

**ANALYZING THE FEATURES OF NEGATIVE EWOM: A CASE OF  
THREE BRANDS OF ANDROID PHONE IN A REVIEW SITE IN  
TAIWAN**

Meng-Lin Shih

Department of Applied Information and Multimedia, Ching Kuo Institute of Management and Health, No. 336, Fu Hsin Rd., Keelung City 20301, Taiwan.

**ABSTRACT**

The power of negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is tremendous, but we have no idea that what percentage of eWOM is negative eWOM, how many negative eWOM messages are from the dissatisfaction with product (service), and how many responses mostly each negative eWOM message has by the previous research. This study analyzes a famous review website in Taiwan to examine above features of negative eWOM about three brands of Android phone. The results indicate that nearly 20% of eWOM is negative eWOM, most of the negative eWOM messages are spread as a result of the dissatisfaction with product, and a large part of negative eWOM messages have less than 10 responses. Detailed findings and discussion for the companies of cell phone are presented.

**Keywords:** Negative eWOM, the features of negative eWOM, Android phone

**Introduction**

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is not an unfamiliar topic in marketing and management fields. Literature on this topic has focused on how WOM influences consumers' product involvement (e.g., Giese, Spangenberg, & Crowley, 1996), brand attitude (e.g., Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001), purchase intention (e.g., Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger, & Yale, 1998), and purchase behavior (e.g., Liu, 2006). However, it has recently attracted much more attention from scholars and practitioners with the advancement of Web 2.0 and subsequent development of social media. Because consumers can easily spread their experiences and opinions about products on various digital media such as online discussion forum, personal blog, or social media platform where those experiences and opinions are read by other consumers (Pitt, Berthon, Watson, & Zinkhan, 2002), the focus has shifted, from traditional WOM to electronic WOM (eWOM).

Online WOM or eWOM is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004, p. 39). With its nature of easy accessibility, eWOM allows scholars to collect and analyze the actual WOM data from digital media and assess their influence on consumers who participate in WOM activities. For more than one decade, there is a lot of research on eWOM has found that it still can influence consumers' brand awareness (e.g., Davis & Khazanchi, 2008), brand attitude (e.g., Doh & Hwang, 2009), purchase intention (e.g., Park & Lee, 2009), and purchase decisions

(e.g., Themba & Mulala, 2013), and the influences are even greater and faster than those by WOM.

Despite its importance, eWOM is still generated by consumers every day and disseminated via digital media, and the proliferation of it has posed new challenges to companies since they can't control its creation and dissemination. Particularly the negative eWOM, its power is tremendous when consumers share negative feelings and thoughts publicly online after experiencing dissatisfaction with products or services. However, do you know how much negative eWOM is generated in a day, what percentage of eWOM in that day is negative eWOM, and what features negative eWOM is with? Obviously we will never know the real answers to above questions because of so many consumers, so much dissatisfaction, and so diversity of negative eWOM in the world, but we can show the statistics of it about selected products in a famous review website during a period of time and analyze its key characteristics that companies need to know in order to manage it effectively and learn how to lower damage from it.

This study selects cell phone as the target product for collecting its negative eWOM. Cell phone is almost a product that everybody buys, owns, and uses. So, negative eWOM about the product will be valuable and full of meanings for the companies. Three brands of Android phone were selected because they are all among top five rankings in cell phone sales in Taiwan. Quite a lot of negative eWOM messages about those brands of products are therefore expected, but on the other hand, they will be able to respond the opinions of a lot of consumers who have experienced dissatisfaction and provide helpful suggestions for companies to consider. Mobile01 website ([www.mobile01.com](http://www.mobile01.com)) is the source of negative eWOM. This website is chosen because it is an important and a famous review website for consumer electronics, computer, and communications (3C) products in Taiwan. We can search this review site to address research questions in this study. Followings are the research questions:

- (1) What percentage of eWOM is negative eWOM? Are the three brands of Android phone different from each other?
- (2) How many negative eWOM messages are from the dissatisfaction with product? How many are from that with service? Are the three brands of Android phone different from each other?
- (3) How many responses averagely and mostly does each negative eWOM message have? Are there a lot of negative eWOM messages over 50 or more responses? Are the three brands of Android phone different from each other?

### **Methods**

To understand above questions about negative eWOM of Android phone across different brands, a thorough content analysis was conducted to examine the key features of three leading brands of Android phone in sales in Taiwan. The three brands of Android phone are hTC, Asus, and Samsung. Content analysis is a common method for investigating the written documents and communication artifacts, which might be texts of various formats including pictures, audio, or video (Babbie, 2001). It has been extensively used in marketing, advertising, and IS literature.

As mentioned earlier, Mobile01 website is the source of negative eWOM because of its popularity among people who like to share their experience with 3C products in Taiwan. The content analysis, therefore, was conducted by using the reviews of this website. The negative reviews about the three brands of Android phone were examined in early September 2019. The reviews were posted during the period of July 16<sup>th</sup> 2019 to August 15<sup>th</sup> 2019. The reviews of one month might be an epitome of a whole year and can be representative for analyzing and understanding the features of negative eWOM about cell phone.

**Results**

As shown in Figure 1, totally 657 eWOM messages about the three brands of Android phone were generated during the period between mid-July and mid-August and 124 negative ones were found in subsequent content analysis, nearly 20% (19%) of eWOM being negative eWOM. That is, if we do not consider which brand of cell phone consumers use, approximately one in five eWOM reviews is negative review. This rate is not at its lower level but we are not surprised at such a high percentage of negative eWOM appearing in a public opinion forum because consumers nowadays have already known how to use the Internet to share their unpleasant feelings and thoughts after experiencing dissatisfaction with products or services. Figure 1 also shows a further phenomenon that no significant difference in percentage in question among the three brands of Android phone was found with that hTC, Asus, and Samsung got the negative eWOM rate of 18%, 21%, and 18% respectively, demonstrating that consumers have the similar amount of complaints when using a cell phone regardless of what brand it belongs to.

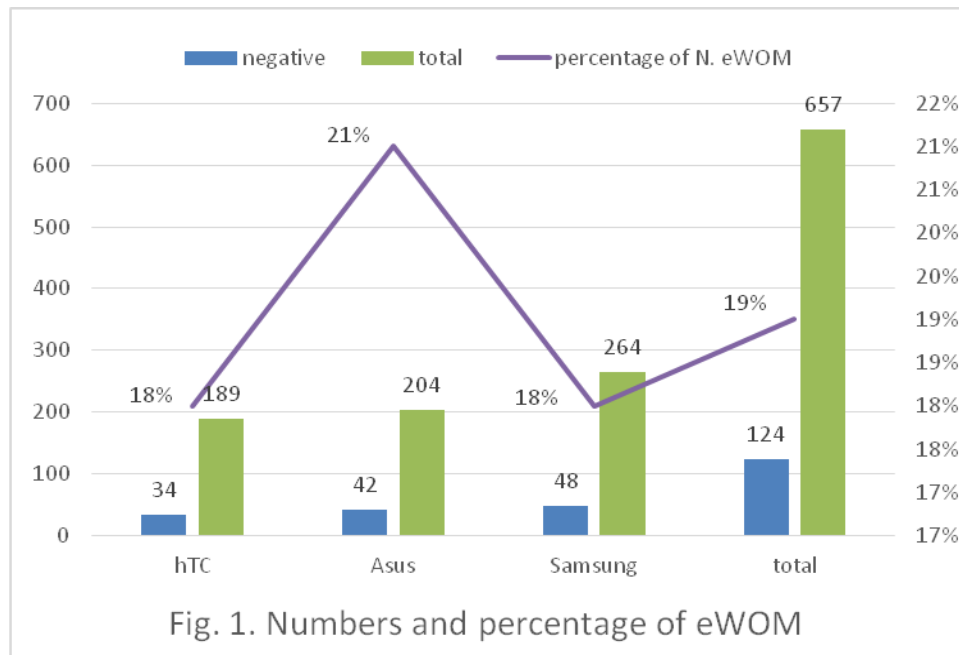


Fig. 1. Numbers and percentage of eWOM

Figure 2 is the distribution of consumers’ negative eWOM from either their dissatisfaction with products or with services when using the three brands of Android phone. As shown in this figure, most of consumers complain as a result of their dissatisfaction with product, with 103 (of 124) negative eWOM messages totally being from product. Even if we look at this figure from a single brand of cell phone, the results are the same, since hTC, Asus, and Samsung got the number up to 29 (of 34), 33 (of 42), and 41 (of 48) on negative eWOM message related to product respectively. Therefore, we think the quality of a cell phone, no matter whether it is from hardware or software is the major source of consumers’ dissatisfaction and the most spread of subsequent negative eWOM. Service, however, may not be as important as product because the three brands of cell phone just got the negative eWOM messages about service of 5, 9, and 6 respectively.

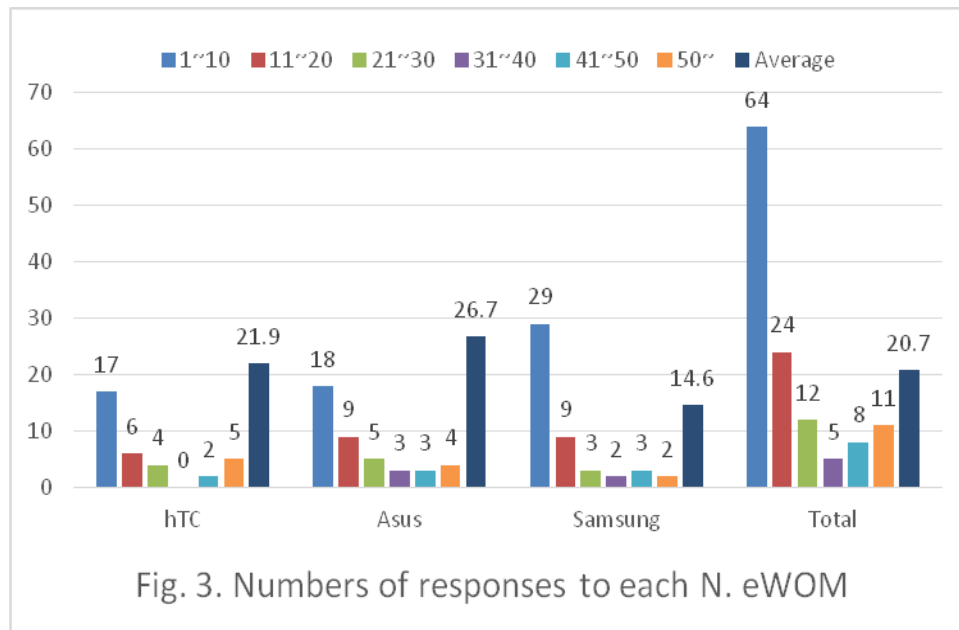
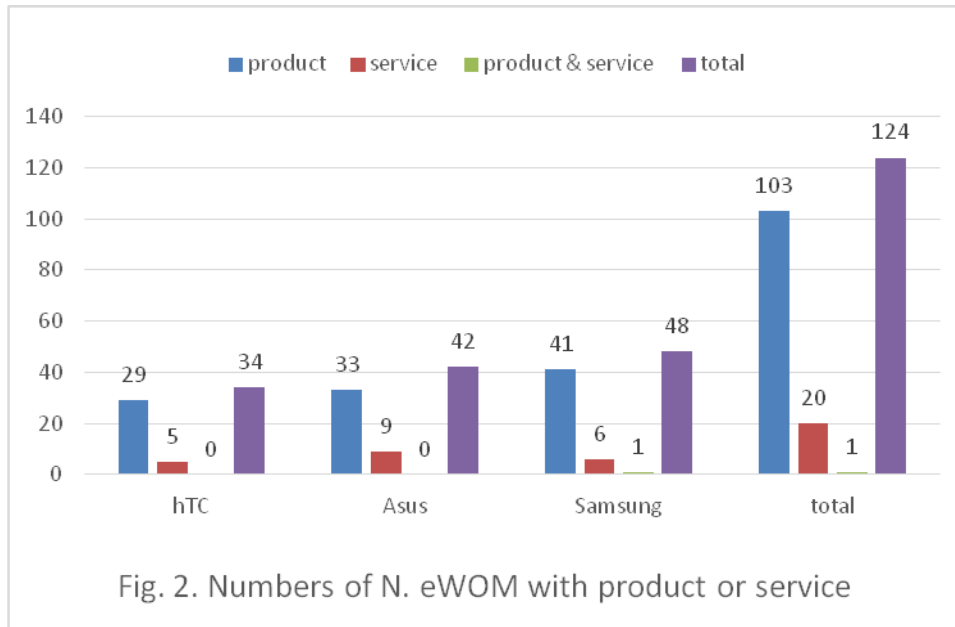


Figure 3 shows the numbers of responses to each negative eWOM message posted on the review site. It demonstrates the popularity of each event that one consumer experienced a dissatisfaction with the usage of a cell phone and share it with other people. As shown in this figure, a large part of negative eWOM messages have less than 10 responses, with that hTC, Asus, and Samsung got the frequency of 17 (34), 18 (42), and 29 (48), respectively. This indicates that a negative eWOM message does not necessarily receive a lot of attention and discussion from consumers since it is possibly a rumor spread by the opponents and does not deserve to be responded heatedly. In addition, only a few negative messages that have more than 50 replies are found with that the three brands of cell phone separately shows the number of 5 (hTC), 4 (Asus), and 2 (Samsung) on the legend “50~.” These messages are posted largely due to a common fault of a part, once again indicating that consumers’ dissatisfaction with the usage of a cell phone is primarily related to its product quality rather than customer service.



In figure 3, the average response of each negative message is 20.7. Looking at it further, we find that hTC, Asus, and Samsung got the number of 21.9, 26.7, and 14.6 respectively. Above data are not as high as expected. That is, a negative eWOM message does not necessarily receive a lot of attention and discussion from consumers, as we mentioned earlier. Some of the messages, however, are still close to or more than two pages of discussion (10 responses per page), which are higher than average, demonstrating that negative eWOM messages are hotter than normal ones.

Table 1 further compares whether the three brands of cell phone have the similar responses to each negative message. The result of an ANOVA shows no difference among the three brands on such responses with p-value 0.2343. Therefore, we think the average replies of each negative review are not related to the brand of the phone, even though that brand of phone is more popular in sales than others.

Table 1. Difference of responses to N. eWOM by ANOVA

| Source of variance | SS       | df. | MS     | F      | P-value | critical value |
|--------------------|----------|-----|--------|--------|---------|----------------|
| Between groups     | 3348.4   | 2   | 1674.2 | 1.4687 | 0.2343  | 3.0711         |
| Within group       | 137931.4 | 121 | 1139.9 |        |         |                |
| Total              | 141279.8 | 123 |        |        |         |                |

**Discussion**

The first research question in this study is to understand what percentage of eWOM is negative eWOM. The result tells us the fact that the ratio of negative eWOM messages to positive ones is

not low (1:4), and consumers nowadays have already known how to use the Internet to share their unpleasant feelings and thoughts after experiencing dissatisfaction with products or services. So companies are best to know this fact and do not ignore consumers' complaints and should develop adequate strategies to respond such complaints. The second research question attempts to know how many negative eWOM messages are from the dissatisfaction with product and with service. The result indicates that most of consumers complain as a result of their dissatisfaction with product, and no matter which brand of cell phone it is, consumers have the same amount of complaints when using it. That is, this generation of cell phone is not only a feature phone with assorted functions, but also a smartphone with multiple apps. Thus, for the consumers it is easy to have problems either related to hardware or related to software when using this kind of phone. Companies that produce such a kind of cell phone for consumers would be wise if they improve the quality of their products on both hardware and software and finally enhance consumers' using experience. The last question is to investigate how many responses averagely and mostly each negative eWOM message has. The result shows that a large part of negative eWOM messages have less than 10 responses, the average response of each negative message is about 20, and only a few negative messages have more than 50 replies. This implicitly indicates that a negative eWOM message does not necessarily receive a lot of attention and discussion from consumers because it is possibly a rumor spread by the opponents. Facing the increasing rate of cell phone use, the companies should know the truth that the dissemination of rumors is unavoidable but they also need to establish adequate strategies in order for the sales and credit of their phones not to be harmed by those rumors.

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