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in business administration

"Let me take a selfie"
Motives for posting electronic word-of-mouth
in visual content on Instagram

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Instructor: Auður Hermannsdóttir adjunct
Faculty of Business Administration
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This thesis is a final project which counts for 12 ECTS credits towards a B.S. degree in business administration at the Faculty of Business Administration, University of Iceland.

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Preface

This final thesis counts for 12 ECTS credits towards a B.S. degree in business administration at the University of Iceland. The thesis instructor is Auður Hermannsdóttir, adjunct at the Faculty of Business Administration. I would like to thank Auður for her motivation and assistance while this thesis was being researched and prepared. Previously Auður had taught a course at the university that I attended and it was her straightforward way of approaching marketing matters and creative teaching-style that inspired me to write this thesis and do so under her guidance. I would also like to thank my partner for his assistance, positive influence and support throughout my studies. In addition I would like to thank Dr. Jónína Einarsdóttir for her words of guidance and for always taking the time to assist me whenever I felt the need. Finally I would like to thank my guidance counselor Jónína Kárdal for teaching me to let go and enjoy the ride.
Abstract

Word-of-mouth has been a part of discussions since human beings began communicating with others. With the outburst of social media services people are constantly communicating online. The concept of word-of-mouth has branched into cyberspace and is known in that context as electronic word-of-mouth. An online photo-sharing application called Instagram has in a few years become one of the most popular social mediums, with 200 million users worldwide. Instagram users show many signs of being particularly inclined to electronic word-of-mouth behavior making it an interesting topic of research.

A quantitative study was conducted within a sample of Instagram users in Iceland. The objective of the study was to understand why and how people use Instagram as a word-of-mouth medium. The main conclusion is that Instagram displays all the characteristics of an electronic word-of-mouth medium. The study’s results show that its users mainly like to see other users photos and that they mostly share photos of either friends and family or experiences and events. On a level of product visibility, Instagram users mostly share photos of products they are happy with and with the intention of assisting their followers in making good purchasing decisions. Given its emphasis on visual content, Instagram is a feasible option for companies to optimize their online presence and their relationship with consumers.
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1 Introduction

For as long as man has been communicating with others, word-of-mouth has been a part of a mutual dialogue. Describing events, sightings and experiences such as catching a large prey or where the best spot to get fresh water; man has been exchanging advice, information and tips with each other for thousands of years. With the outburst of the Internet and a growing online presence of consumers the concept of word-of-mouth has evolved greatly.

This online presence of consumers has only increased with the rise in smartphone usage and Wi-Fi Internet availability, and people have a better access to the Internet than ever before. Jung, Kim & Chan-Olmsted (2014) remarked on the fact that according to research 163.2 million people in the United States owned smartphones, measured in the first quarter of 2014. A report showed that in 2013 66.4% of Icelanders owned a smartphone (Marketing and media research, 2013) and 96.0% of Internet visitors went online via smartphones (Statistics Iceland, 2012).

With improved access to the Internet marketing forces have a better access to consumers than before. The rise of social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram among others, presents opportunities and venues for consumers to vocalize their opinion and engage in word-of-mouth (WOM) discussion. This type of word-of-mouth activity is called electronic word-of-mouth, or eWOM.

An up-and coming social media platform is the smartphone photo-sharing application Instagram. The application, which was launched in 2010, has acquired 200 million users. Instagram enables its users to create an account, edit and share photos with their followers. The user can also choose to follow other users and see their photos appear in a common newsfeed. The user can choose to publicly "like" or post a written comment under the photo as well as ideograms or “smilies”, depicting various scenarios and feelings (Instagram, 2014).

An interesting pattern has emerged among the users of Instagram that could be relevant and possibly serve as a great source of information for future marketing strategies. This pattern inhabits many of the features that characterize word-of-mouth activity and can be described in the following way: The user posts and shares photos of products or brands on their profiles, e.g. a cup of coffee with the coffee-brand logo
showing, and thus spreading, creating exposure and sharing information about the company or brand in question. This is done without receiving any financial reward or compensation.

What is it that motivates this practice? Given that the information and reasons were known, how could marketers and companies utilize it? Is there a possibility that by analyzing this kind of program-usage, marketers and companies could improve their pre-existing relationship with consumers and strengthen their online presence? These are some of the factors that lack in research and knowledge, which leads to the ultimate focus of this thesis; why and how do people use Instagram as a word-of-mouth medium?

This thesis aims to understand the nature of electronic word-of-mouth via Instagram by analyzing the preceding literature on the matter as well as conducting a questionnaire study. Conclusions will be presented as well as ideas on the matter for further research and practical use in an attempt to keep up with the ever-changing panorama of marketing in the technology business.

The thesis begins by explaining word-of-mouth and how the concept has evolved, from traditional word-of-mouth to electronic word-of-mouth. Academic literature regarding word-of-mouth will be discussed as well as motivational factors that influence consumers to engage in word-of-mouth activity. The concept of social media and how marketing takes place in outlets such as Instagram will be presented. The main motives that have been studied will be analyzed and interpreted in relation to the word-of-mouth behavior of Instagram users. The methodology of a research conducted on Icelandic Instagram users will be introduced. Subsequently the findings and conclusions will be presented and finally a discussion of limitations and recommendations for further research.
2 Evolution of word-of-mouth

Buttle (1998) presents the definition of word-of-mouth as put forward by Arndt in 1967: "an oral, person to person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product or a service" (p.2). Word of mouth is in part based on the two-step flow of communication.

The two-step flow of communication was first introduced by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaude in 1944 and later when Katz and Lazarsfeld published their works in 1955 titled "Personal Influence: the Part Played by People in Flow of Mass Communications". According to Kats and Lazarsfelds findings mass media information is transmitted to the masses via opinion leadership. These specific opinion leaders are believed to have a deeper understanding and sense of the media’s content and can therefor interpret, explain and distribute the information to others (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1970).

Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004) discuss the works of the Austrian psychologist Ernest Dichter who in 1966 identified reasons that motivate consumers to engage in positive traditional word-of-mouth or tWOM. The motives are:

- Product-involvement; when a consumer feels so strongly about a product or service that he feels the need to express himself about the purchase, thus releasing the emotional tension.
- Self-involvement; by engaging in word-of-mouth about the product or service the consumer gratifies emotional needs. This has also been thought to meet sociological needs where the word-of-mouth acts as a status symbol.
- Other-involvement describes how a consumer engages in word-of-mouth in order to assist other consumers in optimizing their purchase decisions.
- Message-involvement; where a word-of-mouth discussion is evoked by advertisement, public relations activity and other marketing acts.

These motives will be discussed further in chapter 4.

Engel, Kegerreis and Blackwell (1969) state in their research that when it comes to making decisions regarding purchases, word-of-mouth is more effective than other marketing tools and traditional advertising tactics. Trusov, Bucklin and Pauwels (2009) show that the amount of elasticity for word-of-mouth was roughly 20 times higher than for events of a marketing nature and 30 times higher than that of appearances in the broadcasted media. Additionally word-of-mouth communications is believed to offer
information that can be comparative and thereby reliable (Gruen, Osmonbekov and Czaplewski, 2006).

Being such an important instrument, a trade organization committed to ethical word-of-mouth and social media marketing called the Word-of-mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) was established in 2004. The association aims to educate and share knowledge to improve and aid the progression of the word-of-mouth marketing industry. In order to do so WOMMA shares information based on advocacy, education and ethics (WOMMA, 2014).

Decipher, a marketing research service conducted a survey in 2014 on behalf of WOMMA on the basis of measuring the current state of word-of-mouth marketing. It found that 64% of its participants considered word-of-mouth marketing and social media to be more effective than traditional marketing. At least two-thirds of the participants believed that word-of-mouth marketing is to be used to expand and increase brand awareness among consumers. The participants also thought that word-of-mouth marketing increases equity and the perception of the brand, engage consumers and boost recommendations (Decipher, 2014).

The last decade of the 20th century and the 2000's were characterized by a large global migration into cyberspace. Word-of-mouth behavior quickly adjusted to this change and people increasingly started to vocalize their opinions and sharing product information online (Cheung and Thadani, 2010). Therefore a new branch of word-of-mouth appeared called electronic word-of-mouth, or eWOM.

2.1 Electronic word of mouth

Electronic word-of-mouth is, according to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), a statement made by actual, former or potential customers regarding a product or company made public via the Internet to a mass crowd of people and institutions. This is irrespective of whether it is of a positive or negative nature. The organic concept of traditional word of mouth (tWOM), seeking and providing information and personal references about products or service is still at the core of eWOM but there are some differences.

First of all eWOM has a much larger audience than tWOM. By posting information online it is accessible to an infinite number of users. Duan, Gu and Whinston (2008) describe the change from traditional to electronic word-of-mouth, stating that what
was once targeted to a handful of friends and acquaintances are now visible to the whole world. Cheng and Zhou (2010) remarked that in tWOM the social ties between the sender and the receiver is of a different nature than in eWOM. When tWOM takes place there is a social relationship between the sender and receiver; family members, friends and acquaintances. This on the other hand does not necessarily apply to eWOM. Also the lifespan of the eWOM discussion, comments and information is much longer since it is documented online and has the possibility to be accessible forever.

Berthon, Pitt and Campell (2008) point out that with eWOM consumers are now in the starring role of generating marketing information when they create and distribute eWOM content. Some extensive studies have been made on eWOM but most of them are highly focused on the consumption of consumer-generated information (Duan et al., 2008; Trusov et al., 2009). Shin, Song and Biswas (2014) point out that there are only a handful of studies that examine the generation of eWOM and those are mostly limited to the motivational factors within the individual consumers e.g. self-enhancement (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) or vengeance (Cheema and Kaikati, 2010).

Nonetheless verbalizations of consumers online are a market force to be reckoned with. The days when the consumers were thought of as passive users of marketing information provided to them by professional marketers and companies have passed (Chen, Wang and Xie, 2010). Shin et al. (2014) point out that the Internet possesses certain characteristics, e.g. it spreads at a fast pace, is credible and is available to the public (Hennig-Thurau et. al, 2004). These elements propel the eWOM generation to distribute particular information that is not well suited for traditional word-of-mouth.

Albarracin, Cohen and Taracan Kumkale (2003) show that there is a possibility that contextual or environmental factors combined with individual factors motivate the eWOM generation. This is in line with the research by Shin et al. (2014) which rests on the theory that people engage in eWOM based on two motivational factors; internal and external. The external motivational factor is collective dissonance, which is an emotional state that is the outcome of existing eWOM contents in the communicational dialogue.

The internal factor is based on regulatory focus, a theory originally introduced by Higgins in 1997. It proposes that people aim to reach their goals and aspirations through two distinct modes of self-regulatory system; promotion or prevention focus. When
people concentrate on their goals they develop a certain focus based on behavioral strategies to in turn successfully achieve the end state. On the contrary, when people focus on their goals that are of a more mandatory kind such as obligations or responsibilities they tend to establish preventional focus and count on a cautional strategy to stay away from negative outcomes.

A study by Zhang, Craciun and Shin (2009) shows that there is a consistency between consumer's regulatory focus and the influential power of marketing information. Positive-promotion and negative prevention can increase the consumers motivational state and produce positivity biases in the evaluation of the existing information. Shin et al. (2014) follow the same approach in their study and proposed that the congruence between service experience and regulatory focus would inspire consumers to chronicle their own experiences and publish it in a eWOM manner.

In the following chapter the motives for engaging in word-of-mouth activity based on previous academic literature will be presented and discussed.
3 Motives for word-of-mouth

The main aim of this thesis is to study what motivates consumers to engage in word-of-mouth activity on Instagram. According to Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) whether a product or a service becomes the topic of eWOM can be dependent on the purchase and consumption experience, regardless of if it is a positive, negative or a neutral one. This implies that the act of engaging in word-of-mouth is a coping mechanism resulting from a certain degree of satisfaction or an emotional reaction.

Kietzmanns and Canhotos (2013) use a paradigm called Disconfirmation model as an analytical lens. Introduced in 1977 and again in 1980 by Richard L. Oliver the Disconfirmation paradigm has since then become widely known and used within the field of satisfaction research (Ho, Mursch, Ong and Perttula, 1997; de Ruyter, Bloemer and Peeters, 1997; Mishra and Min, 2013). The paradigm is mainly used as a measurement tool to determine the differences between the performance that the consumer had anticipated prior to consumption/purchase and the actual performance of the product, brand or service. If the consumers’ expectations for the performance, high or low, are confirmed the consumer feels indifferent about the actual performance. On the other hand, if the anticipated experience is disconfirmed it can have a powerful effect on the consumers satisfaction. If a disconfirmation occurs it is possible that consumers might utilize Instagram or other social media platforms to discharge the emotional unbalance and attain a balanced state.

3.1 Influences and motives

The motives for engaging in word-of-mouth have been studied extensively in the past (Dichter, 1966; Engel et al., 1993; Jeong and Jang, 2011; Sundaram, Mitra and Webster, 1998). The original theories of Dichter are still very relevant today, even though the concept of word-of-mouth has moved into cyberspace. Dichter introduced the four main fundamental motives for word-of-mouth as:

- Product-involvement
- Self-involvement
- Other-involvement
➢ Message-involvement

Later Engel et al. (1993) explained the motives more extensively and added a fifth element, dissonance reduction, which mainly describes post purchase anxiety. Finally Sundaram et al. (1998) modified the motives, defining altruism and dividing it into positive and negative, helping the company, vengeance and advice seeking. In Table 1 a short summary of these motives are listed. In the following subchapters each motive will be discussed more thoroughly.

Table 1. Motives for engaging in word-of-mouth activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product-involvement</td>
<td>Customer feels so strongly about the product he needs to express himself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-involvement</td>
<td>Product gratifies particular emotional needs. Connected to self-branding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-involvement</td>
<td>Helping others make good purchase, positive and negative altruism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message-involvement</td>
<td>Evoked by public relations, advertisements or commercial material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissonance reduction</td>
<td>Decreases the ambivalent state of certain post-purchase situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping the company</td>
<td>The need to assist the company, done in goodwill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice seeking</td>
<td>The ultimate word-of-mouth-influence, seeking advice to solve a problem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Product-involvement

Dichter (1966) states that product-involvement occurs when the consumers experiences feelings towards the product that are so strong that he or she feels the need to do something about it. By recommending the product to others the consumer releases emotional tension that comes with the consumption experience. Engel et al. (1993) explain the motive as the consumer’s interest in the product influences him to stimulate discussions by involving word-of-mouth. Finally Sundaram et al. (1998) describe how the consumer feels a personal interest and excitement in the product after consumption and possession.
3.3 Self-involvement

According to Dichter (1966) self-involvement is when the product enables the consumer to gratify particular emotional needs by speaking openly about the product. Engel et al. (1993) illustrate this motive by stating that by recommending a product the consumer gains attention. This implies a certain status, connoisseurship and the impression that the consumer has inside information and therefor is an authoritative figure. According to Sundaram et al. (1998) the consumer displays himself as an intelligent shopper by enhancing images among other consumers.

When the consumer spreads word-of-mouth it improves his or hers social status when others accept the information. Although the act of word-of-mouth can make the consumers status stronger it is not entirely without fault. The consumer is risking his or her reputation since there is always a risk of providing inappropriate information. When it comes to eWOM the risk is not as high and the social benefits are not as strong because the relationship between the source, the one who engages in word-of-mouth, and the receiver, is weaker than in the original face-to-face dialogue of traditional word-of-mouth (Shin et al., 2014).

A concept closely linked to self-involvement is self-branding. According to a study made by Labrecque, Markos and Milne (2011) everybody has their own personal brand, whether it is intentional or not. This theory about branding oneself like a marketed brand is backed up in Labrecque's et al. article with citations to literatures by Lampel and Bhalla (2007). Snorrason (2012) examines self-branding and discusses the theory of self-branding introduced by Peters in 1997.

According to Peters people are in fact brands not unlike product brands. It is irrelevant which status you have in the society, which occupation you have or what field you are in, the only thing that matters is that the consumer is aware of the fact that he or she is the CEO of You inc. and aim is to increase the firms’ exposure to the maximum to make it more valuable. Snorrason (2012) also points out that most of the content people display on their profiles on social media is consciously published by the users themselves. Thus, behavior on social media could be thought of as a way of branding oneself online.
3.4 Other-involvement

Other-involvement is often associated with advice and tips from members of family or the close circle of friends. Dichter (1966) explained how the speaker fulfills the need to give something to the receiver by engaging in word-of-mouth activity. Engel et al. (1993) interpret this motive as the desire to help a friend in making better purchase decisions by recommending a product. Sundaram et al. (1998) go further into defining the motive for expressing word-of-mouth to others. The concept is divided into positive altruism and negative. Positive altruism is the act of helping others by doing a deed without expecting a reward in return. Negative altruism is when the consumer wants to prevent other customers from having the same negative experience they encountered.

A cross cultural study made in the US and China found that a common influencer for word-of-mouth was altruism, especially regarding people with close ties (Cheung, M. Antisal and I. Antisal, 2007). The motivational factor to enhance the lives of friends and family is also one of the values identified by Schwartz (1994) in a wide survey. Sundaram et al. (1998) introduce a motive called vengeance meaning that the consumer uses negative word-of-mouth to retaliate against the company. Negative altruism and vengeance should not be mixed up. Negative altruism has the basis of assistance and helping others but vengeance has a stronger underlying need of revenge against the company or brand in question.

3.5 Message-involvement

Message involvement is described by Dichter (1966) as word-of-mouth discussion that is evoked by advertisements, commercials or public relations. Engel et al. (1993) explain the motive as a discussion stemming from advertisements that have an entertainment value. This motive is especially relevant in regards to social media marketing. Like Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) discuss the foundation of social media are conversations which are often times based on user-generated content. The speed of the online content is an explosive one. Kietzmann and Canhoto point out that the subject in question can reach millions with the push of a button. This incredible speed of circulation is most likely to be achieved if the content has some kind of surprise element.
to it, a message of some kind, which enables it to attract and hold the attention of the online viewer.

3.6 Dissonance reduction

Engel et al. (1993) added the concept of dissonance reduction to the list of motives for word-of-mouth. Dissonance reduction is the act of decreasing the feeling of cognitive dissonance in a post-purchase situation. Alessandri, Darcheville and Zentall (2008) describe cognitive dissonance as a state of stress and anxiety when an individual experiences an ambivalent state of holding two different beliefs or ideas, e.g. after investing in a product and experiencing conflicting feelings in the post-purchase situation. Because of this, the consumer engages in dissonance reduction to adjust their beliefs and actions so that they harmonize. This decreases the feelings of anxiety and distress.

3.7 Helping the company

Sundaram et al. (1998) introduce the motive of helping the company, adding to the list of previously discussed motives. The main reason for the consumer to spread word-of-mouth about a product or service is solemnly to help the company. This is closely connected to positive altruism, but in this case the motive is not to help a family member or friend to make a better purchase but rather to assist the company itself.

3.8 Advice seeking

Sundaram et al. (1998) discuss a motive for word-of-mouth based on the need for seeking advice. The consumer gathers information and advice on how a problem may be resolved. This could be described as one of the first motives to engage in word-of-mouth, people seeking advice and educating themselves on numerous subjects to enhance their living situation.
4 Social media

The concept of social media is explained by Ahlqvist, Bäck, Halonen and Heinonen (2008), as any social interaction among people, where they create and share information in an online environment. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 61).

Web 2.0 is a concept that originated in 2004 as a way to describe the new way software developers and end-users had started to use the World Wide Web. Meaning "a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.61). Social media is a combination of elements of the promotion mix since in a way it gives companies the opportunity to talk to their customers as well as enabling customers to discuss the product among themselves (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

4.1 Instagram

Instagram is an online smart-phone social media application which enables its users to take photos and videos, apply filters to them and ultimately share with other users. The photos are displayed in a vintage-like fashion with a strong resemblance to Kodak Instamatic and Polaroid images. Figure 1 shows the editing display on the Instagram application. The user can among other things, edit the photos with multible colour filters and alter the photos appearance.

The user also has the ability to comment on the photo and give it a title or tag it with a so-called hashtag. Users of Instagram also have the possibility to record videos up to 15 seconds in length and share them with other users. The user’s followers can subsequently observe, like and comment on the shared photos.
Kevin Systrom launched Instagram in October of 2010. In December of the same year the amount of users had grown to one million. In April of 2012 the social media platform Facebook announced via press release that it had acquired Instagram for approximately $1 billion dollars (Facebook Newsroom, 2012).

Currently Instagram has 200 million active users. Over 20 billion photos have been shared via Instagram with an average of 60 million photos shared and 1.6 billion "likes" each day. Instagram's user base has some interesting demographics, especially regarding nationality and genders. According to Instagram's press site 65% of Instagram users are outside of U.S.A. and 68% of users are female. User engagement is high, 57.0% of the users check the social medium at least once a day (Duggan and Smith, 2013).

It could be stated that Instagram's user interface has the necessary factors to be considered an eWOM platform. The user can share his or her product experiences and opinions on purchases via photos with content that represent the users’ statement in a visual context. In addition to presenting the eWOM thoughts in a graphical sense the consumer can illustrate and emphasize his expressed opinion by posting a comment.
under the photo. This means that the consumer can in two distinct ways engage in eWOM via Instagram, by posting a photo to his or her followers as well as sharing comments, thus issuing a written statement.

A typical product related photo, shared on Instagram by the user Gísli Marteinn Baldursson, can be seen in Figure 2. Baldursson shares a photo of "Hekla", a doughnut presumably named after a volcano based in the south of Iceland. Baldursson also posts a written comment referencing the volcano which is followed by a positive critique on the confectionary pastry. He then adds the company's name, Peet's Coffee & Tea, possibly as practical information to other users. The heart on the bottom right side signifies "liking" this post and therefore enables other user to publicly acknowledge the photo and its visual content and written statement.

![Image of a doughnut named Hekla](image)

**Figure 2.** An example of a photo showing typical characteristics of product involvement, shared on Instagram. Picture in courtesy of Gísli Marteinn Baldursson.

## 4.2 Social media marketing

Social media marketing, according to Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013), describes the act of creating marketing content regarding an event, product, service, brand or company. This is intended to attract the attention of consumers and subsequently influence them to share the content in the form of eWOM via their own social media outlets. One could say that social media marketing carries out the same task as traditional and internet
marketing and in addition it enables consumers to interact in the manner of word-of-mouth.

Recently some research has been made on social media marketing and how it can assist companies in increasing their marketing presence as well as making it more efficient. Castronovo and Huang (2012) introduced the Social Media Marketing Communications Model, a concept that combines all the elements of social marketing in order to create and maintain a positive reputation within the market. The model presents a certain structure for marketers to utilize word-of-mouth marketing effectively on a social media platform. As Castronovo and Huang discuss "a social media platform serves as the vehicle through which all marketing communication efforts are connected into one easily accessible, integrated consumer venue" (p.126). In addition they discuss the fact that social media is by its nature ubiquitous and one of its distinctive features is to be able to serve as a connection medium to a vast amount of individuals.

The act of liking a social media page of a company, re-tweeting (re-distributing) a company's tweet via Twitter or by posting a picture of a brand or a product on Instagram, the consumers are in a way endorsing and taking part in a marketing strategy by sharing the content with their respective followers. Chadwick, Martin and Bailey (2010) conducted a survey which showed that 75% the participants were somewhat or highly likely to share content they liked online with friends, co-workers or family. Almost half of them reported to have done so at least on a weekly basis.

Social media marketing and eWOM undeniably cross paths. Both are present online and are based on content conversations, dialogues and discussions. In addition, research has also pointed to the fact that people seem to trust disinterested opinions e.g. online reviews from individuals that do not belong to their social network (Duan et al., 2008). According to Dellarocas (2003) eWOM, or "online referrals", influences purchase decisions. Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) state that researches have agreed that eWOM is indeed a major player in public relations, advertising and marketing today.
4.3 Social advertising

Social media giants Facebook and LinkedIn have recently utilized an advertising tool called social advertising. Originally introduced by the Interactive Advertising Bureau in 2009 as an advertisement that appears online and incorporates user interactions that the consumer had agreed to display and be shared. The resulting ad displays these interactions along with the user's persona (picture and/or name) within the ad content. Tucker (2012) describes the advertising tool as a revolutionary technology for marketing professionals because it exhibits a possibility that they can homogenize social networks with target advertising and thus activate the targeted market.

Tucker (2012) questions why traditional marketing communications have been on the outskirts of the increase of social data information, despite the documented power of social influence on purchasing behavior. Tucker examined the effectiveness of social advertisements and if they were more effective than conventional display advertising.

The results showed that social targeting and an endorsement by a friend increased the effectiveness of the ad. Tucker goes on to answer why social advertisements enjoy this success. One of the possible reasons is that an endorsement from a friend was informative. Another factor that explains the effectiveness of social advertisements is that it displays more clearly which users are more likely to be interested in an ad based on what their friends have expressed an interest in. Tucker (2012) suggests that social advertisements work well for targeted as well as untargeted groups. This seems to be especially beneficial for advertisers that aim to reach consumers outside of the typical marketing segment.

4.4 Marketing on Instagram

In September of 2013 Instagram started displaying advertisements in the newsfeed of their users. According to Instagram's website, the company aims to only display advertisements that are in accordance with the "Instagram society". The advertisements that are featured on its user’s newsfeed are marked with a specific icon that indicate that the content on the photo is of a sponsored nature. The user has the ability to hide the ad and provide feedback to Instagram stating why the ad in question did not appeal to the user. This is done to improve the ad targeting (Instagram, 2014).
In March of 2014, Instagram signed a deal with the American advertising company Omnicom in which the global marketing company would manage an advertising program for the social media application. According to the website, Instagram will for the time being only display advertisements from exclusively chosen brands, among them; Adidas, Ben & Jerry's, Burberry, General Electric, Lexus, Levi's, Macy's, Michael Kors, Paypal and Starwood. Instagram also states that the advertisement targeting will be tailored to each users interests based on his or hers usage behavior, both on Instagram and Facebook. This is done, according to the website so the advertisements are more suitable for their marketing segments (Heine, 2014). This mirrors Tucker's (2012) discussions about social advertisements and arguments about its effectiveness.

Many companies already utilize the application as a part of their marketing strategy. Some of these companies have designed certain ways of using the social medium in a way to create exposure for them and manage at least to an extent the eWOM surrounding their products or brands on Instagram. One tactic that companies have been utilizing on a social media platform such as Instagram is to register a public profile to follow and "like" consumer’s photos. This has proven quite successful when the objective of the marketing strategy is to increase exposure on social media. By liking the consumer’s photos the company is expressing an affinity to the consumer. This also points to the fact that the company approves of the consumers Instagram activity and is interested in the consumers photos and thereby his or hers day-to-day experiences (Erna Hreinsdóttir, personal communication, June 19th 2014).

There is no denying that social media outlets such as Instagram have had booming first years. Many marketers are optimistic about Instagram’s abilities to open new marketing horizons. Unfortunately there is very little known about the factors that motivate consumers to engage in eWOM on Instagram. Shin et al. (2014) contemplate about the lack of attention the influence of contextual factors that motivate consumers to post eWOM has gotten in the academic community of marketing research. Furthermore, there has been even less information gained from research which marketers could utilize in marketing their products or service.
5 Research methodology

The aim of the study is to understand why and how people use Instagram as a word-of-mouth medium. In order to do so a survey was carried out among a population acquired with convenience sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling method where the sample is acquired from the population that is close at hand (Farrokhi and Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). A quantitative research was conducted, which is more convenient to use when the thesis is focused on statistical analysis rather than descriptive narrations. In this chapter the study's participants, their background, the research's design and how it was conducted will be presented.

5.1 Participants

The author utilized her own social network, mostly consisting of females between 20 and 30 years of age. In total 559 individuals took part in the survey and out of them 6 individuals left blank answers to all questions. Of those who answered 78.5% were female and 21.5% male. The participants’ age varied although most were between the ages of 18-30 years old. The participants background information is shown in Table 2. Of those who took part in the survey 87.0% had a registered Instagram account, from now on they will be referred to as participants of the survey. Of the participants 98.5% had shared photos on the application and 1.5% had not done so.

The average amount of followers, that the participants had, was 201-250 but the standard deviation was rather high, which points to the fact that some participants may have a great deal of followers while others only have a handful. Most participants were following between 251-300 users but the range of following is quite wide and varies among users.

In Table 3 the percentage of participants within each gender is shown. A crosstab analysis was performed and the chi-square test shows that women were statistically more likely than men to have an Instagram account ($\chi^2(1) = 4.693; p < 0.05$).
Table 2. Participants background information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>78.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Younger than 18 years old</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25 years old</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years old</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35 years old</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40 years old</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45 years old</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50 years old</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older than 50 years old</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production trade</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Percentage of Instagram users within gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Instagram users within group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Measurements

The aim of the research was to give an insight into how Instagram users utilize the social media application and how the visibility of brands and products has developed among its users. The author designed the questionnaire, which contained 15 questions (see Appendix).

The first question of the survey inquired about whether or not the participant used the social media application Instagram. Participants that did not have an account were
directed straight to the background questions and were therefore never exposed to any questions related to Instagram.

The next couple of questions treated user activity, how many followers the user had and the social aspect of the medium, how many users they were in turn following. A nominal scale was used to categorize the answers for both the number of the user’s followers and following. The scale went from 1-50 followers/following to more than 450 followers/following. The fourth and fifth questions were of a marketing nature and asked if the participants had companies as followers and/or in turn if they were following companies. This was to investigate if companies did in fact have an active presence on the participants Instagram news feed.

The subsequent question asked whether or not the participant had shared photos with their followers on Instagram, and in such a case how many. A similar nominal answer scale was applied as before, ranging from between 1-50 photos to more than 450 photos shared. If the participant had not shared any photos of products and brands they were not asked any further questions regarding that matter.

The following question inquired about reasons for using Instagram. Five different incentives for having an Instagram accounts were presented and a five-point Likert scale, with answer choices ranging from "never applies" to "always applies". The following reasons for sharing photos were presented:

- I like to share my experiences
- I like to participate in contests
- My friends and family use Instagram
- I like to take photos with my smartphone and edit them with filters
- I like to see other users photos

The next question treated the type of content being displayed on Instagram and participants were asked what kind of photos they were sharing. A five-point Likert scale, with answer ranging from "very seldom" to "very often" was applied and five different content descriptions presented with the question: How often do you share photos of the following:

- My friends and family
Experiences and events
Selfies
Food and drink
Products I would like to own

This was followed up by two questions based on product visibility on Instagram and how products were displayed on the social media application. First, the participants were asked whether or not they had observed photos of products or brands and subsequently if they had shared photos of products on their Instagram account.

Finally a question was directed to those who recognized that they had shared photos of product or brands on Instagram. They were asked to mirror the sentence "I share photos of products or brands on Instagram because..." and were then presented with nine answer choices and a five-point Likert scale. The answer possibilities ranged from "highly disagreeing" to "highly agreeing". The possibilities were:

- I am happy with the product
- I am unhappy with the product
- I want to share with others what product I use
- I believe my followers are interested in what products I use
- I want to help my followers by recommending products
- I want to tell my followers about products I'm happy with
- I feel the product or brand represents my characteristics
- The product is a part of an experience/event
- I feel the product or brand represents my lifestyle

5.3 Procedure

The sampling method used for the study was the so-called convenience sampling in which the author opted to use her own social network. The survey was prepared in Google Forms, an online program that creates a link that leads directly to the survey. The survey was then shared on three social media platforms, first on Facebook and then via Twitter and Instagram. Participants had the possibility of sharing the survey, as many of them eventually did.
The link was shared on the three social media platforms exclusively meaning that all of the participants had access to at least one of the social media networking sites. The survey was launched on the 2nd of September 2014 and remained open to participation for 30 hours. The survey's results were processed and coded, first in Excel and then examined in more detail with the use of the statistics computer program SPSS.
6  Findings

A statistical analysis containing crosstabs and chi-square tests was performed. The confidence interval used in the statistical analysis was 95.0%. In the following subchapters the study’s results that indicate a relevance to the research question will be presented.

6.1  Motives for posting photos of products and brands

The participants had to mirror the sentence: “I have shared photos of products or brand on Instagram because...” In Figure 3 the mean of the answers is shown. The reason most participants gave for posting a picture of a product or brand was that they were happy with the product. The second and third most popular motive was telling followers about products that they were happy with and showcasing products as part of an experience/event. The motive people disagreed most with was posting photos of products or brands that they were unhappy with.

![Figure 3. Motives for posting a product or brand ranked by participants](image)

6.2  Companies on Instagram

Questions regarding company profiles on Instagram showed that 59.1% of the participants had companies following them and 63.9% followed companies on Instagram. There was a statistically significant difference between the genders, women
were more likely to follow ($\chi^2(2) = 10.644; p < 0.05$) and be followed ($\chi^2(2) = 9.490; p < 0.05$) by companies.

### 6.3 Product visibility

In order to gain insight into the visibility of brands and products on Instagram participants answered two questions; if they had seen a photo of a product or brand and if they had shared photos of products or brands on Instagram. The results can be seen in Table 4 and show that 77.3% of participants had observed such photos and 53.3% acknowledged that they had posted similar photos of products or brands on their own personal Instagram accounts. This indicates that products and brands are indeed visible on Instagram and that its users are conscious of the fact that they are being exposed to product or brand information.

**Table 4. Percentage of participants who had seen and/or shared photos of products and brands**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you observed photos of products or brands on your Instagram newsfeed?</th>
<th>Have you shared a photo of a product that you owned on Instagram?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.4 Reasons for Instagram use

The participants were asked for what reasons they used Instagram. Figure 4 shows the mean of the answers. Of the five possible answer choices the reason cited most often is that they like to see other users photos. Two other popular reasons were that their friends and family use Instagram and they like to share experiences.
6.5 Visual content

The participants were asked what kind of visual content they had shared most often on their Instagram account. The participants stated sharing photos of friends and family or experiences and events as the most frequently shared topics. The mean value of the answers can be seen in Figure 5.
7 Discussion

The study's aim was to examine why and how individuals use the social media application Instagram to engage in word-of-mouth activity. In order to do so a quantitative research was conducted and its findings analyzed and presented.

The most cited reason participants gave for displaying a product or a brand on Instagram was that they were happy with the product or brands and its utility. They believe that the content they post will be of both interest and assistance to others. The least favored motive for posting photos of a product or brand was on the other hand when they were unhappy with the product. These results resemble both the concept of positive altruism as presented by Sundaram et al. (1998) as well as Dichter's concept of other-involvement; helping others in making better purchase decisions. For that reason Instagram could be seen as an excellent medium for marketing since most of its users tend to use it to engage in positive word-of-mouth.

Another interesting aspect was that a majority of the survey's participants had shared photos of their experiences and events. One of the main motives given for posting a photo of a product or brand was that it was part of an experience or event. This could be of relevance to marketers, especially in the increasingly growing event- and tourism business. Participants frequently employ the social media application to document and broadcast their activities and could therefore be a suitable medium to employ when designing a strategic marketing plan in the event- and tourism business.

This act of sharing photos of experiences and events resembles Dichter's motivational factor of self-involvement. By sharing photos of experiences such as traveling to exotic locations gratifies some particular needs and enforces the public persona of the consumer.

Other interesting and practical results were on the topic of visual content. The main reason most of the Instagram participants gave for using the application was that they liked to see photos that other users’ have shared. This is an important result and sheds light on the fact that Instagram users are interested in the content that is visible to them via the social media application. It is likely that they enjoy using the medium for that main reason. The user is in a state-of-mind where he or she is accessible to visual content and this can possibly give it an advantage as a tool for social advertisements.
This resembles Dichter’s definition of message involvement, the user may be attracted to some kind of a message that he or she finds intriguing. Kietzman and Canhoto discuss the same element and suggest that the content has to involve some kind of a surprise element to it in order to attract and hold the attention of the viewer. This argues that if a marketing tactic is to be implemented on Instagram it is important to give thought to the concept of message-involvement.

Women were in a majority in the participation of the survey however in most cases there was not a statistical difference between the genders. Although, women were more likely to both follow companies on the social media application as well as having more followers. This implies that women could be more open to a company’s presence on the social media application and therefore the female segments on Instagram could be more attainable and more open to marketing content. These results are in accordance to the demographical information presented by Instagram which states that more than half of its users are female.

One of the motivating factors for engaging in word-of-mouth, introduced by Dichter in 1966, is self-involvement which is related to the term self-branding. The participants were asked if they thought that by sharing photos of brands or products they were in a way making a statement about their lifestyles. The participants ranked this answer choice the lowest. This is a surprising outcome and indicates that Instagram users might not be fully aware that they are marketing their persona online with their user activity as discussed by Snorrason (2012).

The survey gives implications that Instagram is a fully-fledged electronic word-of-mouth medium and that many of its users view it as a source of information and as a communicational tool. It seems that our penchant for helping friends and family, optimizing their lives and spreading useful and positive information is relevant on Instagram. Although the concept of word-of-mouth has changed its shape, it is intriguing to see how it is emerging in new kinds of mediums, such as Instagram. Word-of-mouth seems to have the ability to appear in a form that harmonizes organically with the structure of the medium. Even though our lives are infused by technology the core of human communication has not necessarily weakened but rather evolved and progressed along with changing times and the modernization of lifestyles.
8 Limitations and recommendations

The primary restriction for the research was the lack of a wider scope in the range of participants. The largest components of participants were a part of the author’s social network and were of similar age, gender and educational background. Although this gives a panoramic view of a certain condensed group of users it is not possible to interpret the results for the whole population of Instagram users based on this sample. Nonetheless, it can give some clues to how this certain group of users utilizes the application. Women are in the majority of Instagram users which makes the findings possibly relatable.

Since there seem to be limited available academic research it is challenging to compare and evaluate the significance of the information. Also it is difficult to argue that the motives presented in the study are in fact the actual factors that prompt consumers to take part in word-of-mouth activity on social mediums such as Instagram. The motives that were utilized in the study, although under the influence of previous academic research, were merely an interpretation from the author and her perception of Instagram users. Thus, a qualitative study would be of use and thereafter a quantitative one to gain a more concrete understanding of what motivates users to share word-of-mouth by posting product related photos on Instagram.

It is highly recommended that further research be made on the matter of marketing on Instagram as well as a more in depth descriptive analysis of the demographic of the users.
9 Bibliography


Sæl/Sæll!

Ég heiti Anna Margrét og er nemandi á 3. ári í viðskiptafræði við Háskóla Íslands. Nú vinn ég að rannsókn sem er hluti að lokaritgerð minni í náminu. Hluti af þessari rannsókn er að senda út könnun sem snýr að notkun snjallsímaforritsins og samfélagsmiðilsins Instagram. Þar kanna ég m.a. myndbirtingar á vörum og vörumerkjum á Instagram. Ef þú gætir svarað eftirfarandi spurningum myndi það gagnast mér mikið.

Ef þú notar ekki Instagram þá þarftu ekki að svara könnuninni en ég vil þakka þér kærlega fyrir innlitið.

Könnunin er örstutt og þar að auki stórskemmtileg. Hún er að sjálfsögðu nafnlaus og verður ekki rakin til þáttakenda.

Bestu þakkir fyrir þáttökuna!

Anna Margrét Gunnarsdóttir
amg20@hi.is

1. **Notar þú samfélagsmiðilinn/forritið Instagram?**
   - [ ] Já
   - [ ] Nei

2. **Hver er fjöldi fylgjenda þinna (e. followers) á Instagram?**
   - [ ] Ég er ekki með fylgjendur
   - [ ] 1-50
   - [ ] 51-100
   - [ ] 101-150
   - [ ] 151-200
3. Hver er fjöldi notenda sem þú fylgir (e. following) á Instagram?
   - Ég fylgi ekki neinum á Instagram
   - 1-50
   - 51-100
   - 101-150
   - 151-200
   - 201-250
   - 251-300
   - 301-350
   - 351-400
   - 401-450
   - Fleiri en 450
   - Ég er ekki með neina fylgjendur á Instagram

4. Fylgir þú fyrirtækjum eftir á Instagram? (e. following)
   - Já
   - Nei
   - Veit ekki

5. Fylgja fyrirtæki þér eftir á Instagram? (e. followers)
   - Já
   - Nei
   - Veit ekki
6. Hefur þú tekið myndir með snjallsímanum þínnum og birt þær á Instagram-reikningum þínum?
   □ Já
   □ Nei
   □ Man ekki

7. Hversu mörgum myndum hefur þú deilt á Instagram?
   □ 1-50
   □ 51-100
   □ 101-150
   □ 151-200
   □ 201-250
   □ 251-300
   □ 301-350
   □ 351-400
   □ 401-450
   □ Fleiri en 450

8. Af hverju notar þú Instagram?
   Veldu það sem best á við
   Ég vil deila upplifunum mínum og uppákomum
   □ Á aldrei við
   □ Sjaldan
   □ Stundum
   □ Yfirleitt
   □ Alltaf

   Ég tek þátt í leikjum og keppnum
   □ Á aldrei við
   □ Sjaldan
Sundum

Yfirleitt

Alltaf

Vinir mínir, kunningjar og fjölskylda nota forritið

- Á aldrei við
- Sjaldan
- Sundum
- Yfirleitt
- Alltaf

Mér finnst gaman að taka myndir með símanum mínum og breyta þeim með mismunandi linsum (e. filters)

- Á aldrei við
- Sjaldan
- Sundum
- Yfirleitt
- Alltaf

Mér finnst gaman að skoða myndir annarra

- Á aldrei við
- Sjaldan
- Sundum
- Yfirleitt
- Alltaf

9. **Hvernig notaru Instagram-forritið almennt? Hægt er að velja fleiri en einn valmöguleika**

   Merktu við tíðnina, frá aldrei upp í alltaf.

**Ég tek myndir af vinnum mínum og fjölskyldu:**

- Aldrei
- Sjaldan
- Sundum
- Yfirleitt
Ég tek myndir af uppákomum og upplifunum (t.d tónleikar, ferðalög eða sólarlag):

- Aldrei
- Sjaldan
- Stundum
- Yfirleitt
- Alltaf

Ég tek sjálfsmyndir (e. selfies):

- Aldrei
- Sjaldan
- Stundum
- Yfirleitt
- Alltaf

Ég tek myndir af mat og drykkjum:

- Aldrei
- Sjaldan
- Stundum
- Yfirleitt
- Alltaf

Ég tek myndir af hlutum sem mig langar að eignast:

- Aldrei
- Sjaldan
- Stundum
- Yfirleitt
- Alltaf

10. Hefur þú séð vörú, vörumerki eða þjónustu af einhverju tagi birtast á Instagram-myndum þeirra sem þú eltir á Instagram?
11. Hefur þú tekið mynd af vöru sem þú hafðir keypt og deilt myndinni á Instagram?
   □ Já
   □ Nei
   □ Man ekki

12. Hversu sammála eða ósammála ertu eftirfarandi fullyrðingu: Ég hef tekið mynd af vöru og birt á Instagram út af því að...

   Ég er ánægð/ánægður með vöruna:
   □ Mjög ósammála
   □ Ósammála
   □ Hlutlaus
   □ Sammála
   □ Mjög sammála

   mjög ósammála, ósammála, hlutlaus, sammála, mjög sammála

   Ég er óánægð/óánægður með vöruna
   □ Mjög ósammála
   □ Ósammála
   □ Hlutlaus
   □ Sammála
   □ Mjög sammála

   Ég vil deila með öðrum hvaða vöru ég nota
   □ Mjög ósammála
Ég vil deila með öðrum hvaða vörur ég nota ekki

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hlutlaus
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

Ég tel að fylgjendur mínir hafi áhuga á að sjá hvaða vörur ég nota

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hlutlaus
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

Ég vil hjálpa fylgjendum mínum með því að benda þeim á vörur

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hlutlaus
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

Ég vil segja fylgjendu frá á vörum sem ég er ánægð/ur með

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hlutlaus
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála
Mér finnst varan og vörumerkið skilgreina mína persónu

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hlutlaus
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

Voran/Vörumerkið er hluti af upplifun/uppákomu

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hlutlaus
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

Voran/Vörumerkið er stöðutákn fyrir lífstitlinn minn

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hlutlaus
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála
Bakgrunnsbreytur

Hvert er kyn þitt?
□ Karlkyns
□ Kvenkyns

Hver er aldur þinn?
□ Yngri en 18 ára
□ 18-25 ára
□ 26-30 ára
□ 31-35 ára
□ 36-40 ára
□ 41-45 ára
□ Eldri en 45 ára

Hvert er hæsta menntunarstig sem þú hefur lokið?
□ Grunnskólapróf
□ Stúdentspróf
□ Íðnpróf
□ Háskólapróf - grunnám
□ Háskólapróf - framhaldsnám