

(Araştırma)

WHO IS ENGAGED IN E-WOM? ROLE OF E-LOYALTY, DEMOGRAPHICS, VISIT FREQUENCY AND PRODUCT CATEGORY

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ABSTRACT

Consumers tend to share their post-purchase experiences (WOM- Words of Mouth) with others regardless of whether the experiences are positive or negative. With the advancement of internet technology, WOM behavior has shifted to online platforms (eWOM) and eWOM has become an extremely effective way of communication. The main purpose of this study is to unveil the antecedents of eWOM behavior. In this respect, the role of e-loyalty in addition to demographics and other relevant factors such as e-retailer visit frequency and consumer's mostly purchased product online in eWOM behavior was examined. A total of 296 individuals were accessed beginning from January 2019 to February 2019 through online convenience sampling. IBM SPSS 22 statistical software was used and multiple regression models was applied. The independent variables were able to explain the eWOM behavior with a R²value of.42. Compared to participants who belonged to 36-45 age group, younger participants were less likely engaged in eWOM behavior. Consumers who mostly purchased books, CDs, and electronic goods were more likely engaged in eWOM behavior, compared to consumers making apparel purchases online. Finally, findings also revealed that the less the consumers visited online e-retailers, the less these eWOM behaviors were displayed.

Keywords: Electronic word of mouth, demographics, online buying, e-loyalty, e-retailer

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E-WOM DAVRANIŐINI KİM SERGİLER? E-SADAKATIN, DEMOGRAFİKLERİN, ZİYARET SIKLIĐININ VE ÜRÜN KATEGORİSİNİN ROLÜ

ÖZET

Tüketiciler, ister olumlu isterse de olumsuz olsun, satın alma sonrası deneyimlerini (WOM- Ağızdan ağıza pazarlama) paylaşma eğilimindedir. İnternet teknolojisiyle birlikte, WOM davranıőı çevrimiçi platformlarda da yapılmaya başlamıő (eWom) ve eWOM, oldukça etkili bir iletiőim yolu haline gelmiőtir. Bu çalıőmanın temel amacı, eWOM davranıőının öncüllerini ortaya koymaktır. Bu bağlamda, demografik özelliklere ek olarak, e-sadakat, e-perakendeci ziyaret sıklığı ile en çok satın alınan ürün gibi faktörler eWOM oluşumu açısından incelenmiőtir. İnternet ortamında yapılan kolayda örnekleme ile Ocak 2019 - Şubat 2019 tarihleri arasında toplam 296 kişiye erişim sağlanmıőtır. IBM SPSS 22 istatistik yazılımı kullanılmıő ve çoklu regresyon modeli uygulanmıőtır. Bağımsız deėiőkenler e-Wom davranıőını ,42 deėerindeki bir R^2 deėeri ile açıklamıőtır. Arařtırmada, 36-45 yaő grubundaki katılımcılarla karşılaőtırıldıėında, genç katılımcılarına WOM davranıőını daha az oranda sergilediėi gözlenmiőtir. İnternet ortamında, kitap ve CD ile elektronik ürün satın alan tüketicilerin, giyim eőyası alan tüketicilere kıyasla eWOM davranıőını daha fazla bir oranda sergiledikleri görölmüőtür. Son olarak, arařtırma bulguları, çevrimiçi perakencileri daha az ziyaret edenlerin daha az eWOM davranıőı gösterdiėini ortaya koymuőtur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Elektronik ağızdan ağıza iletiőim, demografik özellikler, online satın alma, e-sadakat, e-perakendeci

1. Introduction

Castells (2000: 13) defines our contemporary society as a “Network society” where distances are eliminated; where everyone can connect anywhere and at any time. In other words, networks have removed the concepts of time and distance. Nowadays, individuals have the opportunity to watch all the events and make their voices heard, wherever they are in the world. The introduction of the Internet into our lives, the formation of virtual environments and the spread of communication through computer networks, confirm that McLuhan’s “Global village” assumption has become a reality (Kozinets, 1999: 253).

Consumers want to take the views of third parties before making their purchase decisions. The word of mouth communication (WOM) is more reliable and credible to consumers than brand marketing communications. Nowadays, the rapid development of communication technologies has enabled WOM to be transferred to the internet. Electronic word of mouth communication (eWOM) covers all positive or negative interactions that users make about the products, services, brands and businesses via the internet. Almost all kinds of media and virtual platforms in the Internet are used for eWOM (Yeygel, 2006: 215).

The online information shared in electronic environments can be distinguished more easily than the information created by traditional media. Because the internet offers a wide range of visual, audio and written content (Faber et al., 2004: 456). It also provides comparative sources of information about many brands and products. In addition, the Internet offers consumers the opportunity to interact with other consumers in different cultures and regions. An interactive and dynamic eWOM communication, the source of which is entirely consumers, is seen as a very important force in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of other consumers (Brown and Reingen, 1987: 354).

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Background

2.1. Defining Word of Mouth

Interpersonal networks, where people transmit their knowledge, experience and thoughts to other people, are one of the most effective ways of disseminating information. This process is known as word of mouth communication (WOM). WOM communication acts as a mediator during the flow of information from mass media to less active sections of society. This process has a strong impact on consumers’ brand, firm, product and service judgments (Duhan et al., 1997: 287; Herr et al., 1991: 4; Higie et al., 1987: 264).

Arndt defines the WOM as a form of word of mouth communication between the receiver and the news (source), which aims to convince the receiver of the buyer for a brand, product or service without commercial purpose (Arndt, 1967: 291). Silverman has also identified WOM as unofficial dialogues about products and

services between the people who are independent from companies which are the providing products and services (Silverman, 1997: 33). Buttle (1998) argued that word of mouth communication is “ Face-to-Face verbal communication between individuals, without any commercial purpose, about their perception of a brand, product or service “ (Buttle, 1998: 242). According to Zhao (2019:18), WOM is similar to organic information which is voluntarily or involuntarily shared with friends and relatives. In short, the WOM process can be defined as the possibility of consumers having information about products shared by consumers who have experienced it before. The most sensitive point here is that as stated in the definitions, WOM is not made for commercial purposes because the source or information provider has no expectation or gain from the information receiver. The growth in the Internet and in the electronic commerce industry has also changed consumer behavior and consumption habits. Today, consumers share their knowledge, positive and negative experiences, very quickly with other people. In this way, other consumers who are unstable and in search of information can access information about products, services, brands and much more quickly and easily.

Nowadays word of mouth communication (WOM) is considered to be one of the most important forces in marketing communication (Wals et al., 2004:109). WOM can influence consumer behavior (Bone, 1995; Bansal and Voyer, 2000), preferences, buying tendencies (Herr et al., 1991; Charlett and Garland, 1995) and decision making (Wangenheim and Bayon, 2004). Although the information produced by the marketing staff attracts attention and plays an important role in improving the awareness of the products, WOM is seen as a more effective source of information in regards of changes the attitudes and behaviors of consumers (Grewal et al., 2003; East et al., 2007) and their adapting to new products (Gilly et al. 1998; Goldenberg et al., 2001). This interpersonal source of information is considered to be more reliable (Ferris-Costa, 2011:2) than traditional and mass media (Strebel et al., 2004:101). WOM has been found to be seven times more effective than newspapers and magazines, four times more than personal sales and twice as much as radio advertisements (Chien-Tao, 2008:6).

The characteristics of traditional WOM have been demonstrated by various authors in previous studies (Bickart and Schindler, 2001:32; Brown and Reingen, 1987: 350; Ratchford et al., 2001: 7). The first feature is that traditional WOM is restricted to the local social network of the individual (Brown and Reingen, 1987:351). Furthermore, information is transmitted through face-to-face communication (Bickart and Schindler, 2001:37). Finally, knowledge of traditional WOM communication is derived from individuals close to it, such as family members and friends of individuals (Ratchford et al., 2001:13). WOM can also be defined as the sharing and exchange of personal informal information, which is generated as a result of consumers listening to other individuals (friends, family, acquaintances, etc.) about their suggestions, proposals and personal recommendations (Kalpaklıoğlu and Toros, 2011:4113). Basically, the word

of mouth (WOM) is the communication of information and experience among customers, which help in settling on purchase decisions (Beyari and Ghouth, 2018:54). WOM has started to be realized on the internet, which is the most important communication channel of our time. The Internet's ability to provide immediate and direct access to information, to allow for mutual interaction, to provide efficiency in information transfer, to be personalized, to be integrated with other communication tools and processes (Bauer, 2002:44) enabled its users to become a communication channel with a daily average of 4 hours (Kemp, E. and Bui, M., 2011). The growth in the Internet and in the electronic commerce industry has changed the consumption habits, allowing consumers to access information about the product more quickly and easily. Online information can be more easily distinguished from the information created by traditional media. It is because the internet is supported by an incomparable number of videos, texts and sounds (Faber et al., 2004:456). An interactive and dynamic WOM communication is a very important force in influencing the attitudes and behavior of consumers (Brown and Reingen, 1987:354). The Internet is now a new platform for word of mouth communication, providing consumers with many opportunities. In this way, word of mouth communication, transformed into a new form of electronic word of mouth communication - eWOM form of reshaping and rapid development has become a more effective communication medium compared to traditional word of mouth communication (Çakirkaya, 2016:41).

Table 1. Traditional Word of mouth communication and Electronic Word of mouth communication

Traditional Word of mouth communication	Electronic Word of mouth communication
Personal / Face to face	Non-Personal / Online
One on one	With multiple contacts
Two-way communication	Single-sided or two-way communication
Verbal	Written
Geographically Restricted	Geographically unrestricted
Socially pressured	Socially not pressured
Short-lived	Long lasting
With good income	Planned and effortless
Incalculable	Computable
Direct observation	Indirect observation
Source	Source specific or uncertain

As seen in Table 1, WOM and eWOM have advantages and disadvantages compared to each other. While traditional WOM has face to face communication which is the most effective communication, eWOM also has less effective online communication. However, when we look at the general features of eWOM, it

makes the longevity, effortless, and geographical unrestricted features more attractive. Unlimited features of information technology and the rapid development of the Internet have brought WOM communication to the electronic environment (Dellarocas, 2003: 1407; Thorson and Rodgers, 2006:40). In addition, the use of WOM in traditional ways has to change as a result of the widespread use of the Internet for shopping, information gathering, socializing, entertainment and more (Carl, 2006: 621; Keller and Berry, 2006:1).

Nowadays, consumers prefer to get information about products and goods mostly from family, friends, newspaper news, social media and so on (Tayfun et al., 2013:27). However, thanks to online media, forum pages and social networking sites consumers are able to compare prices, quality and services related to any product (Kitapçı et al., 2012:268). Word of mouth communication is a very important source of consumer information. It is important in purchasing decisions and product / brand evaluations and forms the basis of interpersonal communication (Grewal et al., 2003:188). Therefore, word of mouth communication is an effective factor in repetition and / or changing behavior. Traditional communication theory acknowledges that word of mouth communication (search for information, evaluation, and especially in the decision to buy consumer) has a very strong impact on consumer behavior (Brown et al., 2007: 4). Word of mouth communication in commercial situations involves sharing attitudes, ideas or reactions to business, products and services with others (Jansen, 2010). In the context of marketing, oral communication is defined as informal communication that is directed to other consumers about the use of products or services, their properties, owners and sellers of goods or services (De Matos and Rossi, 2008:578). Word of mouth communication may be positive or negative. Negative directional word of mouth communication includes negative information, experiences and ideas about goods and services, while positive directional word of mouth communication includes positive information, experiences and ideas. For this reason, enterprises want to have a positive direction of word of mouth communication with their goods and services. This is the most important and most desirable situation in terms of continuity of marketing and competitive advantage (Wang et al., 2012:199). Li and Yuan reported that using a customer relationship network in WOM marketing is crucial for gaining an advantageous position in a fiercely competitive market. Companies should effectively capitalize on the use of a customer relationship network to generate positive effects that advertisements cannot produce (Hsu, 2018:2).

Dave Balter (2007), the first word-of-mouth marketing agency, founder of BzzAgent, states that, as a result of their research, they have determined that every conversation between people is related to a product or service. Virtual word of mouth communication in electronic environment also has functions parallel to face-to-face communication (Hagel et al., 1997:23). Although eWOM has a great similarity with traditional oral word of mouth communication, it offers a completely new perspective to WOM (Al Mana and Mirza, 2013:23).

2.2. Electronic Word of Mouth

eWOM refers to “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product, service, web site or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet”. Simply defined, eWOM involves the behavior of exchanging marketing information among consumers in online environments or via new technologies (Chu and Kim, 2018:2).

The virtual eWOM in electronic environment has similar functions to face-to-face communication (Yakın, 2011:14). Being interactive, fast and lacking commercial content and purpose make eWOM one of the most influential factors in consumer buying decisions (East et al., 2007:175). The influence of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on purchase intention has long been known. Previously, the effects of eWOM on discussion forums, consumer review sites, blogs and shopping websites have been studied by researchers. Also, these platforms have been compared in terms of their influence on consumers’ purchase intentions (Erkan and Evans, 2018:617).

The main sources of both WOM and eWOM are consumers, opinion leaders and reference groups (Cop et al., 2009:474). The main advantage of online communication activities is the fastest advantage of offline communication activities. The speed advantage also plays an important role in the continuous increase in the prevalence of eWOM activities. On the other hand, online eWOM is the most popular company with the highest growth rate of 35% (Park et al., 2010:7).

Table 2. Internet Trusted Resources for Purchasing and Obtaining Information

Internet Based Trusted Resources	%
People (Online)	% 70
Internet Ads	% 59
Editorials on the Internet	% 55
Internet	% 18

According to the results of Kılıçer (2006), 60% of the people stated that they received information from the internet about the products in a method other than word of mouth communication. Providing information from the Internet about the product can take place in two ways. First, the product features, price, payment terms and so on. to obtain information by using the company’s web page or via internet advertisements. The other is to obtain information from other consumers using the product through various platforms on the Internet (forums, shopping sites, blogs, grievance sites, etc.). In fact, this method is word of mouth communication through the internet, eWOM (Kılıçer, 2006: 89).

In contrast to traditional WOM, eWOM has become a measurable, observable process on web-based applications such as forums, blogs, comment sites, social

networks, newsgroups, and in this process that spreads rapidly into large areas, individuals can instantly exchange information. (Chen et al., 2012; Litvin et al., 2008). Hennig et al., (2004) indicate that consumers who are in their search for information about products and businesses in online channels that make individuals more active, also share their information, ideas and knowledge, either positive or negative.

As reported by Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2006), consumers have begun to educate each other about brands, products, services and many other issues through the spread of online information resources. In this respect, eWOM takes two important roles in both providing information and providing advice; these comments are becoming information sources that are important in terms of experiencing products and providing positive or negative information about products, affecting consumer decisions, reducing perceived risks and erasing uncertainties. (Zhang et al., 2010; Pan et al., 2007; Park et al., 2012; Laboy and Torchio, 2007; Morgan et al., 2003). eWOM is one of several sources of information consumers use to learn about the quality of products and services. Consumers who write eWOM is believed to be candid about their views due to a perceived lack of financial motivation to assist the brand. Consumers may be influenced by eWOM messages because the messages have higher credibility, relevance, and ability to generate empathy (Bhandari and Rodgers, 2018:127).

According to the definitions made; as people share their experiences of purchasing, a product or property, and because this sharing takes place with the immediate environment, they find word of mouth communication more reliable in terms of purchasing decision than other sources of information. In his study, Murray (1991) states the importance of eWOM in reducing the risk associated with the purchase decision (Murray, 1991:10). In addition, Bone (1995) emphasizes the importance of word of mouth communication in the development of purchasing behavior of customers (Bone, 1995:213). According to Silverman (1997:36), eWOM is a communication that stimulates the consumer's buying behavior or changes to the brand and also provides significant benefits for businesses to gain new customers by eliminating complexity and reducing consumer decision-making (Silverman, 1997:32). According to Ennew et al. (2000), WOM has an effect on the decision to make a purchase if it comes from a reliable and credible person (Ennew et al., 2000:75). According to Bansal and Voyer (2000), eWOM has a significant impact on the purchasing decision process (Bansal and Voyer, 2000:166). Marangoz (2007) indicates that word of mouth communication has an effect on the purchasing behavior (Marangoz, 2007:395).

In the article written by Kılınç in 2018, the studies regarding "Word of mouth communication" on domestic and foreign level were evaluated. It was seen that most of these studies were done are about consumer purchasing decision, intention and behavior, literature study and model building. This is followed by studies on customer satisfaction, customer value, customer loyalty, brand

preference, brand value and quality. The least studied area is the perception of word of mouth communication. As in domestic studies, a large part of the studies conducted in foreign countries were conducted for research (Kılınç, 2018:219). In the last 10 years, there is no research on whether the demographic characteristics of consumers are effective on WOM or eWOM.

Some other studies show that product characteristics can affect WOM and eWOM behavior (Sundaram et al., 1998; Hennig, Thureau et al., 2004; Chitturi et al., 2008). However, these studies did not investigate whether the demographic characteristics of consumers such as gender, age, and educational status have an impact on eWOM behavior. In addition, e-loyalty, frequency of visits to e-retailers, and whether there is a significant relationship between eWOM and purchased product groups has not been examined.

In the literature, it has been researched whether eWOM has an effect on the experiences regarding consumers services (Uygun et al., 2014:43), e-retailer satisfaction status (Youl Ha, 2004:331), people's proximity, demographic characteristics (Bansal et al., 2000: 168). It is possible to duplicate these examples. However, in both the domestic and foreign literature on the subject, the number of studies showing whether the demographic characteristics of consumers have a significant effect on eWOM behavior is quite limited.

Although there is a vast amount of study investigating eWOM behavior, to the extent of the authors' knowledge, studies integrating demographics and other relevant factors such as e-retailer visit frequency and consumer's mostly purchased product are lacking. Thus, this study aims to provide a holistic approach and involves e-loyalty and other relevant factors such as education, gender etc. to investigate consumers' eWOM behavior.

3. Hypothesis Development

In their study deciphering the behavioral outcome of e-loyalty, Srinivasan et al (2002) posited that e-loyalty was an important element determining the extent of WOM. Positive WOM is expected to occur when consumers are loyal to brands and want to show their gratitude. (Dick and Basu, 1994); (Srinivasan vd., 2002). Moreover, loyal consumers are more likely to visit their favorite web sites and spend more money compared to consumers who are not loyal. Another study which aimed to disclose the relation between loyalty and WOM behavior in healthcare industry focused on the impact of patients' general satisfaction towards the health-care quality in addition to hospital staff on the positive WOM behavior (Ferguson et al., 2007:70). According to this study, parallel with the increase in patients' satisfaction towards the hospital, their inclinations to engage in WOM behavior was proliferated.

In one particular study conducted on the customers of a credit institute in Rasht province in Iran, Derakhshanfar and Hasanzadeh (2016:6) investigated the

relation between the consumer experience and satisfaction with loyalty and WOM behavior. In their study, they noted that customer loyalty had an impact on word of mouth advertising. Another study regarding loyalty and WOM was conducted in Malaysia in 2015 was entitled “The Role of Brand Loyalty in Generating Positive Word of Mouth among Malaysian Hypermarket Customers” (Nikhashemi, et al., 2015:1649). According to this study, the hypothesis that read “Customer brand loyalty positively influences positive word of mouth communication” was accepted, indicating a positive impact of customer loyalty on WOM behavior.

In depth literature survey revealed that there are plenty of studies illustrating how loyalty affect WOM in online retailer environment. In this respect, the more the customers like the web sites and have pleasant and satisfactory experiences, the more likely they build up emotional loyalty (Oliver, 1999, 33.; Dick and Basu, 1994). Afterwards, they’ll talk about their positive experiences and recommend the website to their friends so that they will not miss out the opportunity to get a similar experience. In fact, Alexandrov et al., (2013:531) demonstrated that brand-related factors such satisfaction, loyalty, quality, commitment, trust and expected value are significant determinants of WOM behavior.

Harrison Walker (2001:397) posited that the consumers who are emotionally committed to the company are more motivated to support the company by actively sharing their beliefs and experiences regarding the brand. In this context, Harrison and Walker put forward that there is a strong and positive relation between emotional commitment and eWOM volume in addition to the evidence proving positive relation between emotional loyalty and eWOM valence. Park and Kim (2008:399) described the loyalty as the cognitive and emotional tie that connects brand and consumers together. In addition to Maisam and Masha (2016:19) who stressed that brand loyalty has a positive impact on WOM, (Japutra, et al., 2014:616) displayed that the most significant outcome of brand loyalty was to recommend the product through WOM and eWOM behavior.

In a similar vein, as depicted by (Halstead, 2002:1) satisfaction and loyalty are widely recognized as the determinants of WOM and eWOM behavior. Halstead indicated that unsatisfied consumers are more inclined to engage in negative WOM behavior. While the contented consumers are willing to talk about their positive experiences and inform others, unsatisfied consumers create negative e-WOM. In fact, unsatisfied consumers engage in WOM behavior more proportionally than satisfied customers.

Inspecting the relation between service quality and customer satisfaction, Mazzarol et al. (2007:1475), noted that service quality and satisfaction are important determinants of eWOM. Similarly, Chung and Shin (2010:473) demonstrated that characteristics of e-commerce website and consumer satisfaction determine the volume and degree of eWOM behavior that was displayed by online visitors.

There is a vast amount of studies which clearly exhibit that gender has a pivotal role in consumers' online communication habits. For instance, Kimbrough et al., (2013:896) detected that the females' visit frequency of online social networks were proportionally higher than their male counterparts. Similarly put forward that females were more likely to communicate on online platforms more than males. In the light of these findings, one can argue that females differed from females in their inclinations to engage in eWOM behavior, although, the services on the website induce same level of satisfaction in both females and males (Anastasiei and Dospinescu, 2019:814). A study entitled "Exploring the Antecedents of Brand Loyalty and Electronic Word of Mouth in Social-Media-Based Brand Communities: Do Gender Differences Matter?" concentrated on gender-specific differences and specified the gender as an antecedent of e-WOM (Rialti, et al., 2017b:147). Thus gender can be recognized as an important element that influences brand-consumer relation and consumers' perception of brand on social media. (Lee and Lee, 2016). Parallel with this, study of Lee and Lee (2016), demonstrated that gender was related with the consumers' cognitive and behavioral differences and the way they engaged in eWOM behavior.

On social media platforms, loyal consumers tend to be brand volunteer ambassadors. (Burmam, 2010:3). Thus, individuals having high loyalty to the brand, tend to initiate a positive eWOM toward the brand (Habibi et al., 2014a). Yet, this proactive behavior is not developed at same levels with respect to gender. Males are less inclined to give negative comments and complain about a brand, after a bad brand experience (Mitchell and Walsh, 2004:336). In a similar vein, males are also less motivated to share their positive experiences about brands. In contrast, females generally tend to recommend brands which are capable of satisfying their expectations (Li et al., 2011). Thus, although brand loyalty is an accepted catalyzer of eWOM for both genders, the impact is noted as much stronger in females. In conclusion, female consumers were found to recommend their loyal brands in a greater extent and more motivated to engage in eWOM behavior (Li et al.,2011).

The type of product may also have an effect on the positive or negative WOM and eWOM behavior. The level of risk involved in the purchase decision of a product determine the level of e-Wom sought by the consumers (Fang et.al, 2011).For instance, patients pay very much efforts in evaluating non-medical products and services that are frequently used in the cancer patient's daily life, such as wigs and bras (Lang, 2006:58), because these products pose different level of both emotional and psychical risks to consumers depending on the severity of their illnesses. Thus, patients are influenced by the comments of other patients with cancer regarding illness related products, and seek for or share information through eWOM (Jones et al.,2006:98). Furthermore, parallel with the increase of service dimension of a product, WOM was found to be more influential and more widely spread. Yang et al. (2012:1526) illustrated that the impact of WOM on the demand of a product is positive and greater on mass products than niche products, indicating that all products may not be influenced in the same way from WOM.

Investigating the e-Wom behavior differences among generations, Strutton et al. (2011:559) deciphered that Gen Y is more heavily relied on social networking sites, whereas Gen X tend to use e-mails, highlighting the habitual differences in technology use. In this respect, Gen Y individuals are more likely to spread a message from a personal source on Facebook than Gen X individuals. However, Gen X individuals are more likely to spread information that is from advertising source on LinkedIn than Gen Y members. However, there are contradictory findings in the literature about the impact of demographic factors on the eWom behavior. Focusing on the hotel guests in Turkey, Çetin and Dinçer (2014:38) illustrated that none of the demographic factors are significant factors explaining the eWom behavior. In a similar vein, a study of Hsieh et al.(2012:218) revealed that neither the age nor the gender and education status are influencing the intention of individuals to forward information content online. In this respect, this study is an additional effort to examine whether demographic factors could be important factors for eWom behavior.

As opposed to shopping enthusiasts, apathetic shoppers who are identified as the most reluctant shopper's category are usually not so content with the shopping activity. Thus, they do not like to patronize different stores neither they engage in wom behavior (Ganesh et al. 2007:371). In line of this, one can argue that the increase in e-retailer visit frequency could mean an increase in the eWom behavior.

Based on the studies and literature, the following hypotheses were formed;

H1: Gender has a significant impact on online word of mouth behavior.

H2: Age has a direct significant impact on online word of mouth.

H3: Educational status has a direct significant impact on online word of mouth.

H4: E-loyalty has a direct significant impact on online word of mouth

H5: Product category has a direct significant effect on online word of mouth

H6: E-retailer visit frequency has a significant and direct impact on online word of mouth.

4. Methodology

This study applied multiple regression model to investigate whether e-loyalty and categorical variables including “education level, gender, online retailer visit frequency, product category and age” have impact on the eWOM behavior.

The population of interest in this study consists of individuals who have done shopping at least for one time through e-retailers. Yet, e-shoppers in Turkey may stand for millions of people, making it difficult to draw the sampling frame. Due to this, convenience sampling which is one of the most known type of non-probability sampling methods was chosen as the appropriate method. Data had been collected online for one month beginning from the January 2019 until February 2019. A

survey form was prepared on Google Doc and the questionnaire was administered at the social media accounts of a website titled “akademikpersonal.org” which concentrates heavily on higher educational issues. Furthermore, the questionnaire link was tried to be spread by individual efforts of the authors. Throughout the study, IBM SPSS 22 software used to conduct all the analysis and calculations.

4.1 Scales

Consumers’ loyalty to online retailer was measured with seven-items e-loyalty scale, and word-of-mouth behavior was measured with four-items eWOM scale. Both scales were adapted from Srinivasan et al. (2002), and respondents self-reported their level of agreement and disagreement to the given statements on five-point Likert scales (1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neither agree nor disagree, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree).

Education level was measured with three categories from postgraduate to bachelor and secondary education levels. E-retailer visiting frequency was classified into three categories as the first group represented participants visiting e-retailer less than one in a month. Number of visit for the second group was equal to or greater than one but less than or equal to ten. Third group was comprised of individuals who self-reported that they visited e-retailers more than ten times in a month. Mostly purchased products in past purchases were categorized with five groups. Product categories included in this study were i.Apparel, ii.Electronic devices, iii. Books, CDs, iv. Household appliances, v. Other product categories. Finally, respondents’ age was measured with four groups (18-24, 25-35, 36-45 and above 46) representing different age intervals.

5. Results

The survey form was distributed online, and in total 297 valid responses were recorded after checking for reverse coded items and unfilled items. Although the sample size was not very big, the sample was still deemed relevant because all the participants self-reported that they occasionally did shopping from online retailers. As a reminder, this study concentrates on e-consumer behavior; hence the sample characteristics seem to be fully in line with the theme of this study.

Demographics of the participants are shown in Table 3. A quick look at the Table 3 reveals that the sample comprises of young people; a majority of which are younger than 36. They are also highly educated meaning that they very familiar with communication technology and internet use. Apparel was the most frequently purchased product category, followed by electronic goods, household goods; books, CDs, and similar products, and other product types. Finally, a majority of the respondents self-reported that they visited e-retailers’ web sites an average of 1 to 10 times a month.

Table 3. Demographics and Characteristics of eWOM Behavior

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	133	45
Female	164	55
Age		
18-24	140	47
25-35	107	36
36-45	36	12
46-55	14	5
Education		
Secondary education	19	7
Bachelor's degree	175	59
Master's degree or above	102	34
Most frequently bought item from the e-tailer		
Apparel	127	43
Electronic goods	65	22
Household goods	20	7
Books, Cds and similar products	45	15
Other product categories	39	13
Number of visit in a month		
Less than 1 time	51	17
1-10 times	173	58
Equal to or more than 11 times	73	25

5.1. Analysis

A reliability analysis was conducted beforehand for e-loyalty and eWOM scales. Cronbach's alpha (α) of e-loyalty and eWOM quality scored .90 and .71 respectively, indicating that the measures had sufficient internal consistency, hence were reliable. Although the e-loyalty and eWOM scales have one-factor structure in the original work of Srinivasan et al (2002), factor analysis was still conducted to make sure that the scales were structurally valid. Before proceeding to exploratory factor analysis (EFA), well-known assumptions of EFA were checked for Bartlett's test of sphericity was conducted to ensure that the correlation matrix was an identity matrix, hence variables included in the exploratory factor analysis were not related. KMO test was performed to check whether the sample size was adequate for EFA. As detailed by Field, KMO values above .50 and significant p value in Bartlett's test must be sought as primary assumption of EFA. In this respect, as presented in Table 4, both scales achieved minimum requirements to perform EFA.

Table 4. EFA Assumptions

	E-wom	E-Loyalty
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.53	.88
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	555.96
	df	6
	Sig.	.000
		1255.32
		21
		.000

Factor loadings, TVE scores and reliability scores of each scale were presented in Table 5. TVE values greater than % 50 is a rule of thumb to derive that the construct is structurally valid (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 5. Structural Validity of E-loyalty and E-wom Scales

Scales and Items	Factor Loadings	Reliability and TVEs
<i>E-loyalty</i>		
I try to use the website whenever I need to make a purchase.	.84	
When I need to make a purchase, this website is my first choice.	.84	
I believe that this is my favorite retail website.	.81	
I like using this website.	.80	α : .90
To me this website is the best retail website to do business with.	.80	TVE: 64 %
As long as the present service continues, I doubt that I would switch websites.	.79	
<i>E-wom</i>		
I say positive things about this website to other people.	.80	
I recommend this website to anyone who seeks my advice.	.76	α : .71
I hesitate to refer my acquaintances to this website.	.72	TVE: 54 %
I do not encourage friends to do business with this website.	.65	

After making sure that interval scales are reliable and valid, categorical variables needed to be transformed into dummy variables in order to be included in the multiple regression analysis. In multiple regression analysis, the coefficients on dummy variables measure the average difference between the group coded with the value "1" and the group coded with the value "0" (the "base group").

Variance analysis was conducted for each categorical variable. By this means, differences in subgroups in terms for eWOM means were inspected, and the groups differing from other groups largely within the same categorical variable were chosen as base groups. The base groups in this study were "male, age (36-45); post-graduate education; online visit frequency (less than 1 in a month) and apparel product category".

In multiple regression, there are different methods determining the way variables are included into regression. Stepwise methods often fail when applied to new data sets especially when the theory is not well developed because these methods have an inflated risk due to capitalizing on chance features of data (Judd and McClelland, 1989). In other words, by just looking at the β coefficients, stepwise method can sometimes end up in elimination of important variables. This study is one of the first studies that assesses the role of demographics, e-retailer visit frequency and product category in eWOM behavior. In this respect, this study adopted “forced entry” method whereby all independent variables were entered into the equation at one time. Furthermore, all variables were standardized before the multiple regression analysis to avoid problems related to the differences in scales’ intervals, thereby preventing the occurrence of possible collinearity problems between the independent variables (Hair et al., 2010).

Anova result of the multiple regression exhibited that the regression model was statistically significant with F value equaled to 17.38 at a p value of .000. Multicollinearity assumption was also checked through VIF score and condition index. VIF scores were between 1-10 for all independent variables, indicating there was no collinearity issue. Conditions index scored below 15 for all independent variables, hence supporting that collinearity was not an issue for the analysis (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 6 provides the findings of the multiple regression. Overall model explained the variance in the independent variable with an adjusted R^2 of .400, thus the regression model deemed robust. Supporting previous studies (Roy et al., 2009:8; Bozbay et al., 2016:280; Khan and Hasmi, 2016:501), e-loyalty was expectedly found to have significant and strong impact on the eWOM behavior. Yet, the main purpose of this study was to investigate whether other factors ranging from educational level and mostly purchased product category to demographics were helpful to predict eWOM behavior. In line with this, the findings indicated that the participants between the ages of 18-35 tended to display eWOM behavior less than the consumers who belonged to 36-45 age group. Thus, online retailers are advised to concentrate on the latter group to avoid negative comments and encourage positive ones about the website as this group appeared to be more interactive. In this respect, specific marketing activities could be targeted on this group to ensure that they are satisfied with the provided services. In contrast to age, education level appeared to have no impact on the eWOM behavior.

Table 6. Multiple Regression Results.

Independent Variables	Unstandardized β	Std. Error	Standardized β	t value	sig
Constant	7.32E-05	.045		.002	.999
E-loyalty	.591	.046	.591	12.719	.000
Age Group (18-24)	-.216	.08	-.216	-2.706	.007
Age Group (25-35)	-.222	.074	-.222	-3.023	.003
Age Group (46 and above)	-.084	.054	-.084	-1.549	.122
Secondary Education	-.099	.051	-.099	-1.932	.054
Bachelor	-.024	.056	-.024	-.429	.668
Product Category (Electronic Goods)	.109	.055	.109	1.993	.047
Product Category (Book & CD)	.105	.049	.105	2.125	.034
Product Category (Household Goods)	.037	.048	.037	.769	.442
Product Category (Other)	.110	.05	.11	2.184	.030
Visit Frequency (1-10 times)	.143	.063	.142	2.247	.025
Visit Frequency (\geq 11 times)	.173	.063	.173	2.757	.006
Female	-.038	.052	-.038	-.737	.462

Method: Enter, Dependent Variable: E-wom behavior, R: .652 R2: .425 Adjusted R2: .400

One of the most important findings of this study was that consumers' most purchased product category seemed to impact their motivation to display eWOM behavior. Consumers who purchased electronic goods, book & CDs and other type of products were noted to share their ideas about the e-retailer more than the consumers who purchased apparel products. This suggests that product category matters for the eWOM behavior, hence should be taken into consideration to design product-category specific marketing efforts.

As can be expected, online visit frequency was noted to have an influence on the eWOM behavior. With an increase in visit frequency, consumers tend to share their opinions more about the e-retailer, thus recommending or criticizing it with an increasing manner. This finding suggests that e-retailers should concentrate more on the consumers who visit the e-retailer more frequently. By keeping track of registered users' online visit and purchase behavior, e-retailers can design specific product and promotional offers to their consumers visiting the web-site regularly.

Last but not the least, this study revealed that gender does not matter in terms for eWOM behavior regarding e-retailers. Females were found not to differ significantly than males in their eWOM behavior. Hence, both genders should be given same amount of emphasize by e-retailers.

6. Conclusion

Today's consumers use online communication channels more than before to share information and make comments about the products they purchased. Due to advancement in technology, there have been many digital platforms available, such as social media and comment sections embedded on e-commerce web sites, to engage in eWOM behavior. Also, in line with this trend, there are plenty of studies examining eWOM behavior. Yet a majority of these studies, to the extent of authors' knowledge, lack comprehensive perspectives and do not incorporate demographics and other factors reflecting online consumer behavior, such as e-retailer visit frequency. In this respect, this study aims to identify the antecedents of eWOM behavior.

Findings revealed that product category should be paid attention to by e-retailers since online consumers were found not to engage in same level of eWOM across product categories; with eWOM behavior being more likely to occur for electronic goods category which poses more financial and functional risks compared to books and CDs. This finding provides support to the study of Fang et al (2011) who articulated that when higher risks are involved to the purchase behavior, consumers tend to share and seek for more information than the less risky products. Since electronic goods may need repair services and warranty after the purchase, such products should be evaluated by their tangible and intangible characteristics. Yang et al (2012) deciphered that for goods combining both service characteristics and the physical product, WOM was found to be more influential and more widely spread, indicating that the current study is in line with the previous literature. Hence, e-retailers should consider and design customer relationship strategies targeting specific consumers making particular product purchases.

Although education level was found to be a less important factor when determining the degree of eWOM engagement, significance level was little higher (.54) than the acceptance threshold (.05), indicating that participants having postgraduate degree were less likely to engage in eWOM behavior. Thus, e-retailers could do well by concentrating more on the less educated customers who appeared to be more interactive online. Gender came with no influence on the dependent variable, hence no gender-specific marketing strategies are considered effective for e-retailers.

One of the most interesting finding of this study was the difference in eWOM behavior with respect to participants' age. In this respect, online consumers who were between the ages of 36-45 years were noted as more interactive and readily engaged in eWOM behavior. This finding has the potential to suggest the e-retailers to consider age as an important factor and be more proactive when they manage online consumer complaints. To put it differently, this age group could be given special attention so that negative eWOM will be impeded. Findings of this study regarding the impact of demographics on eWOM behavior are not in

line with the previous literature. Çetin and Dinçer (2014) and Hsieh et al. (2012) illustrated before that none of the demographic factors are significant in explaining the eWOM behavior and individuals' intention to forward information content online. Thus, this study yielded somewhat conflicting results and future research should focus on the impact of demographics on eWOM behavior.

This study showed that parallel with the increase in online visit frequency, the intensity of eWOM is increased. This finding is not surprising since higher visit frequency is a sign of consumers' loyalty as suggested by the previous literature (Ganesh et al., 2007). Thus, e-retailers are advised to keep track of how often their visitors explore through their site. In this way, they can more easily concentrate on particular individuals or consumer groups, maybe by offering them special discounts. In this respect, consumers who have the potential to influence others seeking for information online will be well controlled and satisfied.

Although this study collected data on a highly concentric sample who self-reported that they did purchase online, this study is one of the first studies trying to integrate a variety of factors to investigate the determinants of eWOM behavior. Thus, in future studies, it is expected that this holistic approach will be followed and other relevant factors will be included to help the understanding of the eWOM behavior.

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