When Friends Share about Brands: A Study of eWOM on Social Networking Sites

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Word-of-mouth marketing has been recognized as a significant factor influencing consumer behavior. Research has indicated that certain peer consumers – often known as opinion leaders or market mavens – can influence purchase intentions and product attitudes. Likewise, bandwagon cues, which signal to consumers that a product or brand is popular among others, have also been found to influence consumer decisions. To date, most eWOM studies, and particularly those examining bandwagon cues, have assessed messages from anonymous individuals in digital environments such as online review sites.

To address this gap in the literature, this study explored how an individual’s judgment of a peer’s opinion leadership – specifically market mavenism – influences consumer decisions by examining eWOM from known peers within an online social network. In particular, this study aims to integrate our understanding of opinion leadership, eWOM, and bandwagon cues to gain clearer insight into how consumers are influenced by brand messages shared by friends on social media.

Findings indicated messages from peers perceived to be market mavens were judged to be more credible and garnered more positive attitudes in terms of the message, as well as product and brand attitudes. These attitudes also influenced purchase intentions. However, the data did not indicate an effect for the bandwagon cue on post credibility or attitudes.

*Keywords:* electronic word of mouth, opinion leadership, market maven, bandwagon cue, social networking site
When Friends Share about Brands: A Study of eWOM on Social Networking Sites

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When Friends Share About Brands: A Study of eWOM on Social Networking Sites

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Consumers often communicate about their consumption. They tell friends about a new product they love, bemoan a disappointing purchase, or recount a wonderful (or terrible) experience at a store or restaurant. Consumers also share advice about products or services that they think friends might like or benefit from. These types of communication are known as word-of-mouth marketing, simply referenced as WOM (Berger, 2014). This type of personal influence has long been recognized as an integral and significant factor in consumer behavior (e.g. Arndt 1967; Berger, 2014; Buttle, 1998; Katz & Lazarsfeld 1955, 2006).

With new communication technology tools such as email, online review systems, and social networking sites, consumers can share information with each other easier than ever before (Morrison, Cheong, & McMillan, 2013). This online information sharing about products, services, or brands has been classified as a type of consumer word-of-mouth communication called eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). eWOM impacts individuals’ attitudes and behaviors, including purchasing behaviors (Alhidari, Iyer, & Paswan, 2015; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chintagunta, Gopinath, & Venkataraman, 2010; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Fan & Miao, 2012; See-To & Ho, 2014; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). Additionally, features of new media – such as asynchronicity and greater reach – make eWOM less limited than traditional WOM (Yan et al., 2016).

There have been two major efforts in the eWOM literature thus far. One line of research has focused on understanding the eWOM message sender. The second major facet of eWOM research has focused on eWOM message receivers. However, while numerous types of eWOM exist in the digital space, this research has almost exclusively focused on a single type of eWOM
message – those messages coming from anonymous or unfamiliar sources in the form of online reviews.

The studies of eWOM focusing on the message sender have worked to understand why certain consumers are more likely to propagate eWOM messages. For example, these studies have examined how personality traits (Chang, Hsieh, & Lin, 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), opinion-seeking versus opinion-giving behaviors (López & Sicilia, 2014), attitudes (Preece, Nonnecke, & Andrews 2004), and technology usage (López & Sicilia, 2014) can be used to predict and describe who sends or may send eWOM messages. While these studies create a beneficial picture for marketers to understand eWOM message senders, less attention has been paid to eWOM from the point of view of the message receiver (Mazzarol, Sweeney, & Soutar, 2007) and eWOM message effectiveness.

The eWOM literature that examines message reception and effectiveness has focused on exploring eWOM messages from anonymous sources, i.e., information posted as online reviews. These studies have examined how audiences make sense of these messages, exploring message features such as valence (Qiu, Pang, & Lim, 2012; Lee, Rodgers, & Kim, 2009) and message extremity (Lee, Rodgers, & Kim, 2009). The research has also examined how user traits affect message reception and has explored such concepts as technology adoption (Wu & Lin, 2017) and the effects of involvement and prior knowledge (Doh & Hwang, 2009). While these studies help to strengthen our understanding of how audiences interpret and use eWOM messages, their findings may not be applicable to other types of eWOM messages. In particular, these studies disregard messages from senders who are known personally to the message receiver, like those messages that individuals may see when using social media. As Eisingerich and colleagues
(2015) note, on social media the message sender is known and accountable to the message receiver.

Our conceptualization and study of eWOM needs to reach beyond online reviews to better understand all the ways in which consumers send and receive eWOM messages (Grange & Benbasat, 2018). At the juncture of mass and interpersonal communication literatures, little research addresses user processing of eWOM information on social networking sites, particularly that which is exchanged among individuals who know one another.

Early studies of personal influence examined messages like these, that is, the influencer was personally known to the influenced. In their classic study of the two-step flow of media, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1995, 2006) studied how messages about household items, fashion, and movies moved among members of a community. These conversations happened in homes, social clubs, in stores, and numerous other community venues. Today, social media is another space in which these brand conversations can happen.

When it comes to information about brands, individuals consider information from other consumers to be important when making purchasing decisions. Online or offline, consumers find word-of-mouth recommendations to be the most trustworthy source of information (e.g., Nielsen, 2015a). In the digital space, online reviews, blogs, and other content from consumers are utilized by individuals when making purchase decisions (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). However, when using online reviews, individuals know very little about the person who has created the message (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). And while according to a 2013 Nielsen survey, trust in opinions posted in online reviews increased seven percentage points from 2007 (Nielsen, 2013), that percentage decreased in 2015 (Nielsen, 2015b).
Increasingly users are creating eWOM messages on social media sites (Yan et al., 2016). Individuals create eWOM messages to fulfill a variety of needs such as impression-management, emotion regulation, information acquisition, social bonding, and persuasion (Berger, 2014). While currently we have a strong understanding of eWOM, we can have a more robust picture by examining eWOM messages among friends on social media. To this end, the concept of opinion leader (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, 2006) — or in the case of consumer goods and services, “market mavens” (Feick & Price, 1987) — can help us understand which eWOM messages are most effective for consumers. An objective of this study is to understand whether individuals are more influenced by eWOM messages received from friends in their online social networks whom they perceive to market mavens than messages from those who they do not consider to be market mavens.

The second objective of this study is to understand how this market mavenism interacts with bandwagon cues. Research has shown that features of new media such as a high number of likes, shares, or comments, or a high rating can elicit a bandwagon heuristic, which in turn positively influences the effectiveness of eWOM messages (Sundar, 2008; Xu et al., 2012). This study intends to examine how bandwagon cues interrelate to market mavenism. Of particular interest are the “mismatched” interactions. That is, do the messages of market mavens suffer when bandwagon cues are low? Do messages from those not perceived as mavens benefit from posts with high bandwagon cues?

This study will add to the literature in two significant ways. It will add to our understanding of eWOM by considering how opinion leadership, as perceived by the message receiver, influences eWOM message effectiveness. Secondly, this study will examine how features unique to online media that can elicit a bandwagon heuristic impact the effectiveness of
those messages. The study will also investigate how bandwagon cues interact with perceptions of market mavenism.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Word of Mouth and Electronic Word of Mouth

Word-of-mouth (WOM) has been defined “oral, informal, person-to-person communication between a perceived noncommercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organization, or a service” (Arndt, 1967, p. 190). And when consumers receive WOM, they perceive those messages to be more credible when they come from a third party rather than the brand itself (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, 2006). Advertisers have long been focused on not only producing their own communications about their products, but to “provoke, stimulate, and produce Word-of-Mouth” (Dichter, 1966, p. 161).

Digital technologies and social networks bring a new set of challenges and opportunities to marketing communications. Social networks not only gave brands a new channel through which to communicate, but also allow consumers to open a dialogue with brands, share word of mouth messages more easily, and share more effortlessly to a larger swath of their social networks. Good, bad or neutral, this eWOM represents a considerable source of information for consumers.

As consumers spend more time online as message senders and receivers, eWOM has become an integral part of what consumers see and utilize online. As with offline WOM, eWOM does influence consumer behavior (Park & Kim, 2008; Word of Mouth Marketing Association, 2015; See-To & Ho, 2014) and makes a direct impact on sales (Huang et al., 2014; Liu, 2006; Word of Mouth Marketing Association, 2015; Wang et al., 2010). Because of this, businesses have focused on generating positive electronic WOM (eWOM) as a key marketing goal (Barreda, Bilgihan, & Kageyama, 2015, p. 17). Sometimes companies encourage WOM by
sending loyal customers samples to pass along to friends—or, on social media—hold contests that require users to post images of them using a product. Often brands try to encourage eWOM as a type of viral marketing, which can be defined as “any strategy that encourages individuals to propagate a message, thus, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message’s exposure and influence” (Bampo, Ewing, Mather, Stewart, & Wallace, 2008, p. 274).

eWOM can happen via e-mail, blogs, online communities, product review sites, chat rooms, and social networking sites such as Facebook or Instagram (Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006). Some research has explored eWOM on social networking sites (Eisingerich et al., 2015). However, this research has focused on why consumers may adopt eWOM messages on social networking sites (Yan et al., 2017) or why consumers chose to send eWOM messages via social networking sites (Eisingerich et al., 2015).

A large portion of the research on eWOM and WOM has been dedicated to understanding the personality traits and other circumstances that make one likely to generate WOM messages. As early at 1966, Dichter explored what makes someone give and listen to WOM messages. He identified four motivations that drove individuals to engage in WOM communications; these include: product involvement, self-involvement (self-enhancement), other involvement (concern for others), and message involvement. A desire to participate in WOM may also come from a fundamental human need to give helpful advice (Smith, Coyle, Lightfoot, & Scott, 2007). Research has also found that those who are highly involved in a brand (often referred to as those with high brand commitment) are more likely to engage in WOM (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Additionally, the need for social interaction, economic motivations, and seeking advice also influenced individuals’ likelihood to engage in WOM and eWOM (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 2005; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998). Specific to social
networking sites, Barreda, Bilgihan, and Kageyama, (2015) examined users’ perceptions of social networking sites and found that users’ trust in and satisfaction with social networking sites also influenced their decision to engage in eWOM.

While this research helps us understand one side of eWOM, i.e., the sender, the picture is not complete. After all, eWOM is of interest to brands, researchers, and consumers because of the influence the messages have on consumers, not just that the messages were created.

In the body of research aimed at understanding the effects of eWOM, considerable attention has been paid to eWOM in the context of online reviews. This research has examined such factors as review valence (Xu & Fu, 2014), text credibility and reviewer avatars (Nowak & McGloin, 2014), and product type (Park & Lee, 2009). However, the reader ostensibly does not know the source of the reviews personally. On social networking sites, eWOM communicators are “identifiable and accountable” (Eisingerich et al., 2015, p. 121). In the case of individuals posting eWOM messages on social networks, the receiver has a more robust idea about the message sender and will likely be influenced by known personality traits of the individual, such as opinion leadership.

**Opinion leadership**

In early studies of personal influence and consumer decisions, opinion leaders were identified as important and influential individuals (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, 2006). The concept of opinion leadership emerged from a study of voting decisions (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948) and has since been applied to areas such as general political discussion and behavior (e.g. Park, 2013), health behavior change (e.g. Valente & Pumpluang, 2007), climate change (Nisbet, & Kotcher, 2009), and into the realm of consumer behavior (e.g., Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, 2006; Li & Du, 2011; Van Eck, Jager, & Leeflang, 2011).
According to Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955, 2006), opinion leaders exercise “... leadership at its simplest: it is casually exercised, sometimes unwitting and unbeknown, within the smallest grouping of friends, family members, and neighbors. It is not leadership on the high level of Churchill, nor of local politico; nor even of a local social elite. It is at quite the opposite extreme; it is the almost invisible, certainly inconspicuous form of leadership at the person-to-person level of ordinary, intimate, informal, everyday contact” (p. 138).

In their study of fashion and personal influence, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955, 2006) note that influence can often be direct – individuals communicating directly about fashion – or indirect, an individual observing another person wearing a certain fashion. In fact, Katz and Lazarsfeld identify four types of influence: persuasion, imitation, manipulation and contagion. In persuasion, both parties – person A and person B – are aware that person A is attempting to influence person B. In imitation, A is unaware of their influence on B. In cases of manipulation, B is unaware of the influence A has on them. And both parties are unaware of the influence exerted in cases of contagion.

Social media can be an example of this direct and indirect influence. Individuals may explicitly and directly endorse a product or brand in hopes of influencing others on their decision to use or buy that product or brand, or, through simply posting and having the product or brand featured, individuals may be exerting a type of indirect influence.

Social media eWOM may share a good deal with offline WOM, as the social media space is a place of conversation. Just as the coffee shops, living rooms, and grocery stores are places where WOM and opinion leadership conversations took place, social media is a place where those we know share information and have conversations. Utilizing what is known about
influence in the offline world can help us to understand the effective messages in the online world as well.

In his early study of word of mouth, Dichter (1966) not only looked at what motivates individuals to send WOM messages, but also what influenced WOM receivers to listen and act. He suggested a type of triangle exists between the speaker, listener and product and that the listener takes into consideration the speaker-listener, speaker-product, and listener-product relationship. This work suggested that the listener needed to perceive the speaker as having a worthwhile opinion on the product and that the speaker is not engaged in WOM solely for his or her own interest (p. 152).

Dichter identified several categories such as like celebrities and professionals to be relevant and influential to listeners. Additionally, several of the categories Ditcher proposed from his study reflect qualities of opinion leadership. Connoisseurs were defined as those who had “close and authentic, but nonprofessional contact with the product. The connoisseur may know as much or more about the product and its background as the expert, but does not make his living in connection with it; he merely enjoys it and his know-how about it” (p. 154). Additionally, like opinion leaders, connoisseurs were perceived as paying more attention to information about their product category of interest, and in fact Ditcher goes on to describe this group as opinion leaders (p. 154).

More recent work suggests that opinion leaders are perceived as more credible and trustworthy than other sources of information about goods and services. WOM, in general, is perceived as more credible than other sources of product information (Silverman, 2001; Bickart & Schindler, 2001), such as advertising messages or conversations with salespeople. And
messages from opinion leaders are perceived as being more credible than other sources (Assael, Etgar, & Henry, 1983, as cited in Feick & Price, 1987).

As Kimmel (2010) notes "the credibility of formal marketing efforts often is in doubt ...[and] an opinion leader is likely to be chosen as an essential contact for verification or advice about a product or brand” (p. 237). The fact that opinion leaders gain no particular benefit from sharing with others about goods and services and are perceived as having a specialized knowledge beyond the average consumer make them credible sources of information to other consumers. As research on opinion leadership and personal influence in the realm of consumer behavior progressed, a particular type of opinion leader was identified as having considerable influence in the marketplace – market mavens.

**Market mavens.** Market mavens are a type of opinion leader who are marketplace influencers (Feick & Price, 1987; Goldsmith, Flynn, & Clark, 2012). While opinion leadership can be applied to consumer goods and services, the construct can also designate individuals who are opinion leaders in the realm of politics, art or other domains. Market mavens can be seen as a type of opinion leader, but also as a distinct category. Market mavens are like opinion leaders in that they exercise the casual and everyday influence of opinion leaders. However, while opinion leaders have particular expertise in a category, i.e., fashion or movies, market mavens exert expertise and influence in a more general sense of marketplace knowledge rather than a particular product category.

Feick and Price (1987) introduced market mavens as “individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information” (p.
Market mavens are distinct from opinion leaders, because their expertise is not specific, but is “based on a more general market expertise” (Feick & Price, 1987, p. 85).

Feick and Price (1987) hypothesized that market mavens’ interest in the market may be based on being high involvement consumers, who feel a type of obligation to know about the marketplace. Additionally, they may see their marketplace knowledge as something that will help future social interactions, much like that of news consumers who feel their knowledge of current affairs will be useful in social interactions (Atkin, 1972; Chaffee & McLeod, 1973).

Indeed, communication is an important part of market mavenism and that communication is related to a desire to share relevant and useful information to people within their social circles (Feick & Price, 1987). Additionally extroversion and a desire to receive positive reactions from others are also traits of market mavens (Clark, Goldsmith, & Goldsmith, 2008).

Consumers are able to identify themselves as market mavens, distinguish this quality in others, and use market mavens in their purchase decisions (Feick & Price, 1987). Mavens can distribute both positive and negative information (Edison, & Geissler, 2011). And while market mavens are only a small fraction of the market, they disproportionately influence others (Wiedmann, Walsh, & Mitchell, 2001). And market mavens’ influence has been linked to an increase in new customers and increased revenues for businesses (Walsh & Elsner, 2012). And as more communication technologies become available, mavens tend to use more channels to communicate than non-mavens (Barnes & Pressey, 2012).

Like much of the research on WOM, the research on market mavenism has a heavy focus on identifying mavens and developing a taxonomy of traits of market mavens. Fewer studies have interrogated the mechanisms by which mavens is effective. One way that mavens may exert
more influence than other types of consumers is that their messages about products and services are perceived to be more credible.

**Credibility**

Credibility has been a fundamental and long-studied concept in the study of communication, and is a central concept in persuasion. Hovland and Weiss’ (1951) early and seminal study on attitude change identified credibility as a key aspect of effective persuasion. Credibility has continued to demonstrate an important influence on message effectiveness, attitude change, and behavioral change and adoption.

Credibility is often discussed and studied in three distinct concepts – source credibility, message credibility, and medium (or media) credibility. Source credibility focuses on perception of the person (or organization) that generates the message. Message credibility examines message features that influence credibility perceptions, and media credibility focuses on perceptions and features of the message channel, i.e. website, newspaper, etc (see Self, 2014).

With new communication technologies—such as social networking sites—information is more plentiful, easier to access, and more diverse, making credibility assessments more imperative (Metzger et al., 2003). In online communications in particular, credibility is an important part of the early stage of message processing and influences how information is subsequently perceived (Wathen & Burkell, 2002).

While source credibility has been studied widely, and with some conflicting results, source credibility is generally agreed upon to be a multidimensional concept (see Metzger et al., 2003). Two principal dimensions that have been consistently identified are trustworthiness and expertise. Market mavens demonstrate more expertise in the marketplace than the general population. They pay close attention to marketplace information – from new products to places
to shop and prices. Additionally, market mavens are trusted – their advice and opinions are sought out. Thus market mavens represent individuals with marketplace credibility.

In theories of persuasion such as the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and heuristic-systematic model of information processing (HSM) (Chaiken, 1980) credibility plays an important role in message evaluation and subsequent effects. Specifically, the ELM posits that there are two routes to persuasion, the central and the peripheral. The peripheral route is activated when individuals have low motivation and low ability to process a message. The central route is used when motivation and ability are high. In the peripheral route, credibility can influence message perception and adoption. This credibility serves as shorthand and messages are more readily accepted from credible sources and can affect both attitudes and behaviors.

Similarly, in the HSM, heuristics can serve to influence credibility perceptions. According to the HSM, heuristics must be able to be available, accessible and applicable. In the case of eWOM messages on social media, the market mavenship can serve as an available and accessible credibility heuristic, and it is applicable when pertaining to messages about products and services, that is, the marketplace. These heuristics are learned by prior experience and based on prior knowledge (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989), such as a friend’s mavenism is based on the experience and knowledge one has of the friend. While many heuristics are available, two that are notable are the “expert opinions are valid” and “I agree with people I like.” (Bohner, Moskowitz, & Chaiken, 1995). In the case of market mavens, their marketplace expertise and their friendship with the message recipient can both serve as heuristics that would lead to a positive attitude toward the message as well as credibility assessment.
Studies of opinion leadership and market mavenism have linked these individuals to credibility perceptions. Several studies have found that the perceived expertise, a sub-construct of credibility, of opinion leaders influence message effectiveness (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger, & Yale., 1998; Fitzgerald Bone, 1995; Wangenheim & Bayón; 2004). Specifically the expertise of the source of WOM influence purchase decisions (Bansal & Voyer, 2000) and evaluations of the product (Fitzgerald Bone, 1995; Wangenheim & Bayón; 2004). In the case of market mavens, their expertise lies in their specialized knowledge of the marketplace. While it is not tied to one particular product category (as we might expect of an opinion leader), market mavens are perceived to have a greater general knowledge of the marketplace than other consumers. This type of expertise is valued among consumers in discerning the credibility of eWOM messages (see Moran & Muzellec, 2017). While this study will be the first to interrogate credibility and mavenism in and cases of eWOM, offline studies of market mavenism found that messages from mavens have enhanced credibility (Gelb & Johnson, 1995; Williams & Slama, 1995). And studies of credibility in other non-marketplace contexts have found that message credibility is enhanced by source credibility (Mak & Lyytinen, 1997; Slater & Rouner, 1996; Wathen & Burkell, 2002).

When audiences have little information about the source, they rely on message characteristics to determine credibility (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Eastin, 2001; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), and this approach to credibility represents the majority of work on eWOM that focuses on online reviews, since the messages source is not known to the message receiver. However, in the case of market mavens on social media, audiences can rely on their knowledge of the message sender and their market mavenship to make a credibility assessment. In the case of market mavens, they may not be more credible than others on matters at large, but when it comes to
matters of the marketplace, their messages are more credible. Thus, their mavenism represents their expertise and enhances their message credibility when it comes to communicating about the marketplace.

Based on the theoretical dynamics and research underpinning credibility and market mavenism, it’s likely that market mavenism would positively influence message credibility perceptions. More formally:

H1: Market mavenism will positively influence message credibility.

H2: Market mavenism will positively influence the attitude toward the message.

Credibility assessments are an important factor in how and why eWOM messages are effective and attitudes toward eWOM in general (see Moran & Muzellec, 2017). More generally when applied to credibility and product messages, MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) found that the perceived credibility of product messages positively affected consumer attitudes about the messages. This type of message credibility represents how believable and truthful the message about the particular product is perceived to be. This type of message credibility has been found to positively influence attitudes toward online advertising as well (Brackett & Carr 2001; Tsang Ho, & Liang, 2004). Thus, in relation to an eWOM post on social media, it is expected that the message credibility would enhance positive attitudes towards the post. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is proposed:

H3: Perceived message credibility will positively influence the attitude toward the post.

Since messages from market mavens have enhanced credibility (Gelb & Johnson, 1995; Williams & Slama, 1995), it is anticipated that mavenism’s influence on attitude works by way of this enhanced credibility. Credibility thus acts as a mediator between mavenism and the attitude toward the post, and consequently, proposing Hypothesis 4:
H4: Perceived message credibility will mediate the relationship between market mavenism and the attitude toward the post.

Research on advertising messages has found that the perceptions of a marketing message influence subsequent effects of the message. Attitude toward a marketing message can affect message outcomes, such as attitude toward the product and/or brand as well as purchase intentions (Lutz, MacKenzie, & Belch, 1983; Mitchell and Olson 1981; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). These processes are based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), which predicts that behaviors are influenced by attitudes and intentions. Attitudes influence intentions, which in turn influence behaviors. Application of the TRA has demonstrated eWOM can influence purchase intention (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Prendergast, Ko, & Yuen, 2010; Reichelt, Sievert, & Jacob, 2014).

On social media brands and individuals post messages using the same platforms and affordances. Their messages are seen alongside one another in social media feeds. Individuals can form opinions about a friend’s post just as they can form opinions about a brand’s post that is an advertising message. And brand messages from friends can influence attitudes about messages and products in similar ways that opinions about advertising messages can influence product and brand attitudes and purchase intentions.

Based on the dynamics outlined above, it is expected to see positive interrelationships between attitude toward the post, attitude toward the product and attitude toward the brand. The latter two should, in turn, positively influence product purchase intention. More formally Hypotheses 5 through 8 posit that:

H5: Attitude toward the post will positively influence attitude toward the product.

H6: Attitude toward the post will positively influence attitude toward the brand.
H7: Attitude toward the product will positively influence purchase intention.

H8: Attitude toward the brand will positively influence purchase intention.

**Bandwagon cues in eWOM**

Because eWOM happens in an online environment, there are certain affordances, or features, available to these communications that are not presented in traditional, offline WOM communications. As Sundar (2008) articulates in the MAIN model of message credibility, affordances of new media influence message credibility by providing cues that activate heuristics. One such heuristic is the bandwagon heuristic. One type of affordance unique to online platforms is user reactions such as likes and comments. This information can often act as a cue to trigger a bandwagon heuristic. The bandwagon heuristic refers to the psychological phenomenon by which an individual is cued that an idea, product, story, etc. is liked or rated highly by others, that they will also “jump on the bandwagon” of liking that product, post, story, etc. The bandwagon effect offers a type of endorsement or, as Chaiken (1987) describes it, a “consensus’ heuristic in that ‘as more people believe a message is correct then it is probably valid” (p. 24).

The bandwagon effect has been an important part of marketing and WOM influence long before the days of the internet. Dichter (1966) noted a type of bandwagon effect was an important motivator for those sending WOM messages as well. The feeling that their recommendation elicited many others to try or use the product gave them greater confidence and satisfaction. And Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955, 2006) posited that opinion leaders themselves could elicit in a type of bandwagon effect because individuals perceive that many people are listening to and taking the advice of these opinion leaders. And even outside of the context WOM or
eWOM marketers try to elicit a bandwagon effect in their advertising communications (White, 1959; Rikkers, 2002).

In relation to eWOM, the channel and affordances of that channel have been found to influence the message. Berger and Iyengar (2013) examined how face-to-face versus social media WOM differed in terms of how and what people talk about. They found that on social networking sites individual tend to talk about more interesting products due to asynchrony, which allows them more time to construct a message, and self-enhancement concerns. Berger and Iyengar’s investigation demonstrates that the communication channel does impact the messages eWOM senders create. This study aims to understand how a particular feature of new media, i.e. bandwagon cues, can affect how messages are processed by eWOM message receivers.

Bandwagon cues can take on a number of forms online. One common cue is ratings. In studies of eWOM in the form of online reviews, positive ratings influence both the perceptions of the review itself and of the product (Sundar, Oeldorf-Hirsch, & Xu, 2008; Xu et al., 2012). Additionally, the simple number of views (a typical metric shared on video-sharing sites) has been found to positively predict subsequent views of a video. Videos with more views are viewed more often as users would rather view a video that is watched more often (Fu, 2012). In online shopping environments bandwagon cues such as ratings and sales rank influenced a bandwagon effect for both perceived popularity and consumer purchase intention of the product (Sundar, Oeldorf-Hirsch, & Xu, 2008). Wu and Lin (2017) also found that review ratings positively influenced the perceived trustworthiness of the review, which in turn influenced review usefulness, product attitude and purchase intention. As Wu and Lin (2017) point out the research on bandwagon cues and eWOM indicate that bandwagon cues impact users’ perception
of both the message and product as well as consumer behavior, such as purchase intention. Based on the literature and research outlined above, it is expected that posts with high bandwagon cues will be perceived as more credible, elicit a more positive attitude toward the post, and ultimately elicit a more positive attitude toward the product. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H9: Posts with high bandwagon cues will be perceived as more credible than those with low bandwagon cues.

H10: Posts with high bandwagon cues will elicit a more positive attitude toward the post than those with low bandwagon cues.

H11: Posts with high bandwagon cues will elicit a more positive attitude toward the product than those with low bandwagon cues.

Research examining eWOM in the form of online reviews pay particular interest into what cues users can rely on to form credibility assessments (Wu & Lin, 2017; Tsang & Prendergast, 2009; Lee, Park, & Han, 2011; Lee & Youn, 2009), particularly because in online review situations the reviewer is most likely unknown to the review reader. In the case of eWOM posted on social networking sites, the message receiver has some knowledge of the message sender (Eisingerich et al., 2015) and can thus rely on their knowledge of that person to make a credibility assessment. Because theory and empirical research has found both opinion leadership/market mavenism and bandwagon cues to positively influence credibility, an additive effect of posts from high market mavens with high bandwagon cues can be expected and a decreased effect is anticipated for messages from low market mavens with low bandwagon cues. Thus the final hypotheses are proposed:

H12: High bandwagon cues will interact with high market mavenism, such that posts from high market mavens with high bandwagon cues will be perceived as more credible
than those from high market mavens with low bandwagon cues; from low market mavens with low bandwagon cues; and from low market mavens with high bandwagon cues.

H13: Low bandwagon cues will interact with low market mavenism such that posts from low market mavens with low bandwagon cues will be perceived as less credible than those from high market mavens with high bandwagon cues; from high market mavens with low bandwagon cues; and from low market mavens with high bandwagon cues.

**Bandwagon cue “mismatch.”**

However, theoretical and empirical research has not proposed a model for examining how a “mismatch” between the message sender and bandwagon cues might be received. As Sundar, Xu, and Oeldorf-Hirsch (2013) note, there are conflicting viewpoints as to which type of cue may be more influential when cues conflict (e.g. Gladwell, 2000; Watts, 2004). Their particular study of how bandwagon cues interact with cues of authority found that the bandwagon cue had a direct effect on persuasive outcomes while the authority cue did not. However, since the study of conflicting cues and eWOM is still developing, the following research question is proposed:

**RQ1:** How do “mismatched” market mavenism and bandwagon cues, i.e. high market mavenism and low bandwagon cues and low market mavenism and high bandwagon cues, affect credibility?
Theoretical model of hypotheses and research question

- bandwagon cue
  - H12
  - H13
  - RQ1
- market mavenism
  - H1
  - H4
- perceived message credibility
  - H10
  - H11
- attitude toward the post
  - H3
  - H5
- attitude toward the product
  - H6
  - H7
- attitude toward the brand
  - H8
- purchase intention
  - H7
  - H8

H2
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Social networking site selection and pretest

Instagram was chosen as the platform for this study because it is a popular and fast-growing social network (Etherington, 2017). It is also a platform on which there are numerous of brand-related messages both created by brands and by individuals. Brand messages get the most engagement on Instagram (Elliot, 2015). And more than half of Instagram users say they have found a new product via the platform (Instagram, 2017). Instagram users are also more likely to use the platform to make purchases (Buckle, 2017).

A pre-test was conducted to collect three pieces of information for the study stimuli. First, a mid-level involvement product category needed to be found for the population, as well as a product category that represented a product plausibly seen on the social networking site. This was to ensure that the post could feature a product that individuals had some interest in and was reasonable that a friend would post about. Thirdly, a “high” and “low” number of likes and comments needed to be determined for the population.

Participants (N = 483) were recruited from a 100-level introduction to communication course at a large, public Northeastern university. Participants who did not have Instagram accounts were excluded from analysis; those who completed the survey in less than 2 minutes; and those who incorrectly answered the screening question subsequently described were excluded from analysis. A total of 213 participants were included for analysis.

When answering the questions, participants were instructed to answer based on solely considering their friends’ accounts. At the completion of the study participants were asked one screening question: When you answered questions about likes and comments, which types of
accounts were your answers about? The choices were all the accounts I follow; just my friends’ accounts; celebrities and Instagram-famous people; only accounts run by real people, like my friends or Instagram-famous people.

The average age of participants in the pre-test was 19.3, with ages ranging from 17 to 24. In response to an open-ended question about gender identity, 51.6% identified as female, 48.4% identified as male. Participants also indicated their ethnicity in an open-ended question format. The majority of the sample (63.4%) identified as white/Caucasian; 16.4% as Asian or Asian-American; 8.5% as Latinx; 5.6 as black/African American; 4.7% as mixed race, and 1.4% indicated their ethnicity as “other.”

**Pre-test measures**

**Product involvement.** Product involvement for nine product categories was assessed to choose what type of product would be featured in the study. On a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) participants indicated how much they agreed with the following statements: “I am interested in [product category]; I think [product category] is fun; I think [product category] is fascinating; and I think [product category] is important.” The nine product categories were cellphones, computers and tablets, fashion/latest trends, athletic/active wear, audio technology (e.g. headphones, speakers), exercise/fitness products, streetwear, wearable technology (e.g. Fitbit, Apple watch), and beauty products. The means, standard deviations and reliability scores can be found in Table 1.
Table 1

*Product Category Involvement Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach’s alpha*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product type</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cell phones</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computers &amp; tablets</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fashion/latest trends</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>athletic &amp; active wear</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audio (e.g. headphones, speakers)</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exercise &amp; fitness products/brands</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>streetwear</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wearables (e.g. fit bit; Apple Watch)</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beauty products/brands</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses on a 1-7 Likert Scale 1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree

**Frequency of product posts.** Participants also indicated how often they see their friends posting about the nine product categories on a five-point Likert scale. The means of athletic/active wear and streetwear were the median responses out of the nine categories (M = 2.59). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 2.
Table 2

*Frequency of Product Posts Means and Standard Deviations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product type</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fashion/latest trends</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beauty products/brands</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>1.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exercise &amp; fitness products/brands</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>athletic &amp; active wear</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>streetwear</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cell phones</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wearables (e.g. fit bit; Apple Watch)</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computers &amp; tablets</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audio (e.g. headphones, speakers)</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>.902</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Responses on a 1-5 Likert Scale 1 = Never, 5 = Very frequently*

Based on the responses regarding product involvement and posting frequency, streetwear was selected as a category that would be plausible for the population to see a post about as well as one that represented a mid-level of product involvement.

**High and low bandwagon cues.** Participants were asked in an open-ended question to indicate what they considered to be “a lot” of likes and comments, respectively, on a friend’s Instagram post, as well as what they considered to be “very few.” The mean for “a lot” of likes was 313 and “a lot” of comments was 29. The mean for “very few” likes was 43 and one for “very few” comments. To ensure a greater distinction between the high and low number of likes,
the main study used 313 likes in the high bandwagon cue condition and 13 likes in the low bandwagon cue condition.

**Main Study**

**Participants.** Participants were recruited from an introductory communication course at a large, public Northeastern university. Eligibility requirements included being 18 years of age. Each participant received course credit for their participation. Four hundred thirty one individuals participated in the study. After data cleaning and manipulation checks, 272 participants’ data were used for analysis.

In terms of data cleaning, participants who indicated they did not have Instagram accounts (n = 41) were excluded from analysis. Additionally, data were not used from participants who completed less than half the survey (n = 32). An additional eight participants were excluded because they listed the same friend in the friend-listing task (described subsequently), which served as the experimental manipulation; answered every question with the same answer (e.g. always selecting the mid-point for every question); or completed the survey in less than 5 minutes. These procedures left data from 350 participants.

**Procedural checks.** For this study the experimental manipulation included seeing a post from a friend considered by the participant to high or low on a list of market maven traits. Participants were asked to only include friends on their list and not brands, celebrities or Instagram influencers. A screening question was conducted at the end of the study in which participants had to correctly identify the friend whose post they saw. Additionally participants were asked what type of accounts they included during the listing task. Of the 350 participants’ data that remained after initial cleaning, 272 correctly identified the friend whose post they saw.
and indicated that they just listed friends during the listing task. The data from these 272 were included in the final analyses.

**Participant demographics.** The mean age of participants was 19.11 (SD = 1.72), and they ranged in age from 18 to 41. Participants were asked in an open-ended question to indicate their gender and 62.5% identified as female. No participants declined to respond or indicated a gender identity other than male or female. An open-ended item was also used for ethnicity, to which 65.8% identified as white, 14.7% as Asian or Asian-American, 8.8% as Hispanic or Latinx, 3.3% as black or African American, 1.1% as mixed race, .7% as other, and 5.5% declined to respond.

Participants were also asked to indicate their annual family income. Nearly a quarter (23.9%) responded their family income was greater than $150,000, 19.1% indicated between $100,000 and $149,999, and 14.3% indicated less than $10,000. The remaining participants indicated their family incomes were between $10,000 and $99,999.

Several measures were used to record the participants’ usage of Instagram on single items. Participants indicated a mean of 550 accounts followed (SD = 348.56), and that about half (45.78%) of the accounts they follow are their actual friends. The mean number of followers participants had was 619.02 (SD = 458.01). A majority (88.2%) said they posted less than once a week and 9.6% responded that they posted one to three times per week.

**Procedure**

The experiment was administered using the Qualtrics online platform. After reading the consent form and opting to continue, individuals indicated if they had an Instagram account. Next they answered questions regarding product category involvement for streetwear, and then demographic information was collected.
The subsequent screen instructed participants to open their Instagram account either on their phone or computer and they were asked questions about the number of accounts they follow and are followed by. The next screen instructed participants to think only about their friends who they follow on Instagram and not about celebrities, brands, influencers, businesses, etc. for the next set of questions. Participants were then asked to read a list of six characteristics of market mavens (Feick & Price, 1987) and to list ten friends who they thought the traits “describe well or very well.” On the next screen they were shown the same list of six traits and asked to list ten friends who they thought the traits “DO NOT describe well or at all.” These two lists served as the experimental conditions for exposing participants to messages from high or low market mavens (See Appendix A for complete list of measures).

Next participants answered questions about their Instagram usage. They responded to questions about amount of time spent on the site, frequency of posting, as well as measures of Instagram usage intensity.

Participants were told that on the next screen they would see an Instagram post and answer questions about it. The subsequent screen represented the experimental manipulation. After participants hit the button to proceed they saw a mock Instagram post and a sentence saying, “Imagine you are scrolling through Instagram and you see the following post, which has been posted by [piped text].” The piped text brought in a name either from their high market maven list of friends or their low market maven friends list. This represented a high/low market mavenism manipulation.

All the participants saw a post with the same image and caption; however, some participants saw a post with 313 likes and 29 comments, which represent the high bandwagon cue condition, or the post had 13 likes and one comment, to represent the low bandwagon cue
condition. (See Appendix B for images of the stimuli). Thus, the study employed a two (high/low market mavenism) x two (high/low bandwagon cue) design. Individuals were randomly assigned to conditions.

After looking at the post and clicking to continue, participants were asked about their attitude toward the post, credibility perceptions of the post, attitudes about the product and brand featured in the post as well as purchase intentions. They were also asked to assess their friend’s market mavenism and their friend’s credibility.

Participants also answered questions to indicate the closeness of their friendship with the person whose post they saw and the homophily they feel between themselves and the friend. Participants were also asked two open-ended questions to share any thoughts they had about the post and to describe any features or content they remembered about the post.

Finally, participants were asked two screening questions. The first screening question asked participants to list the name of the friend whose post they saw. The second screening question asked participants what type of Instagram accounts they listed at the beginning of the study. They were instructed to only list accounts from friends and not of brands, celebrities, or Instagram influencers. If individuals indicated that they listed types of accounts other than friends, their data were excluded from the study. If they incorrectly recalled the name of the friend whose post they were to imagine they saw, their data were also excluded from analysis.

**Measures**

The following measures represent the independent and dependent variables of interest as well as control variables. Unless otherwise noted, all scales were represented with a normal distribution.
Friend market mavenism. Using Feick and Price’s (1987) market mavenism scale, participants indicated how well six statements described their friend on a 7-point Likert scale (1 – does not describe me, 7 – describes me extremely well). The mean score was 2.26 (SD = 1.18) and it was found to be reliable (α = .96).

Perceived message credibility. MacKenzie and Lutz’ (1989) advertising credibility scale was used to assess the credibility of the post. On a 7-point semantic differential participants will respond to how "believable/unbelievable," "convincing/unconvincing," and "biased/unbiased" they thought the post was. The scale was reliable with a Cronbach’s alpha of .78. The mean was 3.94 (SD = 1.34).

Attitude toward the post. Participants’ attitude toward the post was measured across seven pairs of semantic differentials from Appiah (2001). The pairs included: bad/good; dislike/like; boring/interesting; negative/positive; useless/useful; worthless/valuable; poor/outstanding; not appealing/appealing; not attractive/attractive; and not likeable/likeable. The scale was found to be reliable with a Cronbach’s alpha of .95 and a mean of 3.84 (SD = 1.34).

Attitude toward the product. Participants’ product attitudes were assessed on a 7-point semantic differential scale across the following word pairs from Burnkrant and Unnava (1995): good/bad; harmful/beneficial, undesirable/desirable, unpleasant/pleasant, superior/inferior, and awful/nice. The measure had a mean of 3.89 (SD = 1.25) and the Cronbach’s alpha was .94.

Attitude toward the brand. Attitude toward the brand was measured using Mitchell and Olson’s (1981) four-item semantic differential scale for brand attitude: good/bad, dislike very much/like very much, pleasant/unpleasant, poor quality/high quality. The scale was found to be reliable (α = .95) with a mean of 3.67 (SD = 1.32).
**Purchase intentions.** An adaptation of Lii and Lee’s (2012) and Jung and Seock’s (2016) purchase intention scale was used. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale to the following items: “It is likely that I will buy from this brand,” “I would consider buying this brand next time when I need [product category] items,” and “I will try to buy [product category] items from this company.” The scale had a reliability score of .94 and a mean of 2.55 (SD = 1.34).

**Control measures.** Based on prior research and theory this study employed several control measures in the statistical analyses. The four control measures were product category involvement; Instagram use intensity; friendship strength; and homophily. The study also used a measure of general source credibility to ensure general source credibility was homogenous across the experimental conditions, as well as a measure of brand familiarity.

**Product category involvement.** Product category involvement was measured using an adaption of Higie and Feick’s (1989) scale used by Wolny and Mueller (2013) on a 7-point scale: I am interested in streetwear; I think streetwear is fun; I think streetwear is fascinating; I think streetwear is important. The mean was 4.15 (SD = 1.67, $\alpha = .96$)

**Instagram Intensity.** This measure was utilized as a control, as social media usage has been linked to how individuals respond to digital advertising (Chu, 2011). A modified version of Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe’s (2007) Facebook Intensity measure was created to represent Instagram usage intensity. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale how much they agreed (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) with six statements about Instagram. Items included “I feel out of touch when I haven’t checked Instagram for a while,” and “Instagram is part of my everyday activity.” The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .89$) with a mean of 4.46 (SD = 1.37).

**Friendship strength.** Friendship strength was assessed on a scale adapted from Shi, Shi, Chan, and Wang (2009). This was used as a control measure, as individual’s opinions are more
influenced by those to whom they are more strongly attached (Back, 1952, as cited in Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, 2006) and have greater social attraction (McCroskey, Hamilton, & Weiner, 1974). The scaled used items such as “I feel distant from this person” (reverse coded), “I would defend this person if others criticize him/her,” “I care about his/her long-term success,” and “We have a very close relationship,” to which participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strong disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The scale was found to be reliable ($\alpha = 0.91$, $M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.28$).

**Homophily.** Homophily was also used as a control measure because it influences credibility (McCroskey, Hamilton, & Weiner, 1974) and has been found to influence purchase intention (Simpson, Snuggs, Christiansen, & Simples, 2000). Homophily was assessed using the scale from McCroskey, McCroskey, and Richmond (2006). Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) to items such as “This person does not think like me” (reverse coded), “This person is similar to me,” “This person does not share my values” (reverse coded), “This person behaves like me,” and “This person is unlike me” (reverse coded). The scale had a mean score of 4.31 ($SD = 1.14$) and was reliable ($\alpha = .95$).

**Brand familiarity.** Participants’ familiarity with the brand was assessed on a single item on a 7-point Likert scale to use as a control in the statistical analyses. The mean was 1.18 ($SD = .58$), due to the skew and kurtosis the measure was not used in analyses.

**General source credibility.** Participants also indicated their general credibility perceptions of the friend whose post they saw. This served as a check to ensure that across the experimental conditions, the general credibility of the message sender was not different. McCroskey and Teven’s (1999) credibility scale was used. The scale consists of three sub-con structs: trustworthiness ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.34$, $\alpha = .96$), expertise ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.27$, $\alpha =$
.93), and goodwill (M = 4.90, SD = 1.26, α = .83). The measure utilizes semantic word pairs to which participants indicate which word better describes their friend, e.g. unintelligent/intelligent (expertise scale), insensitive/sensitive (goodwill scale), dishonest/honest (trustworthiness scale). There were seven points on the scale, 1 indicating the less positive word was a stronger representation of the person and 7 indicating the more positive word in the pair was a stronger representation of the person. The scale was also found to be reliable when the three constructs were combined (α = .88, M = 5.04, SD = 1.16).

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the six independent and dependent variables of interest to determine convergent and discriminant validity. The six variables assessed in the model were friend’s market mavenism, post credibility, attitude toward the post, attitude toward the product, brand attitude, and purchase intention. The correlations between measures can be found in Appendix C.

The model showed acceptable model fit (χ² (438) = 864.00, p < .001; CFI = .956, RMSEA = .060), with each item loading well on the appropriate factor. On friend’s market mavenship the six items factors loaded on the factor with standardized regression weights between .89 and .95. For post attitude the 10 items loaded with standardized regression weights between .71 and .83. For post credibility, one item had a moderate loading of .57, and the other two items loaded at .79 and .87. The six items for product attitude loaded between .65 and .93 standardized regression weights, and the four items for brand attitude loaded with standardized regression weights between .85 and .95. And the three items for purchase intention loaded between .90 and .96.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Manipulation check

Before hypothesis testing, the data were examined to ensure that the manipulation of high and low market mavenism functioned between the high and low conditions. The four experimental conditions were collapsed into two groups – high and low friend market mavenism. A t-test revealed that those in the high condition (e.g. those that saw a post from a friend they listed as being described well by the market maven traits) had a significantly higher perception of market mavenism of their friend \((M = 4.48, SD = 1.43)\) than those who saw a post from a friend they listed as not described well by market maven traits \((M = 3.06, SD = 1.61)\), \(t(270) = -7.704, \ p < .001\).

Since credibility of the source (i.e., the friend who authored the post) can influence many of the outcomes tested in the hypotheses, it was needed to ensure that the general source credibility perceptions of the friends did not vary between the high and low market maven groups. It was expected that credibility perceptions would differ when applied to a message from the friend about a product, not one’s general credibility perceptions of the friend. A t-test revealed insignificant differences in general source credibility between the high market mavens \((M = 5.16)\) and the low market mavens \((M = 4.91)\), \(t(270) = -1.797\ p = .073\, \text{n.s.}\).

Hypotheses testing

While this study is rooted in theoretical and empirical findings, it is examining novel relationships among mavenism, credibility, attitudes, and intentions within a social media context. This is one of the few studies to experimentally manipulate and test market mavenism. Additionally, the study is also novel in understanding how a post from a friend—and not a specific advertisement—can influence attitudes towards products, brands, and purchase intentions.
To that end, to understand the individual relationships among the variables, individual testing of the pathways – rather than a global test of the theoretical model – will be undertaken to explore the hypotheses.

To examine Hypothesis 1 multiple regression was used. The control variables of age, gender, ethnicity, income, product category involvement, friend closeness, friend homophily, and Instagram intensity were used and put in the first block. In block two, the friend’s market mavenism was added, and the credibility of the post was the dependent variable. The regression model was significant $F(8, 247) = 4.50, p < .001$, Adjusted $R^2 = .14$, $p < .001$, with both income ($\beta = -.16, p < .01$) and friend’s market mavenism ($\beta = .25 p < .001$) being significant predictors of post credibility. Thus, the data showed support for Hypothesis 1.

Multiple regression with the same control variables was used to examine Hypothesis 2, which predicted that perceptions of the friend’s market mavenism was positively related to the attitude toward the post. This model was significant $F(8, 247) = 3.90, p = .001$, Adjusted $R^2 = .09$. And friend’s market mavenism was significantly related to the attitude toward the post ($\beta = .21, p = .001$), showing support for Hypothesis 2.

The same procedure was used to analyze Hypothesis 3, with attitude toward the post as the dependent variable and credibility of the post as the independent variable added in block two. This model was also significant $F(8, 247) = 13.74, p < .001$, Adjusted $R^2 = .31$, with post credibility emerging as a significant predictor ($\beta = .52, p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 was a test of mediation and predicted that post credibility mediates the relationship between market mavenism perception and the attitude toward the post. To examine this hypothesis, Process Model 4 of The Hayes Process Macro v3 for SPSS (Hayes, 2017) was
used with a 95% confidence interval and a 5,000 bootstrap sample. In the model, the total effect of friend’s market mavenism was positively related to post attitudes, $F(1, 270) = 10.81, p < .01, R^2 = .04, b = .16, t(270) = 3.29, p < .01$. And, the mediator – post credibility – significantly predicts post attitudes, $F(2, 269) = 66.17, p < .001, R^2 = .33, b = .55, t(269) = 10.81, p < .001$. Additionally, friend’s market mavenism positively predicts the mediator, post credibility, $F(1, 270) = 13.24, p = .003, R^2 = .05, b = .17, t(270) = 3.64, p = .003$. However, the direct effect of friend’s market mavenism on post attitude is not significant, $F(2, 269) = 66.17, p < .001, R^2 = .33, b = .06, t(269) = 1.50, p = .14, ns, (c’ = .06; LLCI = -.02, UCLI = .15)$, while friend’s market mavenism does have an indirect effect on post attitude, $(ab = .10; LLCI = .04, UCLI = .15)$. Thus, the relationship between friend’s market mavenism and post attitude was fully mediated by post credibility and the data supported Hypothesis 4.

Multiple regression was used to analyze Hypothesis 5 with the same control variables and with attitude toward the post as the independent variable and product attitude as the dependent variable. The regression model was significant $F(8, 247) = 30.50, p < .001$, Adjusted $R^2 = .51$. Post attitude was a significant predictor of attitude toward the product ($\beta = .74, p < .001$). This indicated support for Hypothesis 5.

The examination of Hypothesis 6 utilized the same multiple regression procedure. Attitude toward the post was the independent variable and brand attitude was the dependent variable. The model was significant $F(9, 247) = 19.59, p < .001$, Adjusted $R^2 = .40$. Product involvement was negatively related to brand attitude ($\beta = -.12, p = .03$) in the final model, and post attitude was positively related to of brand attitude ($\beta = .65, p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 6 was also supported.
The next hypothesis predicted that product attitude would positively predict purchase intention. The multiple regression model was significant $F(9, 247) = 24.00$, $p < .001$, Adjusted $R^2 = .47$. Three control variables as well as the independent variable of interest were significantly related to the dependent variable in the final model. Product attitude – the hypothesized dependent variable – positively predicted purchase intention ($\beta = .64$, $p < .001$) as did friend homophily ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) and Instagram intensity ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$). Closeness of friendship was negatively related to purchase intention ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < .01$). Thus, the data supported hypothesis 7.

Hypothesis 8 was analyzed with multiple regression and the same control variables with attitude toward the brand as the independent variable and purchase intention as the dependent variable. The regression model was significant $F(9, 247) = 26.01$, $p < .001$, Adjusted $R^2 = .47$. Brand attitude was a significant predictor of purchase intention ($\beta = .66$, $p < .001$), indicating support for hypothesis 5. Additionally, homophily ($\beta = .16$, $p = .01$) and Instagram intensity ($\beta = .13$, $p = .01$) were also positively related to purchase intention and friendship closeness was negatively related ($\beta = -0.14$, $p = .02$).

Hypotheses 9 predicted that posts with higher bandwagon cues would be perceived as more credible. To assess this hypothesis, the data were split into two groups – those that saw a high bandwagon post and those that saw a low bandwagon cue post – and a t-test was conducted. There was no significant difference ($t(270) = -.53$, $p = .59$, n.s.) between those that saw a high bandwagon cue post ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.31$) and those that saw a low bandwagon cue post ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.37$). Thus, Hypothesis 9 was not supported.

To further explore Hypothesis 9, only the data of those who correctly remembered the number of “likes” were included in the analysis. Of the 272 participants, 134 correctly indicated
the number of likes the post had. Using data from these participants, there was also no significant difference ($t(134) = -.61 \ p = .54, \text{n.s.}$) between those that saw a high bandwagon cue post ($M = 3.91, \ SD = 1.28$) and those that saw a low bandwagon cue post ($M = 3.78, \ SD = 1.37$).

The next hypothesis predicted that higher bandwagon cues would also be related to more positive attitudes towards the post. The data did not show support of Hypothesis 10 ($t(270) = .09, \ p = .93, \text{n.s.}$), as there was no difference in post attitude between those who saw a high bandwagon post ($M = 3.84, \ SD = 1.43$) and those who saw a low bandwagon post ($M = 3.83, \ SD = 1.24$). Again, this was also true when the data from only those participants who correctly remembered how many likes the post had were analyzed ($t(134) = -.72 \ p = .47, \text{n.s.}$). Those who saw a post with the high number of likes ($M = 3.94, \ SD = 1.16$) did not significantly differ in their attitudes toward the post from those that saw a post with a low number of likes ($M = 3.78, \ SD = 1.51$).

Hypothesis 11 posited that the bandwagon cue would have a positive effect on product attitude. The data demonstrated that there was no difference ($t(270) = .94, \ p = .35, \text{n.s.}$) in product attitude between those in the high bandwagon cue condition ($M = 3.97, \ SD = 1.30$) and the low bandwagon cue condition ($M = 3.82, \ SD = 1.21$). And again, this was consistent when examining that data of just those participants who correctly remembered the number of “likes” ($t(134) = .37 \ p = .71, \text{n.s.}$). Those in the high bandwagon cue condition had a mean product attitude score of 3.99 ($SD = 1.08$), and those in the low bandwagon cue condition had a mean of 3.91 ($SD = 1.30$). Thus, Hypothesis 11 was not supported.

Hypotheses 12 and 13, as well as Research Question 1 explored the moderation of bandwagon cue exposure on the relationship between market mavenism perceptions and message credibility. Hayes Process Model 1 (Hayes, 2017) with a 95% confidence interval, 5,000
bootstrap sample, and mean centering was used for the moderation analysis. The high and low bandwagon cue conditions dummy coded was 1 and 0, respectively. The overall model was significant \( F(3, 268) = 4.70, p < .001, R^2 = .22 \). However, in examining the terms within the model, only perceptions of friend’s market mavenism was significantly related to post credibility (\( b = .18, t(268) = 3.67, p < .001, \text{LLCI} = .08, \text{ULCI} = .27 \)). Exposure to a high or low bandwagon cue had no significant relationship (\( b = .03, p = .84, \text{LLCI} = -.28, \text{ULCI} = .35 \)), nor did the interaction between market mavenism and bandwagon cues (\( b = .09, p = .36, \text{LLCI} = -.10, \text{ULCI} = .28 \)). Thus, the interaction of bandwagon cue and market mavenism perceptions had no impact on the credibility of the post. Thus, Hypothesis 12, which predicted high bandwagon cues would produce an additive effect for high market mavenism, making posts more credible, was not supported. Hypothesis 13 predicted that low bandwagon cues would have a deleterious effect on those with low market mavenism and was not supported by the data.

Research Question 1 asked what is the effect of “mismatched” cues and market mavenism, that is, what is the effect of high bandwagon cues on low market mavenism and low bandwagon cues on high market mavenism. Since it was found that bandwagon cues have no effect and the interaction between bandwagon cues and market mavenism also have no effect on the credibility of the post, there is no relationship to explore between “mismatched” cues and market mavenism.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

This study offered a number of insights to add to our understanding of eWOM. Firstly, as more and more time is spent on social networks, the potential for these networks to be places where eWOM messages are shared is increasing. eWOM messages need to be conceptualized not just as reviews or messages from other users on platforms, but as messages that come from friends, family and colleagues – individuals about whom we have ideas, opinions and conceptualizations. By examining eWOM messages from friends that are known to audiences in their particular social network, this study adds to our conceptualization and understanding of eWOM.

With social networking sites being adopted by more populations, there is an increase in the chance that these casual, day-to-day type of messages about a product or brand can be seen by and influence individuals. eWOM need not – and should not – be conceptualized as a specific, or explicit promotion. Here in this study, the message was simply that an individual was excited about his or her new sweatshirt. Among friends, an individual may not be attempting to or even aware that their communication about a brand or product persuaded another individual (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1965, 2006). On social media, simply sharing a photo (as in the case of this study) demonstrated that when a friend’s message is perceived to be a credible source of market information, individuals can be influenced by that message.

As research aims to build a richer understanding of eWOM, this study demonstrated that eWOM messages in a social media environment can have an impact on product attitudes, brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Unlike many previous studies of eWOM, in which the message sender is anonymous or unknown to the receiver, on social media, many message senders are
known to message receivers. Taking this into account, this study examined how that knowledge of the message sender may influence the message reception and its effectiveness. This study demonstrated that a particular perception of the message sender – that is, their market mavenism – had an impact on message effectiveness.

Such market mavenism increased perceptions of the message’s (post’s) credibility as well as attitudes toward the post. The market maven represents someone who has more knowledge and expertise about the marketplace than the general population, and they are sought out for opinions and advice because of this knowledge. It is important to note that market mavenism did not impact one’s perception of their friend’s credibility in general. Indeed, when examining the credibility perceptions of their friends, there was no difference between the general credibility of those perceived as high or low market mavens. A t-test between the high and low market maven groups show that on general source credibility, participants did not perceive one group to be more credible than the other. Those with low market mavenism (M = 4.91, SD = 1.22) were not perceived to be less credible than those with high market mavenism (M = 5.16, SD 1.09), t(272) = -1.80, p = .07. However, when posting about a product – in the case of this study, a streetwear item – the particular message from high market mavens was considered to be more credible by audiences. That is the message (post) from high market mavens was perceived as more credible (M = 4.18, SD = 1.36) than the message from low market mavens (M = 3.69, SD = 1.27), t(272) = -3.09, p = .002. This demonstrates that it is not that market mavens are also just more credible in general, but when it comes to messages about the marketplace, messages from market mavens are perceived as more credible and are more effective than those messages from non-market mavens.
In relation to theories of persuasion such as the ELM and HSM, an individual’s market mavenism is acting as a credibility heuristic when it comes to marketplace messages. The prior knowledge of the friend – their mavenism – activates a credibility heuristic, making their messages more credible than those from non-maven peers.

This credibility fully mediated the relationship between market mavenism and the attitude toward the post. This indicates that when we see eWOM from our friends on our social networking sites, we will more positively receive those messages from those who we believe have some opinion leadership in the realm of the market. In turn, this increased credibility and positive attitudes toward the message (i.e., the post), leads to increased positive perceptions of the product and brand. Those positive perceptions were related to increased purchase intentions.

This attitude toward the post and its subsequent effect on product and brand attitudes as well as purchase intentions also demonstrates that eWOM message from friends can follow a similar process as advertisements. The advertising literature as long established the connection between attitude towards an ad, often referred to as $A_{ad}$, and the attitude toward a product/brand and purchase intentions (see Brown & Stayman, 1992). This study demonstrated that social media messages about products from sources that are not corporations or brands follow a similar pathway that marketing message do.

While this study demonstrated that an “offline” concept such as market mavenism has relevancy and influence in the online environment of social media, it also sought to examine how elements unique to digital message may also influence message effectiveness. In particular, this study explored how bandwagon cues – in this case, the number of likes and comments a post had – affected how influential a post was. Interestingly, this study found no effect of the bandwagon cue on message credibility, attitude toward the post, or attitude toward the product.
These findings run counter to much of the previous research on bandwagon cues and eWOM. Previous research has found that bandwagon cues were important pieces of information to users exposed to eWOM messages (Wu & Lin, 2017; Tsang & Prendergast, 2009; Lee et al.; 2011; Lee & Youn, 2009). However, rather than “running counter,” we may better conceptualize this as adding to the nuance of our understanding of bandwagon cues in online environments. Previous studies that find an affect for bandwagon cues look at them in the context of messages from strangers or anonymous sources on the Internet (Wu & Lin, 2017; Tsang & Prendergast, 2009; Lee et al., 2011; Lee & Youn, 2009). The bandwagon cues serve as a heuristic as to whether or not the message from this sender can be trusted or useful. The findings of this study indicate that perhaps when presented with an eWOM message from a friend about whom already have some type of judgment about their expertise or familiarity in a particular domain, the bandwagon cues are not utilized as a means by which to evaluate the message. This is an interesting question that needs to be probed deeper in future studies with an experimental design planned specifically to answer this question.

Additionally, Sundar’s (2008) MAIN model articulates that the bandwagon cues are present due to the affordances of online media. This study’s findings demonstrate a case in which the technological affordances of the medium did not influence the message. Particular to this study, the technological affordance of the likes and comments did not have an effect in the presence of another relevant heuristic cue (i.e., the market mavenism of the message source). Perhaps there are certain boundary conditions in which the technological affordances and their cues are used by individuals and when they are not. Here, the technologically affordances made no difference when individuals could utilize their own personal knowledge of the message source.
In this study, it was market mavenism, not bandwagon cues, that proved to be influential in message effectiveness. Just as in our offline lives we are more influenced by friends who are market mavens, this study demonstrates that in our online lives, those messages from market mavens have more credibility and impact on our perceptions of a product. While other studies have used network analysis to examine who may be those nodes of communication, or examined the effect of those who actively cultivate a persona of “influencer” on social media accounts (e.g. Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Jin & Phua, 2014), this study harkened back to that “casual and everyday” opinion leadership that Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955, 2006) identified in their study of personal influence. Here, it was demonstrated that not by amassing a large number of likes, comments, or followers, but by simply being perceived by a friend as a market maven, one’s message is a more effective eWOM message than those who are not perceived as market mavens.

The study findings also add important insight into how brand messages that are more quotidian and more casually shared on social networking sites have an impact on audiences. This type of eWOM has not enjoyed as much research attention as other types of eWOM. A good deal of research has focused on seemingly anonymous sources via product reviews (e.g., Liu, Hu, & Xu, 2009; Senecal & Nantel, 2004; Sundar, Xu, & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2013; Wu & Lin, 2017; Xu & Fu, 2014) or by individuals who have personally branded themselves on social media “influencers,” i.e. beauty vloggers on YouTube, lifestyle or fitness bloggers and Instagrammers who have culled a following specifically to share messages on a specific subject (e.g. Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017, Djafarova, & Trofimenko, 2018).

Another key aspect of this study is that it demonstrated that eWOM messages from friends follow a similar pathway as traditional marketing messages. That is, post credibility
impacted attitude toward the post. Traditionally advertising research has found the credibility of an ad impacts the attitude toward the ad in both online and offline contexts (e.g. Brackett & Carr, 2001; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Tsang et al., 2004). Here it was found that the same mechanisms were at work in posts from friends. Likewise, the attitude toward the post was positively related to the attitude toward the featured brand and product, just as found in traditional marketing and advertising messages (e.g. Lutz, MacKenzie, & Belch, 1983; Mitchell and Olson 1981; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). And finally, those attitudes toward the product and brand that were generated in a post from a friend did impact purchase intention, just as marketing messages that garner more positive product and brand attitudes are more likely to have a positive impact on purchase intentions.

Additionally, this study adds to the literature on market mavenism and opinion leaders by demonstrating an effect from messages from these individuals. As Schäfer and Taddicken (2015) note, most inquiries into opinion leadership “limit themselves to the identification of potential opinion leaders and the description of their psychological or sociodemographic profiles. Effects of these opinion leaders on others are often only assumed, such as when indicators such as hyperlinks are directed toward them or clicks on their profiles are seen as sufficient measures of influence (e.g., Java et al., 2007; Zimbra, Fu, & Li, 2009). The fundamentally social character of opinion leadership—as a relation between individuals—is not properly addressed in these works” (p. 963). The findings from this current study begin to address some of these shortcomings by demonstrating that there is indeed an effect of the messages from market mavens, rather than relying on that assumption. This work supports more survey-based work in which individuals report market mavens and opinion leaders to be more credible, but experimentally demonstrates that market mavens produce messages that are more credible. These
messages are also met with a more positive attitude and result in more positive brand and product attitudes and higher purchase intentions.

While credibility is widely studied, there is still much to learn about the antecedents and consequences of perceptions of credibility. Prior knowledge of a message source influences perceptions of credibility (Slater & Rouner, 1996). This study is of particular importance to the persuasion and marketing literature, as it demonstrates that prior knowledge of a source is used in evaluating the credibility of eWOM messages. While prior knowledge has been used in studies of celebrity endorsements, current findings indicated that personal prior knowledge of a friend (i.e., their market mavenism) was applied here when participants evaluated the credibility of a message from peers.

Additionally, credibility plays an important role in theories of persuasion that explore central/systematic processing versus peripheral/heuristic processing such as the ELM and HSM. In these frameworks, credibility serves as a peripheral and or heuristic cue (under most circumstances). As social media becomes a more crowded place of messages, users may rely more on these peripheral cues of credibility as they scroll through the flood of messages. Social media use has been linked to less need for cognition (Zhong, Hardin, & Sun, 2011), which would indicate more peripheral and heuristic processing. And as Sundar and colleagues (2012) note, persuasive attempts online are often processed heuristically rather than systematically. Additionally, on image-based social media platforms such as Instagram, there is often little textual information for a user to process, and the navigation affordances of most social media platforms encourage quick-scrolling through content. Both of these affordances do little to encourage or allow for systematic processing, indicating that these messages are more likely to
be processed heuristically or peripherally. And this study’s findings indicate that market mavenism can act as a credibility heuristic.

While market mavenism was shown to have a significant impact on how those messages were received by audiences, there may be other features that impact as well. Research has indicated that the closeness of the friendship between the message sender and receiver and the sense of homophily felt by the receiver for the sender can impact message reception. By controlling for these elements and finding a relationship between market mavenism and the message reception this study adds more nuance to our understanding of what makes an eWOM message work.

**Implications for marketers**

Brands have identified creating eWOM as an important marketing goal, so it is important for them to realize not only who is most likely to create eWOM messages, but also what types of senders create the most effective messages and why those messages influence audiences. This research helped to bring clearer insight into this question.

The present study found that the bandwagon cues had no impact on message reception. While marketers often try to get messages to go viral with a lot of shares and increase engagement with a post to bolster the amount of likes and comments (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012), this study found that, among friends, the bandwagon cue made no difference. In an era of micro-targeting, this indicates that getting market mavens to talk about your brand, no matter how big or small their network, may be just as effective as trying to get individuals with large audiences to talk about your brand. This suggests that finding those who are opinion leaders in a certain domain (market mavens in this case) and cultivating ways for them to start conversations may be more fruitful than simply focusing on ways to increase likes and
comments. Perhaps more important than trying to get certain so-called “influencers” to talk about a brand, simply creating more ways and reasons for everyday people to have social media conversations about your brand could be more effective.

Additionally, on social media eWOM messages among friends, personal influence need not be the exact goal. While so-called “influencers” on social media have the goal of telling people about products and brands, when every day people write a post featuring a brand or product, that personal influence on others may not be the reason behind the post. Just as in their study of fashion and personal influence, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955, 2006) note that influence can often be direct – individuals communicating directly about fashion – or indirect, an individual observing another person wearing a certain fashion. Social media can be an example of this direct and indirect influence. Individuals may explicitly and directly endorse a product or brand in hopes of influencing others on their decision to use or buy that product or brand, or, through simply posting and having the product or brand featured, individuals may be exerting this type of indirect influence.

Additionally, identifying market mavens may be more beneficial to brands than opinion leaders who are experts in a very specific product category. As Feick and Price (1987) note, opinion leaders are motivated by product involvement, since their expertise is specific. Market mavens are more motivated by a desire to provide useful information to others, and thus may be more likely to share information, and thus could be better target for brands in creating eWOM buzz.

It should also be noted that market mavens tend to be tuned into many media channels (Barnes & Pressey, 2012) and are heavy media users (Abratt et al., 1995). Market mavenism has also been found to be related to technology affinity (Geissler & Edison, 2005). Thus marketers
need not have to convince market mavens to utilize a technology, they can focus their efforts on giving mavens something worthwhile to share and post about.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study should be acknowledged. Firstly, the study used a convenience sample. While in terms of age, the sample represents a majority of Instagram users as well as a group of interest to marketers and brands. However, the results may not be generalizable to groups of differing ages and of greater ethnic and socio-economic diversity. Despite these external validity limitations, this sample of “digital natives” can help provide a purposive test of adoption intentions amidst a technology-savvy cohort (e.g., Hunt, Atkin, & Krishnan, 2012).

The findings on bandwagon cues are interesting but further research designed to specifically answer the question of bandwagon cue influence when a source is known to a sender is needed. Additionally a check on bandwagon cue perception was absent. Thus it is not known how the participants understood the “popularity” of the message. While the number of likes and shares were gleaned from a pre-test of individuals in a similar population as those in the study, there was not a check that verified how individuals perceived those particular numbers of likes and comments used in the experimental stimuli. Since the bandwagon cue represents a consensus or popularity, a measure to garner if those who saw a high bandwagon post perceived more consensus or popularity could be employed. This might include, for example, such items as: “A lot of people like the information in this post;” “This post is important to many people;” “Most people agree this is something we should know about.”

**Future Research**
The findings of this study indicate several fruitful areas for future research. As mentioned previously, the null findings regarding the bandwagon cues open up some interesting questions. The data from this study demonstrated that when a source is known, the bandwagon cues are not influential in message effectiveness. Future research should be designed and conducted to superficially home in on this aspect of eWOM. Additionally, this future research should take into consideration the effect of product involvement as well as message elaboration in how the bandwagon cue may interact and effect message processing. Those with low product involvement may be more influenced by bandwagon cues, as are those who engage in less elaborative processing.

Additionally, now that it has been found that market mavenism to be influential to message receivers, future research should work to construct a more complete picture of the media attended to by market mavens and how that information flows through mavens to their social networks. This flow can be examined through network analysis, but pairing that with measures of the audience on how those messages are received is important to not only see how message move, but to what effect. Early studies of personal influence were not simply interested in that person A recommended a soap to person B, but they were interested in if that conversation caused person B to try the soap. Research needs to not be content with following the flow, but understanding the effect of the flow. This study has established that market mavenism influences message effectiveness, so future studies should examine how messages flow from brands to market mavens to their audiences and if those conversations have an effect.

Katz and Lazarsfeld’s (1955, 2006) seminal study of personal influence demonstrated that information flows from the mass media to opinion leaders and then to others in a group. This flow of influence demonstrated the importance of interpersonal influence on decisions. In the day
of social media, interpersonal communication can now take on a mass media distribution, and information can be shared with friends with the swipe of a finger. In this era of mass personal communication, this study sought to understand how the concept of opinion leadership, specifically market mavenism, can help us understand the effect social media messages have on individuals.

In particular, this study focused on eWOM messages and sought to expand our understanding of word of mouth marketing messages in the digital space. By moving outside the body of research that looks at messages from particular “influencers” or anonymous reviewers, this study focused on eWOM messages sent by friends and received by friends on social networking sites. On social media platforms, the type of informal, every day conversations that fueled opinion change in Katz & Lazarsfeld’s study are going on today. Just as Katz and Lazarsfeld noted that they “are not interested in leadership or influentially *per se* but in those who communicate information and influence” (p. 108), this study examined how messages shared among friends on social media can communicate information and influence.
References


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Appendix A – Measures

Market Maven listing task – high market mavenism

Think about your friends who you follow on Instagram. (NOT celebrities or “Instagram famous” people, influencers, brands, companies etc.)
Read the following traits and think about your Instagram friends in their online and offline lives. Think about friends who you think these traits describe well or very well:

- Likes introducing new brands and products to friends.
- Likes helping people by providing them with information about many kinds of products.
- Is asked by a lot of people for information about products, places to shop, or sales.
- Is considered by friends as a good source of information when it comes to new products or sales.
- Has information about a variety of products.
- Likes to share information about a variety of products with others

Market Maven listing task – low market mavenism

Think about your friends who you follow on Instagram. (NOT celebrities or “Instagram famous” people, influencers, brands, companies etc.)
Read the following traits and think about your Instagram friends in their online and offline lives. Think about friends who you think these traits do not describe very well or at all:

- Likes introducing new brands and products to friends.
- Likes helping people by providing them with information about many kinds of products.
- Is asked by a lot of people for information about products, places to shop, or sales.
- Is considered by friends as a good source of information when it comes to new products or sales.
- Has information about a variety of products.
- Likes to share information about a variety of products with others

Message credibility

Measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale

unbelievable/believable
unconvincing/convincing
biased/unbiased
**Attitude toward post**

Measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale

- bad/good
- dislike/like
- boring/interesting
- negative/positive
- useless/useful
- worthless/valuable
- poor/outstanding
- not appealing/appealing
- not attractive/attractive
- not likeable/likeable

**Attitude toward product**

Measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale

- bad/good
- harmful/beneficial
- undesirable/desirable
- unpleasant/pleasant
- inferior/superior
- awful/nice.

**Attitude toward brand**

Measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale

- good/bad
- dislike very much/like very much
- pleasant/unpleasant
- poor quality/high quality
Purchase intention

Measured from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)

- It is likely that I will buy from this brand
- I would consider buying this brand next time when I need streetwear items
- I will try to buy streetwear items from this company

Instagram intensity scale

Measured from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)

- Instagram is part of my everyday activity
- I am proud to tell people I’m on Instagram
- Facebook has become part of my daily routine
- I feel out of touch when I haven’t checked Instagram for a while
- I feel I am part of a community on Instagram
- I would be sad if Instagram shut down

Perception of Friend’s market mavenism

Measured from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)

- Likes introducing new brands and products to friends.
- Likes helping people by providing them with information about many kinds of products.
- Is asked by a lot of people for information about products, places to shop, or sales.
- Is considered by friends as a good source of information when it comes to new products or sales.
- Has information about a variety of products.
- Likes to share information about a variety of products with others
General credibility of friend

Measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale

- intelligent/unintelligent
- untrained/trained
- inexpert/expert
- informed/uninformed
- incompetent/competent
- bright/stupid
- cares about me/doesn’t care about me
- has my interests at heart/doesn’t have my interests at heart
- self centered/not self-centered
- concerned with me/not concerned with me
- insensitive/sensitive
- not understanding/understanding
- honest/dishonest
- untrustworthy/trustworthy
- honorable/dishonorable
- moral/immoral
- unethical/ethnical
- fake/genuine

Friendship strength

Measured from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)

I have a good personal friendship with this person
I enjoy my interactions with him/her.
I feel distant from this person.
I would defend this person if others criticize him/her.
I care about his/her long-term success.
We have a very close relationship.
I don’t like this person.
Homophily

Measured from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)

This person thinks like me
This person doesn’t behave like me
This person is different from me
This person shares my values
This person is like me
This person treats people like I do
This person does not think like me
This person is similar to me
This person does not share my values
This person behaves like me
This person is unlike me
This person doesn’t treat people like I do
This person has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine
This person expresses attitudes different from mine
This person has a lot in common with me.

Product involvement

Measured from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)

I am interested in streetwear
I think streetwear is fun
I think streetwear is fascinating
I think streetwear is important.
Appendix B – Study Stimuli

Above the image participants saw the following statement:

*Imagine you are scrolling through Instagram and you see the following post, which has been posted by [piped text]*

*Please take a look at the post below.*

In the high market maven condition a name from the list of high market maven friends was inserted. In the low market maven condition a list from the low market maven friends was inserted.

Low bandwagon cue condition:  

High bandwagon cue condition

---

**So cozy, so fresh. Love my new @ilthy sweatshirt**

13 likes

View 1 comment

**So cozy, so fresh. Love my new @ilthy sweatshirt**

313 likes

View all 29 comments
Appendix C

*Correlations between measures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>7</th>
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<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Friend's market mavenism</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Post credibility</td>
<td>.216**</td>
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<td>3. Attitude toward the post</td>
<td>.196**</td>
<td>.569**</td>
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<td>4. Attitude toward the product</td>
<td>.141*</td>
<td>.494**</td>
<td>.716**</td>
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<td>5. Brand attitude</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.453**</td>
<td>.629**</td>
<td>.817**</td>
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<td>6. Purchase intention</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>.370**</td>
<td>.532**</td>
<td>.630**</td>
<td>.646**</td>
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<td>7. Product involve</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.085</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. General source credibility</td>
<td>.126*</td>
<td>.263**</td>
<td>.317**</td>
<td>.139*</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.127*</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Friend closeness</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>.150*</td>
<td>.209**</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>-.018</td>
<td>.144*</td>
<td>.730**</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Friend homophily</td>
<td>.111</td>
<td>.134*</td>
<td>.218**</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.114</td>
<td>.135*</td>
<td>.680**</td>
<td>.676**</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001