How Country Context Shapes Word-of-Mouth Impact and Credibility, and Consumer Sharing Behaviour.

Senior Lecturer Adnane Alaoui, PhD
Faculty of Business & Law, John Moores University, Liverpool, UK
a.alaouimhamdi@ljmu.ac.uk

Full Professor Natalia Sulikashvili, PhD. Habil.
Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Université Catholique de Lille, France
natalia.sulikashvili@univ-catholille.fr

Abstract

The main goal of this article is to investigate how consumers' backgrounds may affect WOM-related behavior in England, China, and Russia. Twelve variables were used to investigate WOM's *Credibility*, *Effectiveness,* and *practices*. Factor analysis was performed to reduce the number of dimensions to 3 factors. Furthermore, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) revealed that the consumer's background significantly impacted each of these three constructs. Finally, Discriminant Analysis classified the variables according to their ability to differentiate consumers' WOM habits across countries. The paper concludes that companies must tailor their WOM-related strategies, as WOM's patterns differ from one country to another. This research depicted these divergences as well as similarities between the countries studied with respect to WOM's "Credibility," "Effectiveness," and "Likelihood to engage" in WOM. Global companies will value the results of this research, which draws the line for where standardization of WOM strategies should stop and where adaptation should start.

Keywords: Word-of-Mouth; Cross-cultural; Consumer Behavior, International Marketing.
JEL CODES: M31

1. Introduction

Understanding cross-cultural differences is vital, particularly for companies planning to operate globally. Word of mouth (WOM) is a communication channel whose role and effectiveness in supporting companies' marketing strategies can differ across countries. The effect of culture on WOM practices and effectiveness has attracted research interest as more businesses operate globally (Rawal et al.,

2024). Silverman (2010) found that WOM is more successful than most forms of advertising as the message is tailored to the receiver. Moreover, due to the advancement of the Internet, electronic WOM (e-WOM), such as that deployed on online platforms, is increasingly being used and developed. According to recent studies, 96% of people have given a word-of-mouth referral, 93% have been introduced to a new business via e-word of mouth, and 9 out of 10 people researched the referral before making contact via different research platforms (Jenkins, 2021).

The main goal of this article is to investigate the effect consumers' background may have on WOM-related behavior and to determine whether this calls for adapting vs. standardizing WOM strategies, which play a central role in the context of international sales (Alon *et al*., 2021). To do so, this paper contrasts England, China, and Russia.

The reasons for choosing these countries are manifold: they stand at different levels on the cultural dimensions' spectrums. Indeed, Russian culture is characterized by high cultural index scores on "Power Distance" (PD), "Uncertainty Avoidance" (UA), and "Long-Term Orientation" (LTO), while having low scores on "Individualism", "Masculinity", and "Indulgence". Contrarily, the English culture is characterized by a high index score for Individualism, Masculinity, and Indulgence while having low scores on "PD," "UA," and "LTO." On the other hand, the Chinese culture is characterized by a high index score for "PD," "LTO," and Masculinity while having low scores on "UA," Individualism, and Indulgence (Hofstede insights, 2024). These countries are also part of different geographic clusters as defined by Wursten and Fadrhonc (2012): England is part of the *Contest*-cluster, China is part of the *Family*-cluster, and Russia is part of the *Pyramid*-cluster. These differences are expected to result in distinct consumer WOM-related behaviors across countries. Indeed, Schumann *et al.* (2010) confirm that customers from Collectivist cultures (Russian or Chinese) tend to engage in WOM more often than customers from Individualist cultures (English), while Tseng and Stern (1996) found that Asian consumers favor interpersonal communication, as they find it more credible. In addition, Wursten and Fadrhonc (2012) found that countries with high Masculinity (England) value decisiveness over dialogue, suggesting that WOM would have less effect on them.

With respect to the theoretical contribution of this paper, it extends Hofstede's theory where the six Hofstede's cultural dimensions are related to different variables (geographical proximity, shared language, related historical background, religious beliefs and practices similarity, common philosophical influences, and identical political system), by adding one more variable to these existing variables, that is "Shared Communication Patterns" (which encompasses "Frequency of sharing an experience", "WOM's impact on consumer choices", and "WOM's credibility"

compared to other information-sources), and investigates how this new variable varies between countries belonging to different cultures and geographic clusters, which is illustrated through China, England and Russia. In addition, although previous work studied the impact of WOM on a specific facet of consumers' choice individually, no research has compared its impact across several facets of consumers' choice simultaneously across different countries, which this research aims to do. In addition, while previous studies investigated the credibility of WOM in different countries, the latter was not compared with the credibility of e-WOM or other information sources, nor was the extent to which this Credibility differs relative to other information sources examined when the consumer's country of origin is altered. This paper attempts to fill this gap. Furthermore, while prior research considered multiple WOM practices in a single country (Viglia et al., 2016) or a Single WOM practice in multiple countries (Christodoulides et al., 2012), this study examines multiple WOM practices simultaneously and how the latter may differ among multiple countries belonging to different geographic clusters, such as China, England, and Russia.

This paper also has an empirical contribution, as it investigates whether WOM has more effect on consumer's perception of a brand in *high* "UA" and *low individualism* cultures (such as China and Russia) than in *low* "UA" and *high individualism* cultures (such as England), as England was not considered when this issue was studied by Schumann et al. (2010).

The structure of this paper is as follows: ***1. Introduction***; ***2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Justification:*** Displays the relevant work related to WOM in the cross-cultural context, and generates three main hypotheses to be tested, namely whether consumer's background represented by their country of origin, has an influence over "*Information Source Credibility"*, "*Likelihood of sharing experiences via WOM"*, and "WOM's impact on Consumers' choices and Perceptions"; **3.** ***Methodology:*** The section sheds light on ***3.1 Data Analysis Procedures***, namely Factorial Analysis, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), and Discriminant Analysis; 3.2 Measurement Scales; and ***3.3 Sampling Plan***. Then ***4. Data Analysis*** is conducted. Finally, ***5. Discussion and Conclusion*** discuss the findings and make practical recommendations to help managers decide which facets of WOM strategies should be adapted versus standardized for the countries under study.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Justification

WOM is defined by Westrook (1987) as "informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of a particular good or

service". Before justifying the hypotheses in 2.4 below, the literature is classified and discussed in three subsections:

2.1. WOM's impact on consumers' choice and Perception

WOM was proven to impact several factors such as consumer choice for USA consumers (Richins and Marsha, 1983), service switching for German consumers (Wangenheim and Bayon, 2004), purchase decision for USA consumers (O'Reilly and Marx, 2011), brand-choice for Chinese consumers (Huang and Li 2007), as well as products' perception, for French, German, British, USA and Australian consumers (Sweeney et al., 2012). Although these papers studied the impact of WOM on a specific facet of consumer choice *individually*, no research has compared its impact across several facets simultaneously across countries, which is important for uncovering the relative impact of WOM on each facet in each country. This research investigates whether the impact of WOM on each of these facets would depend on the consumer's country of origin. In addition, Schumann et al. (2010) did add that WOM has more effect on consumers' perception of brands, in *high* "UA" cultures (Mexican, Russian, German, Polish, or Thai) than in *low* "UA" cultures (Australian, Dutch, Chinese, Indian, or American). They also confirmed that WOM has a greater effect on customers from *collectivist* cultures (such as Polish, Mexican, Russian, or Indian) than on customers from individualist cultures (such as American, Dutch, or German). This paper will investigate whether these results hold after more than a decade and will use English consumers to examine the low "UA" and high individualism cultures, as England was not included in the Schumann et al. (2010) study.

2.2. Information-Source Credibility

Consumers view WOM as more trustworthy than corporately led marketing communication in different countries, such as Spain (Sicilia et al., 2015), the USA (Allsop et al., 2007; Duffy, 2015). and France, Germany, the UK, the USA, Australia (Sweeney, 2012), Romania (Pelau, Chinie, 2018). More specifically, e-WOM includes online comments or opinions (Thorsten et al., 2014), blogging (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006), reviews (Zhang et al., 2009), and emails (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008). Prior research highlighted the vital role of credibility in the persuasiveness of e-WOM and how it influences consumers' intentions and behavior in Hong Kong (M.Y. Cheung et al., 2009) in the UK and Ireland (Filieri, 2015), and in Italy (Viglia et al., 2016). In the same vein, Tseng and Stern (1996) and Nguyen et al. (2024) found that Asian consumers favour interpersonal communication because they find it more credible. Although previous studies investigated the credibility of WOM in

different countries, they did not compare it to the credibility of e-WOM and to that of other information sources. This research investigates whether the Credibility level of WOM, in general, and of e-WOM, in particular, is different relative to that of other information means when the consumer's country of origin is altered.

2.3. Likelihood of sharing experiences via WOM

Doran (2002) suggests that Chinese consumers, as part of a collectivist culture, are more likely to seek and respond to personal recommendations than their North American counterparts. They are also less likely to make individual decisions, unlike American consumers, who tend to base their decisions on personal experiences, as one would expect in an individualistic culture. This study examines how consumers from Eastern and Western Europe compare with Chinese and Americans in their reliance on others' opinions when making decisions.

With respect to e-WOM, Christodoulides et al. (2012) found that Chinese consumers, as part of a high "UA" culture, were sensitive to recent e-WOM regardless of their connotation, contrary to British consumers that are part of a *low* "UA" culture, and that anchor on negative information, which makes the latter more likely to be shared with other consumers as unsatisfied consumers are expected to spread the word more than satisfied consumers. In addition, Dobele et al. (2007) argue that different nationalities exhibit varying emotional responses to and acceptance of *viral* marketing campaigns. For example, what Americans may perceive as a positive viral marketing message, the Japanese may find negative and offensive, and, therefore, will not share it with others.

A theoretical contribution of this research is that it extends Hofstede's theory where the six Hofstede's cultural dimensions were related to different variables (geographical proximity, shared language, related historical background, religious beliefs and practices similarity, common philosophical influences, and identical political system), by adding one more variable to these existing variables, that is "*Shared Communication Habits*" (which encompasses "Frequency of sharing an experience", "WOM's impact on consumer choices", and "WOM's credibility" compared to other information-sources), and investigates how this new variable varies between countries belonging to different cultures and geographic clusters, that are illustrated through China, England, and Russia.

Although prior research has considered Multiple WOM practices in a Country or a Single practice in Multiple countries, this study examines Multiple WOM practices simultaneously and how they may differ among Multiple countries belonging to different geographic clusters. These clusters are illustrated in this research through China, England, and Russia. This holistic approach would enable managers to have

a more comprehensive view of WOM practices across cultures and geographic clusters, and to understand how that necessitates adapting rather than standardizing WOM strategies for each country, which plays a central role in the context of international sales.

2.4. Hypotheses Justification

2.4.1. WOM's impact on consumers' choices and Perception

Concerning Consumers' background effect on how WOM impacts consumer choices and Perceptions, it can occur at multiple levels, such as WOM's Effect on Store Choice, product Category Choice, brand Choice, and/or *Product/Brand Image*.

Regarding WOM's Effect on *Store-Choice*, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) is mediating the effect of Taiwanese customers' perceived value of a physical store on their loyalty to that store (Liao et al., 2022). Additionally, Positive e-WOM in e-store ratings and reviews has a significant impact on e-store loyalty among US consumers across all product categories (Gauri et al., 2008).

Concerning the Effect of WOM on Product-Category Choice, USA consumers' e-WOM is likely to extend the pre-purchase decision process for the recommended product-category among highly eager consumers. At the same time, it shortens the pre-purchase decision process for less eager consumers, as they tend to opt for the recommended product category (Gupta and Harris, 2010). Besides, USA consumers' WOM has a more positive carryover effect on products that are essential to everyday life, such as personal hygiene items, household goods, home decor, and food, compared to products that are difficult to switch, purchased less frequently, or personal in nature (Luo et al., 2019). Finally, Hyun et al. (2023) found that word-of-mouth has a positive effect on American consumers' trust in Chinese consumer electronics.

About WOM's Effect on *Brand-Choice*, Chinese participants were far more likely to engage in both positive and negative opinions about a brand's Country of Origin (COO) (Sun *et al.,* 2021), with the majority of negative COO opinions being about Japanese brands, such as digital cameras., whereas COO effects appeared to be largely irrelevant for US consumers (Fong and Burton, 2008). Additionally, a 1-point increase in the e-review score (e-WOM) for hotel brands among Italian consumers results in a 7.5% increase in hotel occupancy rate, but this impact diminishes over time (Viglia et al., 2016).

While vis-à-vis WOM's Effect on Product/Brand Image, negative comments about products' country of origin, specifically Japan, were prevalent in online discussions

among Chinese internet users, and this anti-Japanese sentiment was shown to affect Japanese brand image in China (Fong and Burton, 2008). Additionally, Information conveyed through e-WOM on Instagram is crucial in establishing a retailer's brand image among Indonesian consumers in the fashion and apparel industry (Yeo, 2022).

These WOM-related facts above, concerning their impact on consumers' choices and Perception in different countries, provide a solid ground to expect that:

H1: WOM's impact on consumer *Choices and Perceptions* differs between countries.

2.4.2 Information-Source Credibility

When seeking relevant information to assist them in decision-making, consumers could rely on different sources such as *Advertising*, the official *News*, *social media*, or *"Traditional" WOM*. This section will shed light on how the *credibility* of these information sources may differ across countries. However, Pape and Toporowski (2023) found that credibility across different sources of information and, therefore, reliance on each one could differ within the same country, as is the case with highly innovative individuals, who tend to rely more on e-WOM than on "Traditional" WOM.

With respect to *"Traditional" WOM credibility*, Kumar *et al*. (2023) found that the high credibility of WOM among Indian consumers significantly contributes to the uptake of information circulating. Furthermore, Spanish consumers tend to rely more on the opinions of trustworthy friends than on experts' reviews when shopping for fashion accessories. In contrast, Spanish consumers perceive anonymous expert reviews as more helpful when shopping for electronics (Flavián, 2021).

Regarding advertising credibility, investigating the effect of advertising expenditure on sales data helped demonstrate a high level of advertising credibility and effectiveness in the USA (Bhattacharya and Lodish, 1994; Acatrinei, 2015). In addition, print media was perceived as less credible than broadcast media in Hong Kong, likely because advertising regulation on print media was relatively limited. Within broadcast media, radio had the highest credibility, which may be attributed to the creativity restrictions that prevent visual misleading (Prendergast et al., 2009). On the other hand, among USA consumers, magazine advertising was the most trusted, while internet advertising was the least trusted, with lower-educated and lower-income respondents generally having higher levels of trust in advertising overall (Soh et al., 2007). Later, research established that consumption situations

moderate the interaction between culturally derived power (personalized vs. socialized) and the credibility of advertising appeals (Shan et al., 2023).

As for *News* Credibility, "official News" as a source of information is credible in China because it is perceived as a neutral/third-party source and has a positive impact on consumers' brand attitude (Chen et al., 2016). In the eyes of German consumers, the "official News" is also credible and can affect not only their attitudes towards a company's product but also ultimately increase their intention to purchase a specific brand (Von Sikorski and Müller, 2018).

Lastly, with respect to *Social Media* Credibility, British, Irish, and German consumers believe that e-WOM credibility is dependent on the perceived honesty and sincerity of the vlogger. However, this trust did not translate into increased purchase intentions (Filieri et al., 2023). From their side, Zhao et al. (2021) found that Chinese customers highly valued online reviews.

All these findings aggregated lead to the 2nd hypothesis, that is:

H2: Information-Source Credibility differs between Countries.

2.4.3. Likelihood of sharing experiences via WOM

The Likelihood *of sharing* experiences via WOM could be examined from different angles, such as the *Frequency of sharing* a shopping experience, the Likelihood of sharing an experience when dissatisfied, the Likelihood of sharing an experience when Satisfied, and the Likelihood of sharing an experience when *Delighted*.

Regarding the Frequency of sharing a shopping experience, Online reviews are highly valued by Chinese customers: 70% of those buying online rely on them, with 30% seeking this form of WOM frequently (Zhao et al., 2021). On the other hand, impression management and altruistic motives are significant drivers of e-WOM frequency among a sample of Facebook users worldwide (Azer and Ranaweera, 2022).

Regarding the Likelihood of sharing an experience when *satisfied*, a study conducted among tourists from Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Latvia, and Estonia showed that when tourists are satisfied, the perceived success of service recovery has a greater impact on their positive WOM intentions (Akinci and Aksoy, 2019). While in Taiwan, Satisfied customers are more likely to engage in positive word of mouth regarding financial services products (Yi-Liang et al., 2015). Later, Mukerjee, (2020) found that perceived ease of use due to self-service technologies in retail banking among Indian consumers influences word-of-mouth positively. This

result can be explained by the fact that self-service technologies can influence satisfaction (Meuter et al., 2000), which, in turn, would positively affect word-of-mouth (Loureiro et al., 2018).

As to the Likelihood of sharing an experience when *dissatisfied*, Zhou (2020) found that when dissatisfied with an online shopping experience, Chinese consumers tend to spread a negative WOM online, partially with the hope of receiving social support from the online brand community (Liao et al., 2023). For Italian consumers, dissatisfaction with a service brand leads to negative WOM both offline and online (Curina et al., 2020). Russian consumers do not share their shopping experience with others when dissatisfied, as it may reflect negatively on their status, in the sense that it would lower other people's perception of the shopper's standards of living and the shopper's lifestyle in general (Guryeva, 2017; Hassan, 2016).

Lastly, regarding the Likelihood of sharing an experience when *delighted*, US customers are more likely to recommend a delightful shopping experience to friends and family (Arnold et al., 2005). On the other hand, Cheung et al. (2007) confirmed that Chinese and USA consumers who have a delightful shopping experience are more likely to initiate a conversation about it.

These findings should be sufficient to state the 3rd hypothesis, that is:

H3: The *Likelihood* of Sharing a shopping Experience via WOM differs between Countries.

Therefore, the conceptual model reflecting the theoretical contribution of this study is as depicted below:

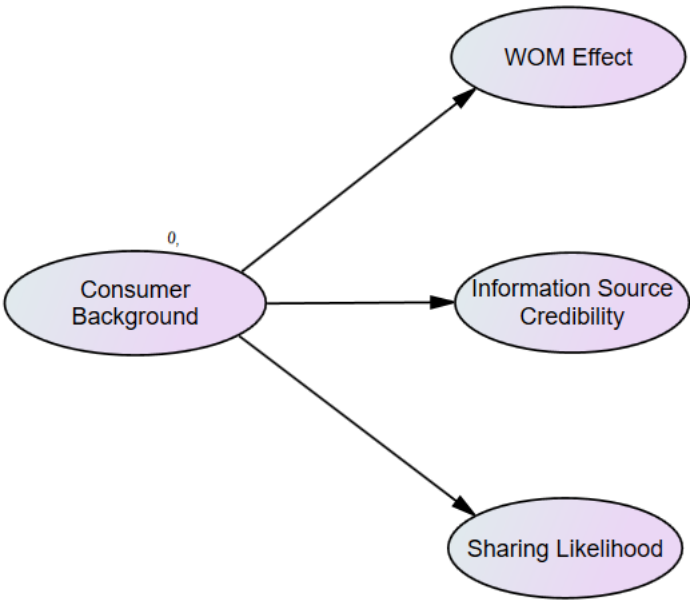

Figure 1 Conceptual/Structural Model

Source: Own Processing.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Analysis Procedures

Twelve explanatory variables were used to investigate WOM practices in England, Russia, and China. Each of these variables was supported by literature. To reduce the number of dimensions, a Factor analysis was conducted, which yielded three factors that were mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive: "WOM's Effect" (first factor), "Information Source Credibility" (second factor), and "Information Sharing Likelihood" (third factor).

To scrutinize the potential influence of "Consumer's Background" on these factors/constructs, a Structural Equations Modelling (SEM) is conducted, and the factors stated above are used as latent variables to build a Structural Model informed by the literature. The SEM enables an investigation of the potential relationship

between "Consumer's Background," the exogenous construct, and the other factors, the *endogenous* constructs (see Figure 1 above).

Finally, to enhance the elucidation of the effect consumers' background has on the indicator variables of the factors stated above, a Discriminant Analysis is run. The latter allows classification of WOM-related behavioral variables in descending order of their discriminating power for consumers' WOM practices in England, China, and Russia.

3.2. Measurement Scales

Concerning the measurement scales used, the 1st factor is the "*WOM Effect*," which represents the overall influence WOM may have on four *consumers' decisions/outcomes*, namely, WOM's effect on "Store-Choice," "Product-Category Choice, "Brand-Choice," and/or "Product/Brand Image." Each of these four measures consists of a 5-item scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) assessing respondents' level of agreement with a statement that WOM influenced each of the decisions/outcomes stated. These measurement scales were validated by Cuesta et al. (2022), Gruen et al. (2006), Sadrabadi et al. (2018), and Liu et al. (2017), respectively.

The 2nd factor is "*Information-Source Credibility*," which represents the credibility of different sources of information in the eyes of consumers, namely "Advertising," "Official News," "Social-Media," and "Traditional" WOM. These indicators of credibility were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), assessing respondents' agreement with the statement that each of these sources of information was credible. These measurement scales were validated by Ziegele and Weber (2015) and Kurdi et al. (2022), respectively.

With respect to the 3rd factor, which is "Sharing Likelihood," it encompasses the Frequency of sharing a shopping experience, the Likelihood of sharing an experience when dissatisfied, the Likelihood of sharing an experience when satisfied, and the Likelihood of sharing an experience when *delighted*. The first measure, which is the "Frequency of sharing a shopping experience," consists of a Five-point scale with different levels of frequency ("1" is the least frequent, and 5" is the most frequent), Park et al. (2021). The other measures consist of a 5-item scale ("1" being Very Unlikely, and 5" being Very likely). These measurement scales were validated by Barari et al. (2020), Balamoorthy and Chandra (2023), and San-Martín et al. (2015), respectively.

3.3. Sampling Plan

The research approach adopted is a survey, utilizing a questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The latter was written in English and then translated into Chinese and Russian. The sample consisted of 515 respondents, comprising 159 from Russia, 246 from England, and 110 from China. These respondents were selected through a probabilistic procedure, namely Cluster sampling, and the samples collected were calibrated to ensure demographic balance. This was done to ascertain that any differences in results between samples from these three countries are not due to demographic differences, but rather to differences in consumers' backgrounds.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Factor Analysis

To reduce the number of dimensions, a Factor analysis was performed and yielded three factors that were mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive, namely the "WOM Effect" (1st Factor), "Information-Source Credibility" (2nd Factor), and "Sharing Likelihood "(3rd Factor). Therefore, the theoretical model suggested in Figure 1 above was conceptualized as having three dimensions, given the results of Factor analysis revealed in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Factor Analysis Rotated Component's Matrix

Variables	**Factors**		
++	Sharing Likelihood	Information Source Credibility	WOM Effect
How often is shopping experience shared with others	**.444**	-.083	-.208
How credible is WOM as a source of information	.202	**.708**	-.146

How credible is advertising as a source of information	.083	**.791**	.033
How credible is news as a source of information	.085	**.764**	.029
How credible is social media as a source of information	-.116	**.510**	.252
Rate how WOM affects where they shop	-.008	-.005	**.665**
Rate how WOM affects the product category	.106	.040	**.737**
Rate how WOM affects brand-choice	.234	.013	**.774**
Rate how WOM affects product/brand image	.054	.081	**.743**
Likelihood of sharing experience if satisfied	**.769**	.062	.088
Likelihood of sharing experience if dissatisfied	**.653**	-.001	-.088
Likelihood of sharing experience if delighted	**.754**	.093	.147

Source: Own Processing.

4.2. Structural Equation Modelling

4.2.1. Measurement Model

Based on the results of the Factor Analysis above, a measurement model was developed as part of the SEM. It utilized three constructs/factors and 12 indicators, with each construct having four indicators (See Figure 2 below).

Figure 2 Measurement Model

Source: Own Processing.

A "Confirmatory Factor Analysis" was conducted in SPSS Amos to test the measurement model. The measurement model's analysis of fit revealed that the

"Minimum Fit Function Chi-Square" divided by the degree of freedom (CMIN/DF) is below the required threshold of 5 (4.71). The comparative fit index (CFI) was computed as a measure of incremental fit and had a good value of 0.92. Additionally, the Root-Mean-Square-Error of approximation (RMSEA), which was computed as a badness-of-fit index, was equal to 0.059, which is below the threshold of 0.07. In addition, the regression weights for all the constructs/factors in predicting their respective indicators were significantly different from zero at the 0.001 level. The relative significance of these weights is reflected by the absolute value of the Critical Ratio (C.R), which is the estimated weight divided by the Standard-Error (S.E) (see Table 2 below).

Table 2 Measurement Model's Regression Weights

	Estimate	**S.E.**	**C.R.**	**P**
WOM_image < ---F1	1.000			
WOM_brand < ---F1	1.976	.166	11.876	***
WOM_product < ---F1	.847	.077	10.937	***
WOM_shop < ---F1	*.888*	*.099*	*8.944*	***
Credibility_Internet _and_SocialMedia< ---F2	1.000			
Credibility_ News < ---F2	*1.600*	*.219*	*7.310*	***
Credibility_Advertising < --- F2	1.713	.232	7.370	***
Credibility_ WOM < --- F2	1.541	.218	7.081	***
Share_Experience < ---F3	1.000			
Sharing_ Delighted < ---F3	-1.642	.256	**-** 6.414	
Sharing_Dissatsified < ---F3	-1.135	.205	- 5.546	***
Sharing_Satisfied < ---F3	***-1.565***	***.244***	***- 6.406***	***

Source: Own Processing.

Legend: C.R = Critical-Ratio = Estimate/Standard-Error**;** (***) indicates a P-value below 0.001.

N.B: The Critical-Ratio (C.R) in Table 2 is different from the Combined-Reliability (CR) in Table 3 below.

Concerning the Combined-Reliability (CR), it is defined as:

$$CR = \frac{\left(\sum_{i=1}^{p} \lambda_i\right)^2}{\left(\sum_{i=1}^{p} \lambda_i\right)^2 + \left(\sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_i\right)}$$

where λ stands for the standardized factor loadings, δ for the error variances, and p for the number of indicators. The CR-values for the constructs/factors "Sharing Likelihood", "Information Source Credibility", and "WOM Effect" are 0.756, 0.791, and 0.821, respectively (see Table 3 below), which are all above the minimum threshold of 0.7 recommended by Hair (2006), confirming that the research questionnaire's measurement items are internally consistent. Therefore, the measurements used in this study are reliable.

With respect to validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used, that is:

$$AVE = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{p} \lambda_i{}^2}{\sum_{i=1}^{p} \lambda_i{}^2 + \left(\sum_{i=1}^{p} \delta_i\right)}$$

where the parameters for the combined reliability (CR) are defined above. The AVE values for all constructs/factors are either above or at the 0.5 threshold recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) (see Table 3 below), indicating the validity of the measurement instruments used in this study.

Table 3 Validity & Reliability of Latent Variables.

Composite Reliability (CR) & Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Latent Variables	CR	AVE
Sharing Likelihood	**0.756**	**0.506**
Likelihood of sharing experience if *Satisfied*		
Likelihood of sharing experience if *Dissatisfied*		
Likelihood of sharing if *Delighted*		
Information Source Credibility	**0.791**	**0.493**
How credible is WOM as a source of information		
How credible is advertising as a source of information		
How credible is news as a source of information		
How credible is Social-Media as a source of information		
WOM Effect	**0.821**	**0.534**
Rate how WOM affects where they shop		
Rate how WOM affects the product category		
Rate how WOM affects brand-choice		
Rate how WOM affects product/brand image		

Source: Own Processing.

4.2.2. Structural Model

Given the measurement model's good reliability and validity results, along with the significant links between the constructs/factors and their respective indicators, a structural model was built to examine potential relationships between "Consumers' Background," represented by the indicator "Nationality of Respondent," and the other three factors (see Figure 1 above).

To assess the Structural Model fit, the "Minimum Fit Function Chi-Square" divided by the degree of freedom (CMIN/DF) was computed, and it was below the required threshold of 5, specifically 3.44. In addition, another badness-of-fit index, RMSEA, and one goodness-of-fit index, GFI, were calculated. The results revealed that the model had a good GFI (0.88) and a good RMSEA (0.069), both below the thresholds of 0.9 and 0.07, respectively. Collectively, these fit indices confirm that the structural model is acceptable and robust, endorsing the theoretical links between the considered constructs.

The Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) results revealed that "Consumer's background" had a significant impact on each of the three constructs ("WOM Effect", "Information-Source Credibility", and "Sharing Likelihood "), as the structural coefficients of their respective paths were significant for α=5% (see Table 4 below). Therefore, all three hypotheses, H_1, H_2, and H_3, stated forth, are accepted, as the results of the analyses proved they were true.

Table 4 Structural Model's Regression Weights

	Estimate	**S.E.**	**C.R.**	**P1**
WOM_Effect< --- Consumer_Background	1.424	.250	5.697	***
Information_Source_Credibility ←-Consumer Background	.383	.149	2.579	.010
Sharing Likelihood< ---Consumer Background	-.546	.113	-4.836	***

Source: Own Processing.

Legend: C.R = Critical-Ratio = Estimate/Standard-Error**;** (***) indicates a P-value below 0.001.

4.3. Discriminant Analysis

Ultimately, to refine the impact "consumers' background" had on the three factors utilized in this study, a Discriminant Analysis was performed, whereby the indicator variables of each factor were classified in descending order of their Discriminating power between behaviors of consumers from England, China, or Russia, as is reflected in the "Structure Matrix" (see Table 5 below). Indeed, as three countries were contrasted, two discriminant functions were used, namely the first function that differentiates between Russians on the one hand, and Chinese and English consumers on the other hand based on the variables that have an Asterix in the 2nd column of Table-5, and the second function that differentiates between Chinese and English consumers based on the variables that have an Asterix in the 3rd column of Table 5.

Table 5 Structure Matrix

	Function	
	1	**2**
Rate how WOM affects the brand	-.647*	.431
How often is shopping experience shared with others	.334*	-.318
How credible is WOM as a source of information	.326*	.282
How credible is advertising as a source of information	.061*	-.044
Rate how WOM affects product/brand image	-.082	.597*
Rate how WOM affects the product category	.007	.546*
Rate how WOM affects where they shop	-.055	.387*
Likelihood of sharing if delighted	-.177	.364*
Likelihood of sharing experience if satisfied	-.198	.319*
Rate how WOM affects the quantity bought	.107	.180*
Likelihood of sharing experience if *Dissatisfied*	-.022	-.116*

How credible is news as a source of information	.084	.105*

Source: Own Processing.

The discrimination and classification process and results can also be illustrated through the "Combined Discriminant-Scores Groups' Plot" in Figure 3 below.

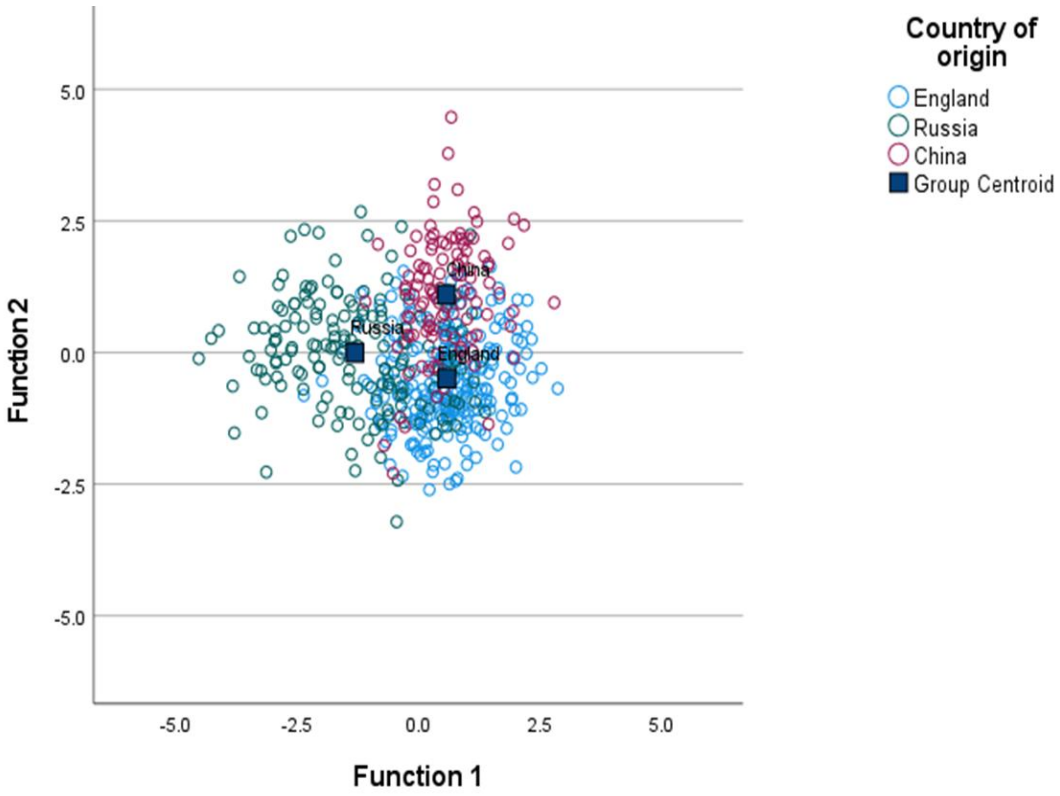

Figure 3 Combined Discriminant-Scores Groups' Plot

Source: Own Processing.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Undeniably, the effect that "Consumer's background" had on the different constructs/factors was specified in more precision by the Discriminant analysis that established the following:

1. Russians are relatively more likely than Chinese or English consumers to:

-Believe that WOM affects brand Choice (while English consumers' brand choice is the least affected).

-Engage the most frequently in WOM, that is, every 2 weeks, compared to every 3 weeks for the Chinese, and every 3.5 weeks for the English consumers.

-Not consider Traditional WOM as a highly credible source of information (contrary to e-WOM), as they rate it only slightly above the average level of credibility on a scale from 1 to 10. This is opposite to Indian consumers, who value traditional Kumar et al. (2023). Nevertheless, these results align with Flavian's (2021) study of Spanish consumers, who also show greater faith in anonymous e-WOM.

2. Chinese are relatively more likely than Russian or English consumers to:

-Have WOM affect their brand image.

-Have WOM affect their product-category choices.

These results are supported by Fong and Burton (2008), who found Chinese consumers to be more likely than their USA counterparts to engage in WOM about a brand's Country of Origin (COO), especially negative WOM about Japanese brands, such as within the digital cameras product category, which affects Japanese brand image in China. At this point, one can draw a parallel between US and English consumers and their Chinese counterparts, as the former, both belonging to an Anglo-Saxon culture, are less likely to be affected by WOM in their brand image or product-category choices.

3. English consumers are relatively more likely than Russians or Chinese to:

- Categorize advertising as a credible source of information. This result is similar to that of Bhattacharya and Lodish, (1994) about USA consumers believing in a high level of advertising credibility and effectiveness, which draws the parallel once again between USA and English consumers as being both part of the Anglo-Saxon culture.

-Not engage in WOM activity when they are *Satisfied* or *Delighted*, probably because they have a prior expectation to be satisfied or delighted by companies. This result confirms Akinci and Aksoy's (2019) finding about the Eastern European countries, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Latvia, and Estonian tourists,

who are more likely to engage in a positive WOM when satisfied, as is the case in Russia. This reinforces Hofstede's belief that countries sharing geographical proximity and/or similar political systems tend to exhibit similar behaviors (Hofstede Insights, 2024).

-Have WOM influence the least their product-category choice, brand image, brand choice, or where they shop. This confirms Schumann et al.'s (2010) finding that WOM has a greater effect on consumers' perceptions of brands in cultures with high "UA" and Collectivism, as seen in the cases of Russia and China in this paper.

4. Consumers from all three countries agree that:

-Social media is a credible source of information. Zhao *et al.* (2021) confirmed this result by finding that Chinese consumers value online reviews, while Filieri et al. (2023) found that British consumers find e-WOM highly credible. However, the credibility of e-WOM depends on the bloggers' honesty.
-The "Official News" has a slightly above-average level of credibility on a scale from 1-10. This result matches Chen *et al*. (2016) description of Chinese consumers' perception of "Official News" as being credible, given that it is a neutral source of information.
-They should not share a shopping experience when *dissatisfied*, probably because people prefer not to share bad experiences, either not to overwhelm others with negative stories or not to reflect on themselves as being easy to be conned by others. This conclusion refutes Zhou's (2020) claim that Chinese consumers spread negative WOM online when dissatisfied, a claim refined by Liao et al. (2023), who explained that this behavior helped Chinese consumers receive social support from the online brand community.
These similarities across countries, along with the other results presented in the previous subsections, contradict Hofstede's theory that consumers from countries that do not share a common culture, language, or physical proximity would behave differently. (Hofstede insights, 2024).

Given the importance of WOM and its impact on consumers' choices and perceptions, companies should facilitate consumers' complaint procedures to maintain control over problematic situations. They should also take responsibility for consumers' negative experiences by promptly resolving their issues and providing appropriate compensation.

Moreover, companies cannot duplicate abroad their level and/or manner of reliance on WOM, as the impact and frequency of WOM communication vary across countries. This research depicted the divergences and similarities between the countries studied with respect to WOM's "Credibility," "Effectiveness," and

"Likelihood to engage," which delineate where standardization of WOM strategies should stop and where adaptation should begin.

5.1 Practical implications

5.1.1 Standardization

As consumers across all three countries agree that official News and social media have, respectively, an above average and a high level of credibility, managers in all three countries should use these two communication vehicles to convey positive messages about their brands through public relations to generate and spread positive WOM. Companies should also offer small gifts or unexpected additional services to surpass consumers' expectations and delight them, as this study found that *delighted* customers in all three countries were more likely to engage in WOM communication.

Companies could also gratify actual customers who participate in the prospecting effort by referring potential customers to the company, thereby incentivizing actual customers to spread positive WOM. This practice was adopted by the megaphone service providers AT&T and MCI as part of their "Friends & Family" promotional program in the USA, in which actual customers were compensated for convincing their friends and family to join these phone service providers.

Given that WOM is more effective in Russia and China, a tactic that could be standardized in both countries is to have marketers use celebrity testimonials with content high in conversational value to stimulate WOM. In these two countries, marketers could also rely on websites' interactivity to provoke WOM by adding a "Click to tell a friend" Button to facilitate sharing brand-related information with others.

5.1.2. Adaptation

With respect to the English Market, managers should focus more on advertising than on WOM as a communication vehicle for the following reasons:

-Advertising is perceived as a more credible source of information than WOM.

- English consumers engage the least in WOM activities compared with consumers from the other two countries, even when they are Satisfied or Delighted.

-WOM does not have much influence on English consumers' product-category choice, Brand Choice, Brand Image, or where they shop.

In the Chinese market, WOM's effect on consumers' product-category choice, Brand Choice, and brand image is more pronounced than in the other two countries. Therefore, WOM should be more important in companies' communication and promotional strategies in China. Companies could, for instance, monitor conversations on e-forums, especially since the Chinese consider e-WOM on social media very credible.

Finally, regarding the Russian market, WOM should also play an important role in companies' communication and promotional strategies, as Russians engage the most frequently in WOM activities compared to consumers from the other two countries. More specifically, WOM should be used to influence consumers' brand choices, as Russians believe it has an undeniable effect on their choices.

These results challenge the expectation that the closer two countries are geographically, the more similar their consumers' behavior is, as shown above, where at times consumers in distant countries (England and China) exhibit similar behavior. In contrast, consumers in neighboring countries (China and Russia) may exhibit dissimilar behavior. Alaoui and Flambard (2022) found that, despite their geographical proximity, French and English consumers rely on sensorial cues to varying degrees when shopping in physical stores, and these differences may also extend to online shopping behavior in some cases.

5.2 Conclusion

This paper would have extended Hofstede's theory by adding one more variable to the list of variables (such as geographical proximity, shared language, etc.) that are used to describe people who are classified based on Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, namely "Shared Communication Patterns," which encompasses several WOM practices. This paper has also illustrated how the new variable, "Shared Communication Patterns," varies across countries at different levels on Hofstede's six cultural dimensions continuum, such as China, England, and Russia. More specifically, this study confirmed that traditional WOM, as well as e-WOM's Credibility, could differ relatively from that of other information means for consumers from different cultural backgrounds. In addition, this paper confirmed that WOM has a greater effect on consumers' perceptions of a brand in *high* "UA" and *low individualism* cultures (such as China and Russia) than in *low* "UA" and *high individualism* cultures (such as England). Finally, this research found that the impact of WOM on *several* facets of consumers' choices *diverges across countries with* different cultures.

Therefore, companies operating internationally cannot *simply duplicate their home WOM strategies abroad, as WOM's Credibility, Effectiveness, and the Likelihood of*

engaging in it can diverge across countries. These differences must be identified and taken into consideration when setting WOM strategies for a foreign market to determine the degree of adaptation required. While this paper investigates WOM's credibility, Effectiveness, and the Likelihood of engaging in it generally, future research could examine whether these results vary by product category. Nevertheless, global companies would value the results of this research, as it depicts divergences and similarities between the countries studied, which draw the line for where standardization of WOM strategies should stop and where adaptation should start.

References

1. Acatrinei, C. (2015). A qualitative research regarding the online advertising formats used by Romanian companies, *Studia Universitatis "Vasile Goldis" Arad. Economics Series,* 25(3), 23 – 34.
2. Alaoui, A., and Flambard, V. (2022). Do consumer's sensory cues' preferences in retail differ between neighboring countries?, *European Journal of International Management*, 1. doi.org/10.1504/EJIM.2022.10048402.
3. Alon, I., Jaffe, E., Prange, C., Vianelli, D. (2021). *Global Marketing: Contemporary theory, practice and cases*. New York, NY: Routledge – Taylor & Francis.
4. Arnold, M. J., Reynolds, K. E., Ponder, N., Lueg, J. E. (2005). Customer delight in a retail context: Investigating delightful and terrible shopping experiences, *Journal of Business Research*, 58(8), 1132-1145.
5. Akinci, S., and Aksoy, S. (2019). The impact of service recovery evaluation on word-of-mouth intention: A moderated mediation model of overall satisfaction, household income and gender, *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 31, 184-194.
6. Azer, J., and Ranaweera, C. (2022). Former customers' e-WOM in social media platforms: An investigation of motives, network size and social ties, *Journal of Business Research*, 146, 118-133.
7. Barari, M., Ross, M., Surachartkumtonkun, J. (2020). Negative and positive customer shopping experience in an online context, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, 101985.
8. Balamoorthy, S., and Chandra, B. (2023). The influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors on e-WOM behaviour: The role of

psychological impact during the time of COVID-19 crisis, *Heliyon*, 9(2), e13270.
9. Bhattacharya, C., and Lodish, L.M. (1994). An advertising evaluation system for retailers, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 1(2), 90-100.
10. Chen, J., Teng, L., Yu, Y., Yu, X. (2016). The effect of online information sources on purchase intentions between consumers with high and low susceptibility to informational influence, *Journal of Business Research*, 69(2), 467-475.
11. Cheung, M. S., Anitsal, M. M., Anitsal, I. (2007). Revisiting Word-of-Mouth Communications: A Cross-National Exploration, *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 15(3), 235–249.
12. Cuesta-Valiño, P., Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, P., García-Henche, B. (2022). Word of mouth and digitalization in small retailers: Tradition, authenticity, and change, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 175. doi:org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121382.
13. Curina, I., Francioni, B., Hegner, S. M., Cioppi, M. (2020). Brand hate and non-repurchase intention: A service context perspective in a cross-channel setting, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 54. doi:org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.102031.
14. Filieri, R., Acikgoz, F., Du, H. (2023). Electronic word-of-mouth from video bloggers: The role of content quality and source homophily across hedonic and utilitarian products, *Journal of Business Research*, 160. doi:org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113774.
15. Flavián, C., Gurrea, R., Orús, C. (2021). Mobile word of mouth (m-WOM): Analysing its negative impact on webrooming in omnichannel retailing, *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management,* 49(3), 394-420.
16. Fong, J., and Burton, S. (2008). A cross-cultural comparison of electronic word-of-mouth and country-of-origin effects, *Journal of Business Research*, 61(3), 233-242.
17. Fornell, C., and Larcker, D.F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error, *Journal of Marketing Research,* 18, 39– 50.
18. Gauri, D., Bhatnagar, A., Rao, R. (2008). Role of Word of Mouth in Online Store Loyalty, *Commun. ACM,* 51(3), 89–91.
19. Gruen, T. W., Osmonbekov, T., Czaplewski, A. J. (2006). EWOM: The impact of customer-to-customer online know-how exchange on customer value and loyalty, *Journal of Business Research*, 59(4), 449-456.

20. Gupta, P., and Harris, J. (2010). How e-WOM recommendations influence product consideration and quality of choice: A motivation to process information perspective, *Journal of Business Research*, 63(9-10), 1041-1049.
21. Guryeva, E. (2017). Social status and its impact on consumer behaviour of actor in the market of tourist services, Sotsiologija I Sotsial'nye technologii, 16(4), 24-32.
22. Hair, J.F., Black, W.C., Babib, B.J., Anderson, R.E., Tatham, R.L. (2006). *Multivariate Data Analysis*. 6th edition. New Jersey, NJ: Upper Saddle River, Prentice Hall.
23. Hassan, L., Shiu, E. Parry, S. (2016). Addressing the Cross-Country Applicability of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB): A structured Review of Multy-Country TPB Studies. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 15(1), 72-86. doi.org/10.1002/cb.1536.
24. Hyun, H., Dongyoup, K., Jungkun, P. (2023). Direct and indirect effect of word-of-mouth with the moderation of ethnocentrism, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 51(4), 484-502.
25. Jenkins, H. (2021). How important is Word of Mouth in the digital age ? Study retrieved from : https://businessgrow.com/2023/08/28/word-of-mouth/. Accessed on 23/05/2023.
26. Kumar, S., Prakash, G., Gupta, B., Cappiello, G. (2023). How e-WOM influences consumers' purchase intention towards private label brands on e-commerce platforms: Investigation through IAM (Information Adoption Model) and ELM (Elaboration Likelihood Model) Models, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 187, 233-247.
27. Liao, S., Hu, D., Fang, Y. (2022). Repurchase intention in a physical store: moderated mediating role of electronic word-of-mouth, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management,* 51(2), 205-219.
28. Liu, X., Hu, J., Xu, B. (2017). Does eWOM matter to brand extension? An examination of the impact of online reviews on brand extension evaluations, *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 11(3), 232-245.
29. Luo, A., Baker, A., Donthu, N. (2019). Capturing dynamics in the value for brand recommendations from word-of-mouth conversations, *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 247-260.
30. Loureiro, S.M.C., Cavallero, L., Miranda, F.J. (2018). Fashion brands on retail websites: customer performance expectancy and e-word-of-mouth, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 41, 131-141.
31. Meuter, M.L., Ostrom, A.L., Roundtree, R.I., Bitner, M.J. (2000). Self-service technologies: understanding customer satisfaction with

technology-based service encounters, *Journal of Marketing*, 64(3), 50-64.
32. Mukerjee, K. (2020). Impact of self-service technologies in retail banking on cross-buying and word-of-mouth Alternate title: Impact of self-service technologies, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 48(5), 485-500.
33. Nguyen, T.T.T., Limbu, Y.B., Pham, L., Zuniga, M.A. (2024). The influence of electronic word of mouth on green cosmetics purchase intention: evidence from young Vietnamese female consumers, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 41(4), 406-423.
34. Pape, D., and Toporowski, W. (2023). Reviving the experiential store: the effect of scarcity and perceived novelty in driving word-of-mouth, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 51(9/10), 1065-1094.
35. Pelau, C., and Chinie, A. C., (2018). Clusters of tourism consumers in Romania, *Studia Universitatis "Vasile Goldis" Arad. Economics Series*, 28(1), 17-34.
36. Prendergast, G., Po-yan L., Poon, D. T. Y. (2009). A Hong Kong study of advertising credibility, *The Journal of Consumer Marketing,* 26(5), 320-329.
37. Rawal, M., Saaverda Torres, J.L., Bagherzadeh, R., Rani, S., Melancon, J. (2024). The role of individualism, collectivism, and promotional reward type on consumer response to amplified word-of-mouth strategies, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 41(3), 298-313.
38. San-Martín, S., Prodanova, J., Jiménez, N. (2015). The impact of age in the generation of satisfaction and WOM in mobile shopping, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 23, 1-8.
39. Shan, M., Zhenzhong, Z., Chunlei S., Haipeng, A.C. (2023). The effectiveness of advertising appeals: A culturally-derived power perspective, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 75, 124-137.
40. Sadrabadi, A.N., Saraji, M.K., Monshi Zadeh, M. (2018). Evaluating the role of brand ambassadors in social media, *Journal of Marketing Management and Consumer Behavior*, 2(3), 54-70.
41. Silverman, G. (2010). *Secret of word-of-mouth marketing: how to trigger exponential sales through runaway word of mouth.* New York, NY: AMACOM.
42. Soh, H., Reid, L. N., King, K. W. (2007). Trust in Different Advertising Media, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly,* 84(3), 455-476.
43. Sun, Y., Gonzalez-Jimenez, H., Wang, S. (2021). Examining the relationship between e-WOM, consumer ethnocentrism and brand

equity, *Journal of Business research*, 130, 546-573. doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.040.

44. Tseng, L.P., Stern, B.L. (1996). Cultural Difference in Information Obtainment for financial Decisions-East Versus West, *Journal of Euro-Marketing*, 5(1), 37-48.
45. Viglia, G., Minazzi, R., Buhalis, D. (2016). The influence of e-word-of-mouth on hotel occupancy rate, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management,* 28(9), pp. 2035-2051.
46. Von Sikorski, C., Müller, L. (2018). When Corporate Social Responsibility Messages Enter the News: Examining the Effects of CSR-Framed News on Product Purchasing Intentions and the Mediating Role of Company and Product Attitudes, *Communication Research Reports*, 35(4), 335-345.
47. Yi-Liang, S., Tom M.Y. Lin, Sue-Ting C. (2015). Exploring the impact factor of positive word-of-mouth influences satisfied customers, *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, 26(3-4), 430-444.
48. Yeo, S. F., Tan, C. L., Kumar, A., Tan, K. H., Wong, J. K. (2022). Investigating the impact of AI-powered technologies on Instagrammers' purchase decisions in digitalization era–A study of the fashion and apparel industry, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 177, 113-127.
49. Wursten, H., and Fadrhonc, T. (2012), *International Marketing and Culture*, New York, NY: ITIM.
50. Zhao, H., Yang, Q., Liu, Z. (2021). Impact of online customer reviews and deep learning on product innovation empirical study on mobile applications, *Business Process Management Journal,* 27(6), 1912-1925.
51. Ziegele, M., and Weber, M. (2015). Example, please! Comparing the effects of single customer reviews and aggregate review scores on online shoppers' product evaluations, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 14(2), 103-114.
52. Zhou, Z., Zhan, G., Zhou, N. (2020). How does negative experience sharing influence happiness in online brand community? A dual-path model, *Internet Research,* 30(2), 575-590.