation above, then the respondent is classified as English. Otherwise (if the *D*-score is negative), the respondent is classified as Russian. Table- IV below shows the classification results. One can read that the *hit-ratio* was 83.2%, meaning that 83.2% of people in the sample were correctly classified, indicating the high discriminatory power of Word-of-Mouth practices between English and Russian consumers. A "Leave-One-Out" method is used for validation and reveals high robustness of the model, as its accuracy will only decrease by 1.5% to 81.7%, when applied to people outside the sample (See Table- IV).

Table IV Classification Results

			Predicted Group Membership		
			England	**Russia**	Total
Original[a] Country	Count	**England**	213	32	245
		Russia	36	123	159
	%	**England**	86.9	13.1	100.0
		Russia	22.6	77.4	100.0
Cross-validated[b]	Count	**England**	210	35	245
		Russia	39	120	159
	%	**England**	85.7	14.3	100.0
		Russia	24.5	75.5	100.0
a. 83.2% of original grouped cases correctly classified.					
b. 81.7% of cross-validated grouped cases correctly classified.					

Keeping in mind that the centroids of the Russian and the English groups are negative and positive respectively (as stated above), a closer look at the unstandardized coefficients of variables with a significant discrimination power in Table-II above, shows that people scoring high on variables X_7, X_{10}, and X_{11} are most likely to be Russian (as these variables' coefficients are negative), while those scoring high on variables X_1, X_2, and X_9, are most likely to be English (as these variables' coefficients are positive).

Table-V below ranks the independent variables in a decreasing order of their discrimination power between the Russian and English consumers, based on the absolute values of their respective *standardised* coefficients. Note that variables that were not found to be significant in discriminating between Russian and English consumers in the Test of Equality of Means above, are at the bottom of Table-5.

Table V Standardized coefficients

Variable Name	Variable Definition	Function 1
X_1	Frequency of sharing a product/brand experience via WOM	.427
X_{10}	Likelihood of Sharing a product/brand experience if Satisfied	-.277
X_{11}	Likelihood of Sharing a product/brand experience if Delighted	-.267
X_2	Credibility of WOM as a source of information	.243
X_9	WOM's Effect on Product/Brand Image	-.229
X_7	WOM's Effect on Brand-Choice	-.168
X_5	WOM's Effect on Store-Choice	-.147
X_6	WOM's Effect on Product-Category Choice	-.132
X_3	Credibility of Advertising as a source of information	.072
X_8	WOM's Effect on the Quantity to Buy of a product/brand	.061
X_4	Credibility of the News as a source of information	.057
X_{12}	Likelihood of Sharing a product/brand experience if Dissatisfied	.009

Interpretation of Findings

Now that data has been analysed and the findings reached, the next part of the paper focuses on giving meaning to these results through a thorough interpretation. This section focuses mainly on explaining the divergences, between English and Russian consumers, with respect to the components of the factors stated above, and does not interpret the similarities.

1st factor: Concerning the 1st factor that comprises variables X_1, X_{10}, X_{11}, and X_{12}, the latter variable did not reveal a significant difference between the two countries, while all the other variables did:

With reference to X_1, the results were against the expectations built through the literature review. Indeed, while cultures that are individualistic with low *Power-Distance* (PD) and low *Uncertainty-Avoidance* (UA) such as England tend to be *"Low-Context"* communication cultures that are more verbally oriented[46], and therefore should communicate verbally via WOM more frequently than in Russia, the study found that the opposite was true., as they scored 2.15 and 3.05 respectively, where "2" stands for communicating via WOM "every 2 weeks", and "3" stands for "once a month". As a result, *H1-Alternative*-Hypothesis was accepted, indicating that Russian and English consumers differed in their respective frequencies of sharing their product/brand experiences via WOM. Likewise, while English consumers should seek more actively WOM recommendation than Russians, given that individualistic cultures of low *Power-Distance* such as England, tend to actively acquire information via friends [47](Wursten and Fadrhonc, 2012), the study proves just the opposite. These contradictive results at times, question

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[46] Mooij Marieke, Hofstede Geert, (2011), "Cross Cultural Consumer Behaviour: a Review of Research Findings" in *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, vol. 23, 2011, pp. 181–192.

[47] Wursten Huib, Fadrhonc Tom, *International Marketing and Culture"*, 2012, *ITIM report,* [https://www.academia.edu/22416733/International_marketing_and_Culture], 17 December, 2019.

the validity of previous literature that issued scores for each country based on different cultural dimensions. If a single score was issued for each country, then the assumption is that each country is homogeneous, which is not always the case. While some work in the past accounted for the heterogeneity within the same country, such as differentiating between the North and the South of Italy[48], other studies [49] allocated one average to a country as large as Russia, assuming wrongly homogeneity of the Russian population! This lack of vigilance with respect to populations' heterogeneity could be behind some discrepancies observed between certain statements in the literature, and some results above.

As to variable X_{10}, the *Alternative* Hypothesis of H_{10} was accepted, meaning that when *satisfied*, Russians differ from English consumers in their likelihood to share a product/brand experience (Eng = 3.42 vs Rus = 4.07; where "1" stands for "very Unlikely to share", and "5" for "very Likely").The explanation of this finding is rooted in differences between the two cultures with respect to *Individualism*, and Uncertainty-Avoidance that reflects on Tolerance levels in each culture, as described above.

With respect to X_{11}, the *Alternative*-Hypothesis of H_{11} was accepted, meaning that Russians again, are more likely to share a product/brand experience when *delighted* than English consumers would, as they each scored 4.24 and 3.70, respectively. The same logic used in the *satisfying* situation above, applies to explaining the differences in the Likelihood of sharing when delighted. Moreover, one can note that in both countries, the probability to engage in WOM activity when *delighted* is higher than when "only" satisfied. A further observation is that Russian consumers are more likely to share a

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[48] Wursten Huib, Fadrhonc Tom, *International Marketing and Culture*", 2012, *ITIM report,* [https://www.academia.edu/22416733/International_marketing_and_Culture], 17 December, 2019.

[49] Hofstede Geert, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (2nd ed.): London, Thousand Oaks CA, Sage Publications, 2001, pp. 65.

product/brand experience when *satisfied* than English consumers would when they are *delighted*, as they scored 4.07 and 3.70 respectively! Which raises the question: Is being satisfied in Russia treated as a significant event, given the long communism period that made consumer satisfaction very scarce?

2nd _factor:_ With reference to the 2nd factor that comprises X_2, X_3, and X_4, the latter variable along with X_3 did not reveal a significant difference between the two countries. On the other hand, with respect to X_2, the *Alternative* Hypothesis of H_2 was accepted, meaning that English consumers perceive WOM to be more credible than their Russian counterparts, as they scored 7.2 and 6.2 respectively, where "10" stands for "Very Credible" and "1" for "Not Credible at All".

3rd _factor:_ In connection with the 3rd factor that comprises X_5, X_6, X_7, X_8, and X_9, only X_8 did not reveal a significant difference between the two countries. With regard to X_5, the *Alternative*-Hypothesis of H_5 was accepted, meaning that, Russian consumers seem to believe more than English consumers, that WOM has an effect on where they shop, as they scored 3.17 and 2.80 respectively, (where "1" is "Totally Disagreeing" with WOM having an effect on where they shop, and "5" is "Totally Agreeing" with it).

Vis-à-vis the variable X_6, the fact that H_6-*Alternative*-Hypothesis was accepted, means that, English consumers seem more likely to be effected by WOM when choosing what product-category to buy, than Russian consumers would, as they scored 3.13 and 2.83 respectively, based on the same scale used to measure variable X_5 above. Further investigation is needed to unveil whether specific product categories are more subject to WOM influence that others? One would suspect that product categories that are more involving, be it financially, socially, or usage wise, would generate more WOM. But, only future studies would confirm this statement.

As to the variable X_7, the *Alternative*-Hypothesis of H_7 was accepted, meaning that WOM has more effect on Russian consumers' brand-choice, than on their English counterparts, as they scored 3.19 and 2.91 respectively, where "1" is "Totally Disagree" with WOM having an effect on brand-choice, and "5" is "Totally Agreeing" with it. In addition to the explanation provided above within H_7 hypothesis definition, and that emphasised Russians reliance on Networks called "Blat" to guide them in their brand-choice process. Accepting the *Alternative*-Hypothesis of H_7 could also be explained by the fact that societies with a high *Long-Term-Orientation*-Index such as Russia ("81" vs "51" for England), rely heavy on networks as a source of information.

Regarding variable X_9, the *Alternative*-Hypothesis of H_9 was accepted, meaning that Russian consumers acknowledge a slightly higher effect of WOM on their perception of brand-Image than their English counterparts, as they scored 3.22 and 2.85 respectively, where "1" is "Totally Disagreeing" with WOM having an effect on brand-Image, and "5" is "Totally Agreeing" with it.

Managerial implications

In terms of managerial implications, the results reported in this study have significant implications for marketers aiming to operate in the international market. For instance, since WOM is more credible than Advertising in both Russia and England, marketers should rely more on it when elaborating marketing strategies than at present, in both countries. More specifically, as WOM has more effect on brand-choice in Russia than in England, marketers should emphasis the importance of social status when launching a WOM campaign in Russia, and how people could become members of their aspirational group, merely by making specific brand-choices.

In addition, WOM could be more effective in Russia, as it is a collectivist culture that is characterized by symbolism and indirect verbal expression, whereas in England consumer's argumentation, rhetoric,

and more formal verbal messages through a public-relations campaign should be used, as these are traits of an individualist culture[50].

Moreover, as WOM has slightly above average effect on the Russians and slightly below average effect on English consumers, with respect to "Store-Choice" and "Brand-Image", marketers should rely on WOM to affect these two dimensions, slightly more in Russia than in England.

On the other hand, the other variables namely, X_3, X_4, X_6, X_8, and X_{12}, do not have a statistically significant difference between Russia and England, and therefore marketers could rely equally on them in both countries. To be more specific, marketers could rely moderately on WOM to have an effect on consumers' product-category choice and on the quantity purchased of a product/brand, while they could rely relatively more on the News to convey their messages to prospects in both countries. Finally, a special attention should be devoted to unsatisfied customers, as the likelihood the latter would share their dissatisfaction is slightly above average in both countries.

In both countries, WOM could be generated by offering gifts and additional services to consumers, in order to surpass their expectations and delight them, as delighted customers talk about their product/brand experiences more than satisfied customers do. Companies could also gratify actual customers that participate in the prospecting effort and refer new customers to the company. This technic was used in different industries and proved to be successful in generating positive WOM, and in creating a new customer base, such as in the telephone industry by MCI and AT&T in North America, even back in the 90's.

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[50] Cf. Wangenheim Florian, Bayon Tomas, "Satisfaction, Loyalty and Word of Mouth Within the Customer Base of a Utility Provider: Differences Between Stayers, Switchers and Referral Switchers" in *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2006, pp. 211-220; Schunamm Jan H, Wangenheim Florian V, Stringfellow Anne. Yang Zhilin, Blazevic Vera, Praxmarer Sandra, Shainesh G.. Komor Marcin, Shannon Randall M, Jiménez Fernando R, "Cross-Cultural Differences in the Effect of Received Word-of-Mouth Referral in Relation Service" in *Journal of International Marketing*, vol.18, no. 3, 2010, pp. 62-80; Christodoulides George, Michaelidou Nina, Argyriou Evmorfia, "Cross-National Differences in E-WOM Influence" in *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 46, no. 11/12, 2012, pp. 1689-1707.

One can clearly see from the results above, that the use of WOM strategies/tactics by companies, cannot be standardized to all countries where they operate, but should rather be adapted and tailored to each target market, based on the role and importance WOM plays in each market.

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