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Electronic Word of Mouth (Ewom) and Brand Equity in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

Electronic word of mouth is the process of sharing suggestions, complaints, comments and reviews about a company on the internet. Today, eWOM is so trusted that majority of online buyers consider previous reviews and comments before making purchases on the internet. Although positive eWOM influences brand choice and encourages brand trial, fabricated comments, exaggerated claims, and fake reviews erode brand equity. Using secondary data, the paper examined deceptive eWOM and its effect on brand equity – brand awareness, brand association, perceived product quality and brand loyalty in the digital era. First, electronic word of mouth and falsehood on online media spaces were explored. In addition, the adverse impact of deceptive eWOM on brand equity was investigated. The example of some popular cases of deceptive eWOM were identified and discussed. The paper concludes that deceptive eWOM is not sustainable for brand management, hence marketers should develop a clear policy on online reputation management which emphasises the importance of authenticity and transparency. Organisations can further establish a social media monitoring plan to track online conversations in order to identify fake reviews and respond promptly.

KEYWORDS

EWOM,
Brand Equity,
Digital Era,
Nigerian
Marketers

INTRODUCTION

Electronic word of mouth (Ewom) is a persuasive message from consumers about a product, idea or service which influences other customers' purchase decisions on the internet (Handoko & Melinda,

2021). According to Siddiqui et al. (2021:1109), “eWOM is an assertion made by existing customers about a product or organisation which is made accessible to a huge number of individuals and institutions by means of the internet”. This implies that eWOM is a form of suggestion, conclusion, and recommendation by customers which provides product information to other customers on the internet. Onurlubas and Altunişik (2019) mention that eWOM is the process of sharing suggestions, complaints, and reviews about a company on the internet. Through eWOM, customers can get access to product information, and this assists them in making purchase decisions (Rathnayake and Kumara, 2019; Badawi, Nuradin and Muafi, 2021).

In exploring the characteristics of eWOM, Handoko and Melinda (2021:84) aver that “eWOM has unprecedented scalability and speed of diffusion”. In this context, scalability refers to the ability of digital platforms to handle and accommodate a large volume of information and interaction. This denotes that while information in traditional word of mouth is shared in a close conversation (among a few people), electronic word of mouth is open to a large group of people, even those not on the internet when a comment was made. Similarly, speed of diffusion refers to how quickly information spreads through eWOM. In the digital era, information can be shared, transmitted, and accessed almost immediately. This allows for rapid dissemination of comments, opinions, reviews, and recommendations, leading to easy and fast dissemination of product information, which potentially influences consumer buying behaviour at a very fast pace compared to traditional word of mouth (Hendrayati & Pamungkas, 2018; Handoko & Melinda, 2021).

Electronic word of mouth is a concept that has attracted a lot of attention from researchers and professionals in the field of marketing as one of the major factors influencing purchase intentions and decisions on the internet (Hendrayati & Pamungkas, 2018). It was reported that 85 percent of the world’s online population has used the internet to make a purchase, and 77 percent of online shoppers in the US reported using consumer-generated reviews and ratings to aid their purchase decisions (Nielsen, 2008; Jupiter Research, 2008b). An empirical study by Cheung et al. (2009) also reveals that consumer purchase decisions are influenced by both positive and negative comments from fellow buyers; however, positive messages are believed to be a valuable vehicle for promoting products and services. Electronic word of mouth seems important to online purchasing because of the amount of risk involved in online shopping (Almana & Mirza, 2013). To alleviate risk and boost confidence, internet shoppers leverage experiences, comments and suggestions of other people.

Digitalisation has improved marketing activity and practice in recent times (Hendrayati & Pamungkas, 2018; Rust, 2019; Dash, Kiefer, & Paul, 2021). Today, marketers employ digital media (websites, social media, online videos, digital images, podcasts, and mobile applications) to communicate their offerings (product, service, and idea) to both existing and potential buyers (Rust, 2019). Through digital media, marketers can communicate product information and receive and address customers’ feedback, suggestions, complaints, reviews and comments (Dash, Kiefer, & Paul, 2021). Digital media also enables customer-to-customer

interaction as it allows customers to share opinions with marketers and other buyers on the media spaces (Rust, 2019; Onurlubas & Altunışık, 2019).

As technology advances, consumers' ability to influence the buying behaviour of other consumers through word-of-mouth communication is accelerated by the internet (Siddiqui et al., 2021). The connectivity nature of the Internet allows consumers to easily interact and exchange shopping experiences with one another using online discussion forums or any other social network technologies (Cheung, Lee & Thadani, 2009). Digital media facilitate the sharing of information, experience, and recommendations, making it easier for individuals to express their thoughts and opinions. As more people transact online, eWOM is gradually making its way into the marketing communication mix (Handoko & Melinda, 2021).

In the digital era, the diminishing effect of eWOM cannot be ignored. Since customers are gradually believing eWOM claims rather than advertising messages (Siddiqui et al., 2021), some online retailers employ unethical tactics to improve their online reputation by writing fake reviews on their business pages (Zhang & Ghorbani, 2020). These retailers also share deceptive opinions, reviews, comments, and suggestions on the internet to dubiously influence customers' purchase intention and decision (Caled & Silva, 2022). Sometimes, online sellers employ inflated ratings to sell their products on the internet. Here, existing buyers share fake experiences that a product offers some untrue benefits, leading new buyers to make purchases based on false information (Salminen, Chandrashekhar, Kameld, Junga, & Jansena, 2022). It has also been observed that online vendors employ fabricated reviews which include personal experiences and testimonials that are entirely false or untrue to boost sales on the internet (Budhi, Chiong, & Wang, 2020). So, as eWOM becomes prevalent, falsehood and deception, which can damage brand equity, grow among marketers and sellers.

Although eWOM is gradually becoming a marketing communication strategy, previous studies predominantly focused on the effect of eWOM on purchase intention (Fan & Mia, 2012), purchase decisions (Cheung et al., 2009; Almana & Mirza, 2013), behavioural intention (Kamtarin, 2012) and buying behaviour (Chen, 2012). However, deceptive eWOM and its effects on branding have received limited attention from scholars. It is believed that unethical and manipulative marketing communication strategies ruin branding while honest and truthful communication practices build a brand (Roujee & Roujee, 2017). This study, therefore, examines deceptive eWOM and its effect on building brand equity – brand retention, branding association, perceived product quality and brand loyalty in the digital era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Electronic Word of Mouth and Falsehood on Online Media Spaces

Technology advancement has improved marketing activities and amplified the presence of eWOM in the marketing communication mix (Chen, 2012; Kamtartin, 2012). Today, buyers' reviews can play a crucial role in determining the profitability of any business as online users rely on comments, testimonials, and recommendations before making purchases on the internet (Mohawesh et al., 2021). Based on this, some deceptive online retailers employ unethical tactics to improve their online reputation by writing fake reviews on their business pages. Salminen et al. (2022:1) noted, "As reviews are among the most influential tools for influencing consumers' buying behavior, fraudulent actors are tempted to hire writers who specialise in/or use automated methods for generating fake reviews to enhance the attractiveness of their products and services, or to degrade competitors' reputation". This implies that some e-retailers now invest in unethical eWOM communication strategies to manipulate their customers, and/or defame their competitors in the online spaces (Salminen et al., 2021).

Fake review is defined as deceptive opinions, reviews, comments, and suggestions shared on the internet with the intention to dubiously influence customers' purchase intention and decisions (Mohawesh et al., 2021). Zhang and Ghorbani (2020) opine that fake review is one of the common unethical eWOM employed by e-retailers online. According to Caled & Silva (2022), fake reviews refer to fabricated or intentionally misleading information presented as legitimate news and often disseminated through various online platforms, including social media, websites, and messaging apps. Fake reviews can inflate product ratings, misrepresent product features, fabricate experiences and testimonials, provide biased recommendations, and present deceptive user-generated content in order to distort consumers' perception of a product or service (Fiedler & Kissling, 2020).

Inflated rating has also been identified as an unethical eWOM strategy employed by e-retailers on the internet. Inflated ratings occur when customers, mostly existing ones, affirm that a product offers untrue benefits. Customers, usually prospects, may rely on these ratings to assume that a product is of high quality and meets their needs, leading them to make purchases based on false information (Salminen et al., 2022). An example is the product with a 4.8-star rating based on hundreds of fake positive reviews, giving the impression of excellence and customer satisfaction. Oftentimes, inflated ratings misrepresent the features and performance of a product by exaggerating its benefits to deceive customers (Fiedler & Kissling, 2020). Customers may be swayed by these claims, believing that the product offers benefits that it does not possess.

Additionally, deceptive eWOM can come in the form of fabricated reviews (Do-Hyung & Kim, 2008). Fabricated reviews include personal experiences and testimonials that are entirely false or untrue (Budhi, Chiong, & Wang, 2020). Here, a brand pays an individual to share positive reviews about their products or services even when such customers have not used the products before. These stories can create an emotional

connection with potential customers, leading them to perceive the product as more reliable or effective than it is. For example, a fake review describing how a weight loss supplement can help someone shed belly fat in a week, accompanied by a detailed and compelling personal story, can encourage a prospect to make an uninformed decision.

Furthermore, deceptive eWOM can be a negative comment posted by competitors with the aim to diminish the reputation of their competitors (Salminen et al., 2022). Here, a competitor intentionally writes a negative review about its rival's product to undermine its reputation and divert customers towards its own offerings. These reviews may contain false information or exaggerated flaws about a particular brand. This type of fake review often scares customers away from the product. For example, a fake review warning customers about the poor durability of a competitor's product and urging customers to choose their products instead. This kind of review can ruin brand reputation, image, and identity in the marketplace.

Deceptive eWOM also takes the form of user-generated content. Some fake reviews now mimic genuine user-generated content, which makes it challenging to distinguish between real and fake reviews (Fiedler & Kissling, 2020). Customers may trust these reviews and base their decisions on false or manipulated information. For example, a fake review that appears to be written by a regular consumer, using natural language and expressing genuine satisfaction, but in reality, was created by a marketing team. These untrue machine-generated reviews often mislead and deceive customers into making purchases.

One of the major concerns surrounding eWOM is the lack of credibility and authenticity (Rathnayake & Kumara, 2013). In the digital space, it is difficult to ascertain the reliability and trustworthiness of information shared online, as anyone (customers, marketers or competitors) can post fake comments, manipulate ratings, or generate artificial buzz. Such deceptive practices undermine the credibility of eWOM, making it challenging for customers to make informed decisions.

Also, eWOM can lead to a trend of groupthink and herd mentality (Nuseir, 2019). Groupthink is a phenomenon in which members of a group prioritise consensus and conformity over critical thinking and rational decision making. In the context of eWOM, this can lead to the spread of inaccurate or biased information, as customers may be hesitant to express their own opinion or challenge the prevailing narrative. This can result in a trend of herd mentality, where individuals make decisions based on the opinions of others rather than their own independent analysis.

Another challenge of eWOM is the spread of harmful or offensive content (Malbon, 2012). Online discussions can quickly turn toxic, with the fake customers trolling and bullying others. Importantly, online vendors can use eWOM to generate favourable feedback for their products (Banerjee & Chua, 2017). As a result, consumers may be exposed to false information, leading to wrong decision-making. While eWOM in the digital era has undoubtedly improved the way we gather and share information, it is important that marketers and consumers critically assess its limitations and setbacks.

Deceptive Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) and Brand Equity in the Digital Era

Branding is a strategic process of creating, shaping, and communicating a distinct identity for a company, product, or service in the minds of consumers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). It encompasses various elements (logo, design, style, and message) that work together to differentiate a brand from its competitors and establish a desired perception in the mind of customers (Oyeniyi, 2011). An effective branding goes beyond logos and tag lines; it encompasses a company's value, personality, and reputation (Gossaye, 2017).

The implication of deceptive eWOM in eroding branding is significant as it creates confusion and distrust, which negatively affects brand equity (Malbon, 2013; Zhang & Ghorbani, 2020). Brand equity encompasses the emotional, social, and financial connections between a brand and its stakeholders, including customers, employees, and partners (Rojuee & Rojuee, 2017). Brand equity refers to the value and reputation of a brand in the minds of consumers. It's the sum of all positive and negative experiences, perceptions, and associations that customers have with a brand (Aaker, 1996; Abdul, Mustapha & Hassan, 2022). Deceptive electronic word of mouth (eWOM) can significantly impact brand equity by eroding the dimensions of brand equity – brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Bismoaziiz, Suhud, & Saparuddin, 2021).

First, deceptive eWOM can erode brand awareness. Brand awareness refers to the extent to which a brand is recognised and remembered by its target audience (Tibebe & Singh, 2016). It's the degree to which a brand is top-of-mind, and how easily it comes to consumers' minds when they think of a particular product or service category (Lee & Chen Yu, 2018). Deceptive eWOM can overwhelm genuine content with fake reviews and opinions, making it harder for potential customers to find authentic information about a brand (Putri, 2022). This confusing brand message through deceptive eWOM contradicts brand claims and values, causing uncertainty among consumers. Furthermore, deceptive eWOM can decrease search engine rankings, making it hard for customers to find a brand online. This reduced visibility not only leads to decreased website traffic but also results in difficulty for customers to learn about the brand and its offerings (Putri, 2022). Ultimately, deceptive eWOM can erode brand recall as it often makes it difficult for customers to remember a brand when making purchasing decisions (Randyantimi & Andrini, 2020).

Also, deceptive eWOM can significantly impact brand association. Brand association refers to the mental connections or links which consumers make between a brand and various attributes, characteristics, or values (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). These associations can be based on personal experiences, marketing efforts, or cultural influences, and they influence how consumers perceive and feel about a brand (Roujee & Roujee, 2017). Fake reviews and opinions can lead consumers to associate a brand with low quality, dishonesty, or poor customer service, damaging a brand's reputation and image (Hendrayiti & Pamungkas, 2018). Deceptive eWOM can overshadow positive brand associations, making it difficult for consumers to recall a brand's unique benefits, features, and

values. The domination of online conversation with fake reviews and opinions through deceptive eWOM can shift customers' focus away from the brand's strengths and accomplishments (Rathnayake & Kumara, 2019). Ultimately, deceptive eWOM can lead to a reevaluation of the brand's position in the market, causing consumers to reconsider their relationship with a brand (Jasin, 2022). For example, a vendor who claims their diet tea cuts down thirty calories in seven days may only achieve a one-off purchase, as customers may never return to their page.

Furthermore, deceptive eWOM can significantly affect perceived product quality in the digital era. Perceived product quality refers to the customer's subjective evaluation of a product's quality, based on their experiences, expectations, and interactions with the product (Anjum, Rizwan, Khaleeg & Rasheed, 2012). It is a measure of how well a product meets the customer's needs, expectations, and standards (Mishra, Das, Mishra & Mishra, 2012). It has been observed that fake reviews and opinions can lead consumers to believe that a product has flaws or shortcomings that don't exist, or that it lacks features or benefits that it actually possesses (Jasin, 2022). Also, deceptive eWOM can amplify minor issues or anomalies, making them seem like major problems. This can lead to an exaggerated perception of the product's limitations which can cause consumers to doubt its quality and reliability (Stockman, Stockman, Hoyer, & Viera, 2020). Deceptive eWOM can further create unrealistic expectations by exaggerating the benefits or performance of a product. When the product inevitably fails to meet these inflated expectations, consumers may perceive it as being of lower quality than it actually is (Hendrayiti & Pamungkas, 2018). Importantly, deceptive eWOM can erode trust in a brand's products, leading to a decline in perceived quality and a loss of sales (Rathnayake & Kumara, 2019).

Lastly, deceptive eWOM can significantly impact brand loyalty. Brand loyalty refers to the degree to which a customer consistently purchases and advocates for a specific brand, despite competition or other factors that may influence their decision (Aaker, 1991; Oliver, 1999; Chen & Ching, 2007; Alhaddad, 2015). Bismoaziiz et al. (2021) mentioned that when consumers encounter fake reviews or opinions that contradict their own experiences, they may begin to question the brand's honesty and authenticity, leading to a decline in loyalty. Also, deceptive eWOM can create uncertainty and doubt among consumers, making them more susceptible to competitors' offerings. As trust in the brand wavers, consumers may become less committed to the brand and more open to alternative options (Hendrayiti & Pamungkas, 2018). In addition, deceptive eWOM can also lead to a sense of betrayal among loyal customers who feel misled or deceived by fake reviews or opinions. This can further result in a loss of loyalty and advocacy, as these customers become disillusioned with the brand (Bismoaziiz et al., 2021). In the long run, deceptive eWOM can damage the emotional connection between consumers and the brand, leading to a decline in loyalty and retention.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES REVIEW

Several relevant studies (Hendrayiti & Pamungkas, 2018; Rathnayake & Kumara, 2019; Stockman, Hoyer, & Veiga, 2019) have been examined to document the role of electronic word of mouth in the digital era with emphasis on deceptive eWOM and its effect on branding. For example, the study of Cheung, Lee, & Thadani (2009) on the impact of positive electronic word-of-mouth on consumer online purchasing decisions shows that positive eWOM strengthens the relationship between consumers' emotional trust and their intention to shop online, as well as the relationship between consumers' perceived integrity and attitude. Similarly, Almana and Mirza (2013) carried out a study on the impact of electronic word of mouth on consumers' purchasing decisions in Saudi Arabia. Results show that Saudi Internet shoppers are very much influenced by eWOM, and that a larger percentage of them are dependent on such online forums when making decisions to purchase products through the Internet.

In addition, Rathnayake & Kumara (2019) in their study, "The Impact of Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication on Online Purchase Intention: Mediating Effect of Brand Image", assert that the eWOM positively affects brand image and online purchase intention. They argue that e-retailers can win more customers by changing their purchasing behaviour through effective communication. Also, Perkasa et al. (2020) in their study, "The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Product Quality and Price on Purchase Decisions", posit that eWOM has a positive and significant effect on purchasing decisions. Findings reveal that positive comments of internet users can influence consumers' purchase decisions.

Conversely, the study of Hendrayiti & Pamungkas (2018) on "Viral Marketing and E-Word of Mouth Communication in Social Media Marketing" reveals that eWOM can have both positive and negative effects on a brand, as its effectiveness depends largely on the contents and messages it conveys. This implies that while some customers can share positive information promoting brand image, a group of dissatisfied customers or even competitors can share information that can harm a brand's identity in the competitive market. This assertion was further buttressed by the study of Stockman, Stockman, Hoyer, & Viera (2020), which examined the negative effect of eWOM on applicants' attraction and job applicant decisions. The study maintains that negative eWOM can lower applicant attraction to a company even when such a company has a positive brand image.

It was further observed in literature that some empirical studies have examined the effect of eWOM on branding, but these studies were carried out in other countries with little attention given to Nigeria. For example, Bismoaziiz et al. (2021) analysed social media marketing, electronic word of mouth, and consumer attachment to brand loyalty in Grab Indonesia. The results showed that exogenous variables (social media marketing, electronic word of mouth, and consumer attachment) positively and significantly affect endogenous variables (brand loyalty). The variable that has the highest value in influencing brand loyalty is social media marketing. Meanwhile, the variable that directly influences brand loyalty

with the lowest regression coefficient is electronic word of mouth. Also, in Indonesia, Putri (2022) carried out a study titled “Impact of Electronic Word of Mouth Using Influencers on Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention”, and findings indicate that eWOM through influencers has a positive impact in increasing brand awareness, while influencers have no significant impact on customers’ purchase intention. Jasin (2022) also analysed the effect of social media marketing and electronic word of mouth on purchase intention through brand image in Indonesia, and results prove that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand image. Electronic word of mouth also has a positive and significant influence on purchase intention and brand image.

Theoretical Framework: The Theory of Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Theory of Acceptance Model (TAM) explores individuals' willingness to embrace and use evolving technology, particularly influencing online business development. Users' reactions and perceptions of information technology play a crucial role in shaping their behaviour and acceptance of such technology. Adopted from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), TAM in eWOM asserts that an individual's attitudes and reactions determine their behaviour. It establishes a model, rooted in psychological theory, describing computer users' behaviour through elements like trust, attitude, intention, and user behaviour. Developed by Davis F.D in 1989, TAM is widely utilised in information technology research for its simplicity and user-friendly approach (Kartika & Pandjaitan, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This is a position paper; hence, the study employs a secondary data approach to investigate the impact of deceptive electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on brand equity in the digital era. Secondary data provides a convenient and cost-effective way to access existing research findings, industry reports, and academic studies.

The data sources include academic journals and articles (e.g., Journal of Marketing, Journal of Consumer Research); Industry reports (e.g., Nielsen, Forrester); online databases (e.g., Google Scholar, JSTOR); social media and online review platforms (e.g., X, Yelp)

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to identify relevant studies and findings related to deceptive eWOM and brand equity. Industry reports and online databases were also searched for data on consumer behaviour, online reviews, and brand performance. Social media and online review platforms were analysed to gather examples/cases of deceptive eWOM and its impact on brand equity. This secondary data may have limitations in terms of relevance, accuracy, and generalisability. Also, it may not be comprehensive or up-to-date.

CASES OF DECEPTIVE ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (EWOM) AND ITS EROSION ON BRAND EQUITY

Bell Canada's Fake Review Scandal (2011)

In 2011, Bell Canada, one of Canada's largest telecommunications companies, was caught creating fake online reviews to promote their services. The scandal came to light when a blogger discovered that Bell Canada employees were posting positive reviews on websites and forums, posing as satisfied customers. The fake reviews were part of a larger marketing campaign aimed at improving Bell Canada's online reputation. However, the plan backfired, leading to widespread media coverage and public outcry. Bell Canada's reputation suffered greatly, with many customers expressing disappointment and anger. The incident also had financial repercussions, with Bell Canada's stock price dropping following the scandal.

Samsung's Fake Review Debacle (2013)

In 2013, Samsung, the world's largest smartphone manufacturer, was accused of paying students to write fake online reviews for their products. The incident came to light when a Taiwanese website discovered that Samsung had hired students to post positive reviews on websites and forums. The fake reviews were part of a larger marketing campaign aimed at promoting Samsung's products and improving their online reputation. However, the plan was widely criticised for its dishonesty, leading to legal action and fines for Samsung. The incident damaged Samsung's brand reputation and eroded trust among consumers.

Amazon's Fake Review Problem (2020)

In 2020, Amazon, the world's largest online retailer, faced criticism for allowing fake reviews on its platform. The incident came to light when an investigation found that many products on Amazon had fake reviews, with some products having hundreds of fake reviews. The fake reviews were created by sellers and third-party companies, who used fake accounts and bots to post positive reviews. Amazon faced criticism for its failure to prevent fake reviews on its platform, which raised concerns about the company's ability to police its own platform and protect consumers.

Wal-Mart's Fake Blog Scandal (2006)

In 2006, Wal-Mart, the world's largest retailer, faced criticism for creating a fake blog to promote its brand. The blog, "Wal-Marting across America," was created by Wal-Mart's PR agency and featured a couple travelling across America in an RV, visiting Wal-Mart stores and meeting employees. However, the blog was widely ridiculed and criticised for its lack of transparency and honesty in marketing practices. The incident damaged Wal-Mart's reputation and trust among consumers.

Legacy Learning Systems' Fake Review Scandal (2011)

In 2011, Legacy Learning Systems, a company that sells educational products, was caught creating fake online reviews to promote their products. The scandal came to light when a blogger discovered that the company's CEO was posting positive reviews on websites and forums, posing as a satisfied customer. The fake reviews were part of a larger marketing campaign aimed at improving Legacy Learning Systems' online reputation. However, the plan backfired and led to a decline in the company's reputation and customers' trust. Legacy Learning Systems faced legal action and fines for their deceptive practices.

CONCLUSION

In the digital era, eWOM has emerged as one of the powerful marketing communication strategies for influencing consumers' purchase decisions. With the advent of social media platforms, online review sites, and discussion forums, customers can share their opinions, comments, suggestions and experiences with other buyers on the internet. The paper concludes that deceptive eWOM can erode all the dimensions of brand equity – brand awareness, brand association, perceived product quality and brand loyalty. It is recommended that marketers in Nigeria should develop a clear policy on online reputation management, which emphasises the importance of authenticity and transparency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Organisations should establish guidelines for employee social media use which can prohibit fake reviews and testimonials. In addition, they should implement a whistleblowing mechanism for reporting deceptive eWOM practices. As a project, marketers can conduct regular online reputation audits to identify and address deceptive eWOM. They can also develop a comprehensive online reputation management strategy, incorporating social media monitoring, content creation, and crisis communication. In the long run, marketers should collaborate with experts, influencers and brand ambassadors to promote authentic brand stories and values. Furthermore, marketers can create a crisis communication plan to address deceptive eWOM incidents, which includes a swift response, apology, and corrective action. They can also develop a content creation plan to promote authentic brand stories and values, highlighting customer testimonials and user-generated content. They can further establish a social media monitoring plan to track online conversations in order to identify fake reviews and respond promptly.

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