

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

BELIEVABILITY OF ONLINE AND OFFLINE WORD OF MOUTH AMONG
YOUNG PEOPLE: A STUDY OF THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

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DECLARATION

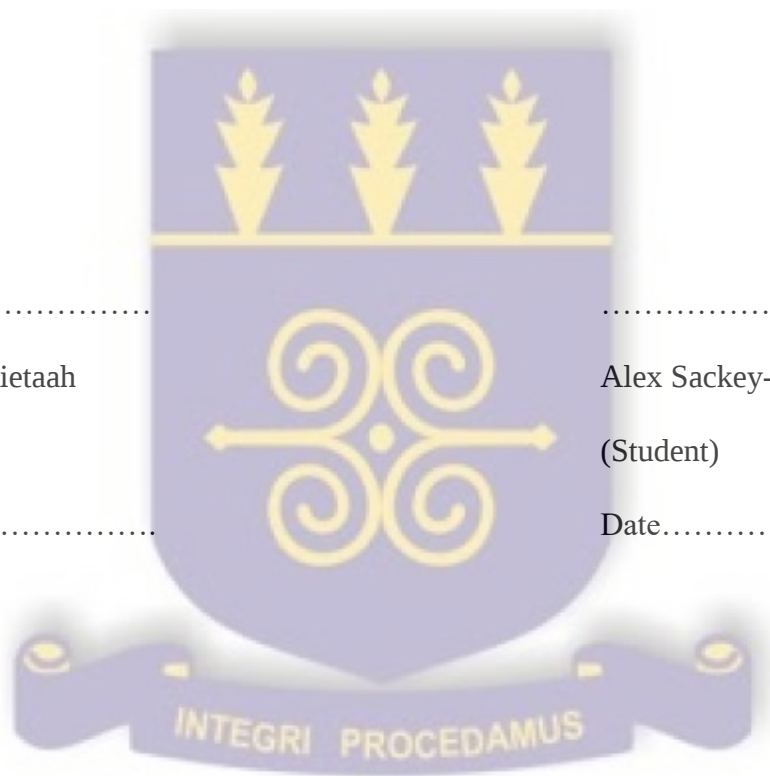
I, Alex Sackey-Eshun, hereby declare that the project work is the result of my work carried out under the supervision of Dr. Etse Sikanku and Dr. Gilbert Tietaah of the Department of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, Legon. Acknowledgements have been given where other work have been cited.

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DEDICATION

To my tutors, my mates, and my family who helped and supported my efforts in diverse ways.



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I am very grateful to my supervisors, Dr. Etse Sikanku and Dr. Gilbert Tietaah for their prompting and encouragement. I am appreciative of the support I received from my lecturers and my course mates, especially Ernest Agorde, who gave me a few pointers. I must mention Benson Osei-Tutu (OT), for his guided tutorial in the SPSS application towards the analysis of this work.



ABSTRACT

The study investigated the difference in believability of online and offline word of mouth (WOM) among young people. Due to the current extensive use of the Internet, the study sought to find out the extent of its credibility and to compare it with offline credibility. Literature reviewed in this area showed a lack of consensus and also a paucity of literature on the subject in Africa and Ghana. Consequently, the study sought to uncover insights that could be useful for communication practitioners in a developing economy such as Ghana. Among others, it sought to investigate whether the strength of one's social ties in a chosen channel of WOM had a relationship with the believability of that WOM.

Employing convenience sampling, the study sought to draw relationships between variables such as “trustworthiness of a preferred WOM”, “strength of ties and its influence over a preferred WOM,” and “degree to which a preferred WOM can influence purchase. Using a quantitative approach, the study sampled 100 University of Ghana students. Data was obtained from a 5-item Likert-scale. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze and draw conclusions.

The study concluded that young people find offline word-of-mouth (WOM) more believable than online word-of-mouth (WOM). A greater number of respondents attached more credibility to offline WOM, indicating a higher likelihood of being influenced. Strength of ties was regarded as essential in influencing both offline and online WOM believability. It is recommended that future studies under the same subject be undertaken to obtain more accurate conclusions since this study was completed under the constraint of a rigid deadline.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Word of Mouth is a form of interpersonal communication between individuals concerning their experiences with a product or service. Nasiruddin and Hashim (2015) identify it as consumer talk around the evaluation of products and services of interest. According to Brown and Reingen (1987) Word of Mouth (WOM) significantly helps shape consumers' attitudes and behaviour. People are likely to make particular purchase decisions because of the recommendations or otherwise, from their friends and family. People tend to give value to information based on how familiar or socially close they are with the senders. In this regard it becomes a powerful tool employed in persuasive communication. This view is supported by Gfrerer and Pokrykwa (2012) who conclude that WOM is a powerful force in the consumer market place. Indeed according to Chu and Yoojung (2011) it is more influential on behaviour than TV and print advertising.

Even though WOM does not fall under the umbrella of the strict definition of advertising, it is sometimes substituted for it. For instance, consumers who feel an advertisement is biased or lacks credibility are likely to turn to WOM communication for confirmation or otherwise. Consequently it is applied quite often in the advertising market place and it usually has a significant persuasive effect on the recipient of the information (Bayraktar & Erdogan 2015). The effect could be positive or negative. According to Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) positive word of mouth is likely to increase the consumer's purchase decisions by diminishing risk while negative word

of mouth could dissuade consumers from contemplating purchasing a product or service. They indicate that consumption experiences could lead to a certain effect, which in turn could transfer into a potent source of motivation or demotivation. The post-consumption behaviour could manifest in complaints, recommendations or repeat purchases. It is worthy of note that Word of mouth information is usually sent or transmitted by friends, peers, family members or sometime just acquaintances (Khan, Ramzan, Shoaib and Mohyuddin, 2015).

Until recently WOM was carried out mainly offline. This occurs when individuals after being exposed to a product or service, would share their views via face-to-face interactions. However, there is a general shift from this hitherto dominating culture of offline WOM to a now digital age, and according to Deuze (2006) this has influenced the emergence of online WOM. Online WOM is defined as a statement by a potential consumer about a product or service to someone or a multitude of people via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004). Today's digital communication environment, courtesy of the Internet, has spawned a lot more channels, through which online WOM information is sent. Information is shared via online platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp.

According to Chuan and Yoojung (2011), online WOM takes place in the form of discussion forums and newsgroups on social network sites via Internet. WOM communication, whether offline or online is however influenced by demographic attributes such as age, gender, education or social ties. To the extent that "individuals are similar in terms of certain shared social characteristics," (Rogers 1983, in Gfrerer and Pokrywka 2012: 12) they may share consumption patterns as well. Consequently,

peers or groups with common interest but separated by time and space easily share their views and experiences at the click of a button online or share views face-to face. By sharing content online, they directly or indirectly produce evaluations or mobilize support for a product or service, not only with friends but also with unfamiliar people worldwide.

Recent studies such as Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) and Sun, Youn, Wu and Kuntaraporn (2006) also support the view that online WOM is more influential than traditional advertising formats such as TV and Print. For instance Bayraktar and Erdogan (2015) say as a result of its persuasive nature, online WOM has become an important driver of consumer behaviour, and advertisers especially are at a breakneck speed to harness its benefits, at the expense of the traditional format.

However the view that online WOM is more influential than offline WOM is open to debate. Studies such as Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012), indicate that when it comes to serious and verifiable information, people believe offline WOM to be more believable. They argue that due to the anonymity of online WOM, it has the potential of misinformation. A study done by Kellerfay Group (2010) in America for instance concluded that offline conversations were more positive and more credible and more likely to lead to purchase decisions or behavioural change. Their study showed that body language and social context cues which were lacking in online WOM contributed to credibility in offline WOM. However other researchers such as Liang and Tsai (2008) hold on to the view that online WOM is more influential because of its speed and convenience. Liang and Tsai (2008) argue further that the lack of face-to face rather contributes to credibility, in that there is less pressure on the sender to

please the recipient of the information. The sender consequently is likely to tell the facts as they are without any inhibitions. He contends that fellow contributors online are more believable because they are not likely to have the intention to influence the reader or receiver.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Internet usage seems to be enjoying an astronomical growth. Its popularity is quite legendary. The number of Internet users has grown sharply since the 2000 till date. From a population 361million in 2000, it is now in the region of 4 billion users. (Internet live stats). This presupposes that accessibility of online WOM has also increased. Owing to its speed and global reach, a comment by one person on a social media platform could have repercussions on the entire world in an instant. In this regard it is easy to understand why advertisers or people that seek to affect behaviour or opinion take advantage of online WOM. However, one needs to consider whether online always believable? Even if it is believable, should it be at the expense of offline WOM.

Some studies suggest that despite the Internet's popularity and dynamism, online WOM may not be the best alternative, especially when compared to offline WOM. For instance Keller Fay (2010) found out that 90% of young people found offline WOM more credible, and that those offline conversations were more likely to lead purchase intentions. Also Xiabo (2014) concluded that 59% of Americans believe that offline WOM is more credible. These studies showed that majority of public discussions about products and services, in terms of everyday WOM occurred rather, offline.

This may not hold in all cases because other authors have found contrarian evidence. For instance, Steffes and Burgee (2009) concluded that students rated information obtained online higher than that which they gained from their friends in person. Also Sun, Youn, Wu and Kuntaraporn (2006) contend that online WOM had more impact than offline WOM because the information transmitted online was more intact and had a semblance of formal, thus online was more believable. Consequently it is a trusty medium for those who want to affect behaviour. Indeed the Internet has become an important driver of consumer behaviour making marketers interested in influencing online consumer behaviour (Ashley & Leonard, 2009). This is further endorsed by Grussel (2007) who argues that the future of advertising is becoming more personal and suggests that the Internet being online WOM, was the best route to use in advertising to the youth.

These studies show that there does not seem to be a consensus on whether either online WOM or offline WOM is more believable. Interestingly, the evidence underpinning the controversy displays a bias towards more advanced economies. The literature reviewed for this study did not reveal any study on WOM believability in smaller markets such as Ghana. Given recent market evolution due to the return to market liberalization, and Internet penetration alongside a pluralized media, Ghana presents an interesting case for understanding young people's WOM attitude both online and offline.

Also because Internet is relatively new and dynamic, one is likely to assume that the youth (millennials) are more likely to find online WOM more believable than offline

WOM, especially when they extensively rely on online resources in their information search (Gfrerer and Pokrywka, 2012). This study sought to explore these, and discover new insights regarding the youth's preferences.

The study targets a number of contributions to the literature. First this study will add to the knowledge and stir up further studies in the subject of Word of Mouth communication in developing economies such as Ghana. This study's finding and insights should also be instructive for communication practitioners, especially advertisers in their plans and programmes for the youth. Also, owing to the burgeoning dynamism of the Internet and its spawns of WOM social media platforms in Ghana, it has become more imperative than ever before to study WOM communication.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To find out which of the WOM channels, young people find more believable as regards communication messages

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1. What is the relationship between young people's believability of and preferred WOM channels?

RQ2. What is the relationship between social ties and the degree of believability of young people's preferred WOM channels?

RQ3. What is the relationship between the number of friends of UG students and their preferred WOM channel?

1.4 HYPOTHESES

The study was premised on the following hypotheses:

H1 The more friends one has offline the more one would believe in offline WOM

H01 The number of friends one has offline is not related to belief in offline WOM

H2 The more friends one has online the more one would believe in online WOM

H01 The number of friends one has online is not related to belief in online WOM

1.5 RATIONALE FOR HYPOTHESES

Friendship or familiarity with a sender of a message is likely to influence the believability or otherwise of a message. According to Herbert Kelman's (1958) Social Influence theory which grounds this study, one's emotions and opinions could be altered based on the nature of ties one has with the sender of a message. Also the Attribution theory, another theory that forms the basis of this work, explains that an individual decodes a message based on the nature of perception of the sender of the message. Chu and Yoojung (2011), also posit that making more friends online can lead to increased credibility of messages shared. Consequently the study sought to explore the relationship between the number of friends respondents have and their believability in their preferred WOM.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The power of WOM seems to be underrated. Offline WOM campaigns are not extensively used in most communication campaigns probably because of the cost challenges and evaluation difficulties. However studies have shown that it can serve

as a powerful and important tool in persuading intended targets. The result of this study is likely to offer a meaningful contribution towards the planning of campaigns in areas such as advertising, PR and other communication efforts. The study is intended to also to contribute towards the debate and help to foster a consensus on the believability of online WOM or offline WOM

1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS

WOM (Word Of Mouth):

ONLINE WORD OF MOUTH (online WOM): “..all informal communications directed at other consumers about ownership, usage or characteristics of particular goods or their services via the Internet” (Steffes and Burgee 2009: 42). It is communication from family or friends, key in shaping consumers’ attitudes and behaviour.

OFFLINE WORD OF MOUTH (offline WOM): “..oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand or product” (Breazeale, 2008: 297)

YOUNG PEOPLE/MILLENIALS Individuals born from 1980s – 2000s Are expected to be 18-36yrs.

COMMUNICATION MESSAGES: Information received by respondents in the form intended to get him or her to act or behave in a certain way.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter served as an initiation into the subject of the study, shedding light on the literature that triggered the study. It also ushered in the hypotheses and operationalized key words in addition to expounding the importance of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the theories that anchor this study. It will address and discuss other research work done in the same area. It will review their theories, propositions, variables measured, methodologies and findings.

2.1 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The study will be grounded on two theories: The Social Influence theory and the Attribution theory.

2.2 SOCIAL INFLUENCE THEORY

Herbert Kelman propounded the Social Influence theory in 1958. The theory posits that influential people affect other's emotions and opinions. One's emotions and opinions are affected as a result of peer pressure, leadership, and persuasion. In these cases it results in a change due to a need to belong. The change may occur during the physical presence of the sender of the message or may occur due to imagined pressure, usually from social norms.

Kelman suggest ways in which Social Influence takes place: Identification, Internalization, and Compliance. Identification is when ones attitudes and behaviours are changed by the one that the person likes. Here the change is contingent on the nature of the ties the receiver has with the sender. The change also occurs because the receiver feels obliged to maintain a self-defining and status quo relationship with a group or person.

Compliance is the process of responding to a clear request from others. Kelman suggest that the satisfaction derived from compliance is of the need for one to receive a favourable reaction from sender or to be accepted socially. The receiver may agree publicly but may have a difficulty with the information privately.

The third arm of the Social Influence theory is Internalization. This concerns the process of acceptance of a set of norms established by people who are influential to the individual. In this regard the individual behaves according to the norms because he or she finds them intrinsically rewarding and also because they agree with his or her value system. A person agrees to be part of the group either publicly or privately, changing his or her behaviour to fit in.

The study sought to uncover the relationships between elements of Identification as posited by Kelman and students believability of their preferred WOM channel. For instance, it hoped to explore the extent to which social influence related to believability and purchase decisions. For instance, Steffes and Burgee (2009) in examining the strength of ties, which was a means of identification, concluded that strong tie referrals were more influential than weak ties in decision-making. Some weak ties however were rated as more influential. The Social Influence theory is linked to the objective of the study in terms of finding out whether students are influenced in their believability ratings by elements such as individual or peer pressure, or some other reason. It expected that offline WOM will likely be influenced by individual while online WOM could be either due to the influence of individual or group pressure as was concluded in Steffes and Burgee (2009).

2.3 ATTRIBUTION THEORY

The second theory that grounds this work is Attribution theory. It owes its origins to Heider (1958). Broadly explained, the Attribution theory tries to demonstrate how individuals interpret events in relation to thinking and behaviour. It is the basis for consumer's future expectations, intentions and behaviours (Johnson 2006: 183). That is to say there is always an explanation for a particular behaviour. Individuals explain their attitudes based on either by their behaviour or someone else's. According to Heider (1958), the attribution could be internal or external. It would be internal if we look to personal traits such as an individual's motives or beliefs but could be external if we consider environmental or situational reasons for our behaviour. A receiver will always try to assign the motivations of a sender. Out of Heider's(1958) explanation, Harold Kelly (in Heider 1958) carved out a Covariation model, which explained that three types of causal information influenced an individual's judgment; consensus, distinctiveness and consistency. He assumes that people make attributions in a rational and logical manner and that behaviour is always attributable to factors that are present. Otherwise if the factors are not present that behaviour does not occur.

An aspect of the Attribution theory, known as Interpersonal Attribution is relevant to this study. Interpersonal Attribution posits that the way in which a receiver attributes the message of a sender is based on the perception he or she has of that sender. Consequently if the motives of the sender are perceived as favourable, the receiver is likely to respond positively. If for instance a sender keeps telling a receiver to try a particular soap, and the receiver assumes that the sender is a truthful person, the receiver is likely find the sender believable and may try the soap. In effect it provides the receiver a means to understanding the sender's motive. The study intended

unveiling some of these perceptions between the sender and the receiver. As in Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012), it sought to shed light on the attributions ascribed and the likelihood of believability of respondents.

2.4 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In examining traditional Word-of-mouth (WOM) vrs electronic WOM in the automobile industry Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) referred to the Self-Perception theory, which is an offshoot of the Attribution theory. They contended that this theory was applicable to their study in addressing the concept of persuasiveness. The theory explains that people develop attitudes based on attributions to influencers in order alter their self-image. They explain that these attitudes are socially influenced. Consequently attributions of sender's behaviour on either offline or online can lead to the receiver's altered behaviour.

The Attribution theory is also employed in explaining why WOM received from a trustworthy sender is likely to be more believable (Martensen and Groholdt: 2015) They postulate that once a receiver attributes good intentions for the WOM communication, that WOM is likely to influence the relationship with sender and consequently lead to a favourable response.

In choosing their sample from the population of 18-30 year olds, Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) rationalized that such a group was key to their research because the people within that age bracket would likely be contemplating buying their first vehicle. Before carrying out their study, the researchers opined that it could be safely concluded that their study group would extensively use and prefer online sources to

offline sources. Similarly, Khan Ramzan Shoaib and Mohyuddin (2015) also employed 213 female respondents aged between 18-30 in their study to find out the impact of brand WOM on purchase decisions. They assumed that females, more than men, were more aware of brands.

In the case Bayraktar and Erdogan (2015) they held a position that offline WOM was more credible than online WOM. Consequently their objectives were to determine why specific consumers found their preferred WOM more believable and find out the features of WOM channels that made them believable. Unlike Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012), the median age of their sample was 30-35, with about 38% of them being workers in the business sector. However it is obvious that in all these cases youthfulness was conditional of their sample.

Steffes and Burgee (2009) also chose college students as their sample, in a study to find out if a variable such social ties would have an influence on the credibility of online WOM. They wanted to find out if these ties had influenced how the students rated their professor.

Their work was premised on the hypothesis that strong tie sources such as the close friends or homophilic relationships were more likely to be more influential in the consumer's decision making process. Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) also examined this in the context of online WOM and offline WOM. In their discussions prior to the study, Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) stated that homophilic relationships were not that strong in the online WOM in terms of individuals but rather at the level of the website. They argued however that homophilic relationships were evident in offline

WOM and that could lead to stronger ties, which could be quite significant in consumer decision-making. Contrarily, their study generated the finding that homophily was not a key influencer whether in the offline or online setting.

Bayraktar and Erdogan (2015) concluded that strength of ties is key in enhancing the value of information obtained especially in offline WOM and for them this made their offline WOM more influential than online WOM communication. This view is supported by Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) who say that young people especially, and rather surprising, enjoy the opportunity to connect with others online but are not persuaded towards a purchase decision. They found that young people could not be assured of the trust and honesty of online WOM. The researchers contend that, in their study of the automobile industry young people find offline conversations more convincing.

Apart from the variable of the strength of ties, Khan et al.,(2015) examined also trustworthiness, source expertise, information usefulness. They concluded that though trustworthiness and purchase decision were positively and moderately correlated, source expertise and purchase intention were positively but weakly related. However for them, strength of ties and purchase intention, were positively and moderately related. To them these variables were key to informational credibility, which was likely to result in believability and consequently purchase intent.

The methods employed in collecting data were varied and were based on the demands of a particular research. Steffes and Burgee (2009) for instance applied a survey questionnaire to 482 college students. Each questionnaire had 24 questions of which

included demographic information. A key data captured was the number of close friends a respondent had. This information gave an indication of the sociable nature of the respondents and consequently their information seeking behaviour. Such data will inform this research.

Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) study was two-pronged. Firstly, they wanted to find out the nature of the online environment and secondly, seek explanations of the facts derived from that information. So they employed a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative. Data collected in the first one, that is, an online survey included reasons for seeking WOM advice and perceived trustworthiness of the information. The researchers then drew patterns of associations between online and offline WOM. This was followed up with a qualitative method of semi-structured interviews, which provided a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour towards WOM.

Also, Bayraktar and Erdogan (2015) adopted a qualitative method, specifically exploratory, to gain an in-depth understanding of the value of online and offline WOM. The researchers also employed semi-structured interviews in a sample of 40 individuals from Turkey and America. Their interviews engaged interviewees in going beyond WOM channel preference to questions about why individuals preferred particular channels for specific products. Their study sought also to find out whether there were significant differences between American and Turkish participants. They concluded that Americans trusted online WOM than did the Turkish.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter examined the theories that grounded the study and their relevance to it. It also discussed the methodologies employed in related literature and their linkage to the study.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will describe the steps, procedures and methods of data collection used towards answering the research questions. It will mention the population chosen and its relevance to the study. It will further discuss the sampling method employed, emphasizing on its relevance and how the data was analyzed.

3.1 TYPE OF STUDY

To fulfill the aim of the study, a quantitative method was chosen, employing a survey method. Surveys are done to help examine relationships among variables and to make inferences about them (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). It is a means by which information can be collected from a selected group of people applying systematic questionnaires and interviews.

The survey approach was chosen because of a number of reasons. Surveys allow large amount of data to be collected with relative ease, allowing a lot variables to measured. It helps to draw relationships among variables and also make inferences about them (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). Further more, according to Kerlinger (1993) surveys simplify the procedure of data analysis. Also, surveys were the main methods applied in the research reviewed relevant to this study. Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) Steffes and Burgee (2009) are some examples.

The demands of this study required that a large amount of data from the study sample be collected for generalization across the population of UG students. In the survey,

questionnaire instrument was used and administered face-to face. Questionnaire contained demographic data, habits and preferences data about the sample.

3.2 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The students of the University of Ghana were chosen as the population because it had the characteristics that were relevant for the study. Students were chosen because of their youthfulness. Students are mostly millennials and thus consume a lot of information especially online. Similarly, most studies reviewed (Steffes and Burgee: 2009, Gfrerer and Pokrywka, 2012, Khan et al., 2015) selected their sample among students and young people. The research intended to find out if students and generally young people are more persuaded by online WOM than offline as concluded by the afore-mentioned research. Also WOM data on the youth is key to advertisers and other communication initiatives because most campaigns are targeted mainly at the youth.

The University of Ghana has a student population of over 38,000 that includes those enrolled in the regular, sandwich and distance education programmes. Wimmer and Dominick (2010) indicate that sample population for a study is dependent on factors such as project purpose, amount of error tolerated and time constraints. Due to constraints of time, this research had to be carried out and completed at a period when the regular undergraduate students, which comprises the larger majority, were on vacation. During this period however the students undertaking the distance education programme and some sandwich students were available. They numbered in total, 6,575. (from Institutional Research and Planning office, University of Ghana- 2016)

Some of them had taken residency in five halls of residence. The total numbers of students in each hall were not determined. While some had over 200 others had below 40 students in residence. They were not evenly distributed within the halls. As a result of the unavailability of the regular students, and the disproportionate distribution in the halls, the convenience sampling method was employed to draw the sample. According to Schonlau, Fricker and Elliot (2002), the convenience sample method is a non-systematic method, which allows a potential sample to self-select, making it a non-probability sampling method. Despite this, Schonlau et al., (2002) say that convenient sampling can still be employed in surveys especially when the group to be studied is difficult to obtain or when the population is dispersed. For instance Cho (2012) employed convenience sampling in selecting her respondents for a survey that examined the use of different media in building the identity of Korean married immigrant women. She used this method because she believed her population was dispersed. Mensah (2015) also employed convenience sampling in a survey to find out the use of Social networking sites among students. Also, Ishida (2011) employed convenience sampling in a survey to find out the effects of online and offline WOM on the destination image of tourist. His reason was based on the availability of students. Khan, Ramzan, Shoaib and Mohyuddin (2015) also used convenience sampling in a quantitative study of a clothing brand's Word-of-mouth impact on purchase decision.

Employing convenience sampling, this study obtained responses from a sample population of 100 from the five traditional halls of Legon, Akuafio Sarbah, Commonwealth and Volta Halls randomly. These were the halls with the highest concentration of students. A sample of 100 (56 males 44 females) was chosen

because, for a population of 2000 to 6000 a sample size of 100 to 127 is ideal in obtaining 95% confidence level (Joanna Keyton, 2007).

3.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

A 23-item questionnaire was administered in a face-face-face interaction with respondents. The interviewer introduced himself indicating the length of time and purpose of the interview. The questions were then read out to the respondents sequentially and their answers were recorded by hand. This method is employed because it is most helpful in achieving high response rates (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011).

3.4 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

One of the main constructs of interests was the relationship between the number of close friends and the likelihood of purchase. Borrowing from Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) and Steffes and Burgee (2009), it also investigated the relationship between strength of social ties and the preferred WOM. In addition, this study measured: use of media devices, search for WOM information, trust in online versus offline WOM sources and its influence over the decision to purchase. Other variables examined comprised respondent's demographic data such as age, sex, and academic level. Questions that employed ordinal values were ranked on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The ranking method of the Likert-scale allows respondents to express different levels of intensity of their thoughts (Churchill, Brown & Suter, 2008). Also questions requiring dichotomous answers were coded numerically for easier quantification, processing and analysis. The purpose of the questionnaire was to discover respondents general perceptions about information received offline and also online.

It was also to explore the differences between online WOM and offline WOM and their resultant credibility and persuasive effects on respondents.

3.5 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted to test for reliability concerns and to estimate time to be spent on each questionnaire. Ten students (5 male, 5 female) were conveniently selected for the study. Their answers led to a few amendments. These respondents were not used in the actual survey.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data gathered from the field was coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Graphs, Percentage frequency tables and Crosstab tables were generated to analyze and explain findings.

3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter examined the actions that were taken to collect the data and how the data was analyzed. It explained the rationale for the sample and the reason why the convenience sampling technique was employed.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter entails the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data that were collected. Data were collected via questionnaire, guided by the research questions and the overall objective of the study. The intent of this study was to find out the extent to which young people differ in their believability of either offline WOM (word-of-Mouth) or offline WOM (word-of-mouth). Consequently the undergraduate students of University of Ghana were chosen as the population. A sample of 100 was selected through convenience sample. Out of these 56 were males and 44 were females. Their responses are analyzed in this chapter.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Questions were asked to obtain demographic information about respondents. The study sought to find out respondents' academic level of study, their age range and also their gender. Though all the respondents were students, the questionnaire also asked about their employment status.

4.1.1 Gender of respondents

Out of the total sample population of 100, slightly less than half were females while the rest were males. This closely conforms to the ratio of study population of students (3811males and 2765 females).

Table 1: Gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
MALE	56	56.0
FEMALE	44	44.0
Total	100	100.0

4.1.2 Age of respondents

As Table 2 shows, majority of the respondents interviewed were in the age range of 18-30 thus the sample can be categorized as young.

Table 2. Age of respondents

Respondents	Frequency	Percent
BELOW 18	0	.0
18-30	95	95.0
ABOVE 30	5	5.0
Total	100	100.0

4.1.3 Academic Level of respondents

The study deemed the academic levels as key therefore it found out that most respondents were in the 200 and the 300 academic levels of their studies, comprising more than six in 10 of the sample population. Table 3 shows that the 100 and the 400 level combined made up for a little over a third of the population.

Table 3 Academic level of respondents

Level	Frequency	Percent
100	17	17.0
200	30	30.0
300	31	31.0
400	22	22.0
Total	100	100.0

4.1.4 Employment status of respondents

The study also asked about the employment status of respondents. The result in Table 4 indicated an insignificant number (11%) of them were employed.

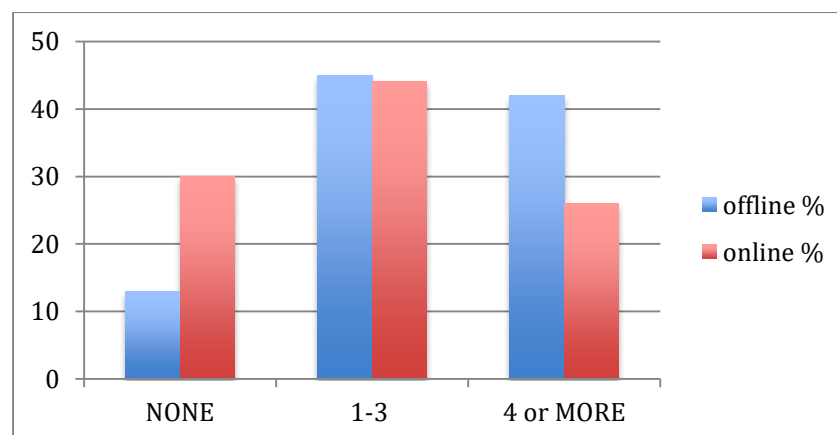
Table 4. *Employment status of respondents*

Response	Frequency	Percent
YES	11	11.0
NO	89	89.0
Total	100	100.0

4.1.5 Number of close friends of respondents in online and offline WOM

It was important to find out the number of close friends respondents had in order to gauge their ‘friendliness’ and consequently draw relationship between that and their likelihood of trusting a particular WOM by WOM. As shown in Figure 1, in both offline and the online environment nearly half of the sample population had not more than three close friends. Remarkably however, respondents who said they did not have close friends in the offline environment were nearly twice as the number those in the online environment.

Figure 1. *Number of close friends of respondent in the online and offline WOM environment*



4.1.6 Frequency of Internet usage by respondents

In Table 5, almost all respondents answered that they use the Internet every day. Only a 20th of them said they use the Internet a few times a week.

Table 5. *Frequency of Internet usage by respondents*

Response	Frequency	Percent
DAILY	95	95.0
A FEW TIMES A WEEK	5	5.0
Total	100	100.0

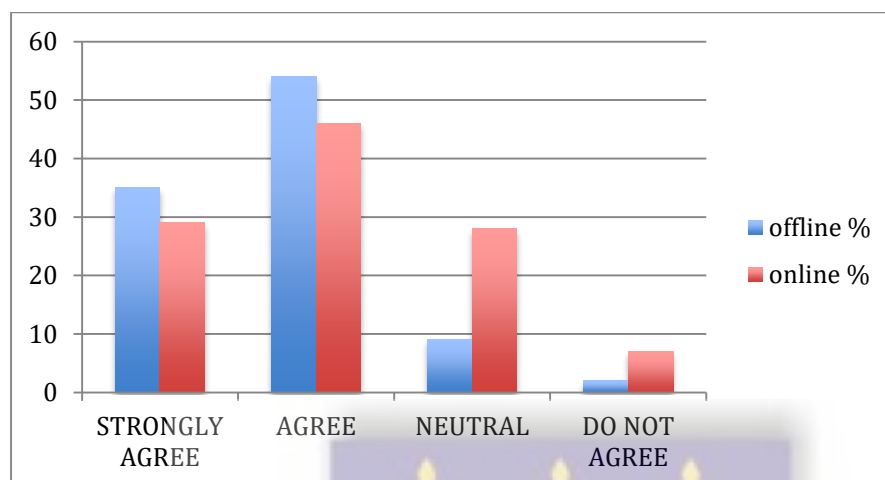
4.1.7 Ratings of importance attached to respondents' search for information (about products and services) online and offline

Table 6 and Figure 2 show that out of the total of 100 respondents, almost nine in 10 rated offline positively as the environment they are more likely to search for information. Also, three-quarters of the population rated online positively as also a source of important information.

Table 6 *Ratings of importance attached to respondents' search for offline and online WOM information*

Online			Offline		
Degree	Frequency	Percent	Degree	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	18	18.0	Strongly agree	35	35.0
Agree	40	40.0	Agree	54	54.0
Neutral	15	15.0	Neutral	9	9.0
Do not agree	25	25.0	Do not agree	2	2.0
Strongly disagree	2	2.0	Strongly disagree	0	.0
Total	100	100.0	Total	100	100.0

Figure 2 *Ratings of importance attached to respondents' search for offline and online WOM information*



4.1.8 Degree of online and offline WOM and believability in products and services on respondents

Twice the number of respondents, who said they believed in online WOM about products and services to a considerable degree, believed in offline WOM. Table 7 displays that cumulatively, four in five of the sample population noted that they had belief in offline WOM as against a little over half who had belief in online WOM about products and services to a considerable degree. It is noteworthy that only one respondent said he/she did not believe at all that offline WOM had any degree of effect, while two respondents answered similarly for online WOM.

Table 7. *Degree of online and offline WOM and believability in products services by respondents*

Online Degree	Frequency	Percent	Offline Degree	Frequency	Percent
Major effect	18	18.0	Major effect	36	36.0
Moderate effect	40	40.0	Moderate effect	47	47.0
Neutral	15	15.0	Neutral	9	9.0
Minor effect	25	25.0	Minor effect	7	7.0
No effect	2	2.0	No effect	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0	Total	100	100.0

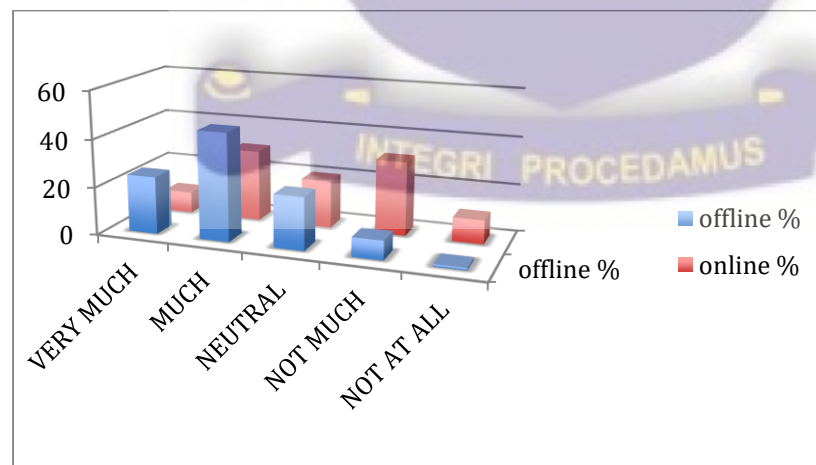
4.1.9 Degree of trust in WOM online and offline of products and services by respondents

Table 8 and Figure 3 both show that nearly three times the total number of respondents who said they trusted online WOM very much, indicated that they could trust offline to the same degree. Markedly, just about a fifth of the sample population was uncertain of which of WOM was trustworthy.

Table 8. *Degree of trust in online and offline WOM of products and services by Respondents*

Online			Offline		
Degree	Frequency	Percent	Degree	Frequency	Percent
Very much	9	9.0	Very much	24	24.0
Much	30	30.0	Much	45	45.0
Neutral	20	20.0	Neutral	22	22.0
Not much	31	31.0	Not much	8	8.0
Not at all	10	10.0	Not at all	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0	Total	100	100.0

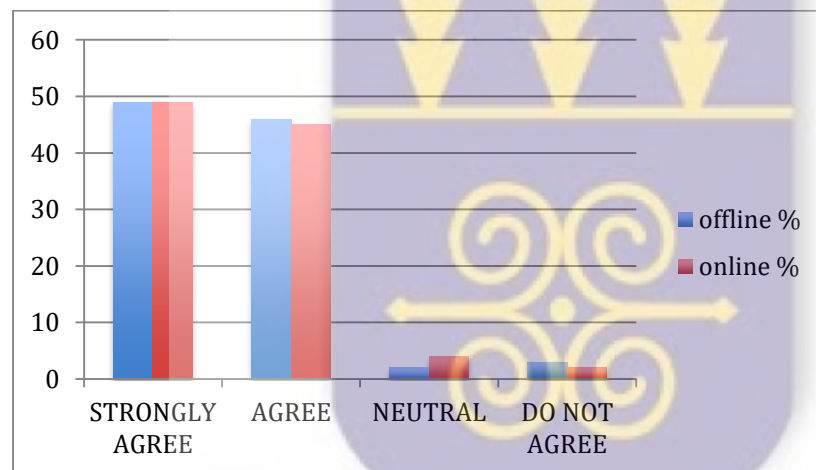
Figure 3 *Degree of trust in online and offline WOM of products and services by Respondents*



4.2.0 Degree of trust in WOM online and offline sources of information by respondents

Here, irrespective of their WOM preference, almost the same number of respondents believed that it was important to trust the source of information to believe the message sent. Indeed Figure 4 shows that above nine out 10 of the total number of respondents indicated that the trustworthiness of the source of information was key to believability of the message.

Figure 4. Degree of trust in WOM online and offline sources of information by respondent



4.2.1 Degree of importance of sharing a similar Age on believability of online and offline WOM by respondents

Cumulatively, Table 9 shows that while half of the sample said that having a similar age, as the sender of an offline WOM message was likely to make it more believable, just a little over one-third of them said similarly for the online WOM. Significantly almost the same number of respondents in both online and offline WOM did not think that similar age was an attribute that would lead them in believing a message.

Table 9. Degree of importance of Age in believability of online and offline WOM by respondents

Online			Offline		
Degree	Frequency	Percent	Degree	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	14	14.0	Strongly agree	15	15.0
Agree	26	26.0	Agree	35	35.0
Neutral	23	23.0	Neutral	19	19.0
Do not agree	18	18.0	Do not agree	16	16.0
Strongly disagree	19	19.0	Strongly disagree	15	15.0
Total	100	100.0	Total	100	100.0

4.2.2 Degree of importance of sharing a similar Gender in believability of online and offline WOM by respondents

In Table 10, cumulatively, nearly half of the respondent disagree that having a common gender can contribute to the believability of the message in the online WOM while just about a third disagree with this in the offline WOM. However almost the same number, of about one-third (30% online & 33% offline) of the population agree in both online WOM and offline WOM that sharing same gender can contribute to the believability of the message.

Table 10. Degree of importance of sharing a similar Gender in believability of online and offline WOM by respondents

Online			Offline		
Degree	Frequency	Percent	Degree	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	5	5.0	Strongly agree	6	6.0
Agree	30	30.0	Agree	33	33.0
Neutral	17	17.0	Neutral	23	23.0
Do not agree	31	31.0	Do not agree	22	22.0
Strongly disagree	17	17.0	Strongly disagree	16	16.0
Total	100	100.0	Total	100	100.0

4.2.3 Degree of importance of sharing a similar interest in believability of online and offline WOM by respondents

Significantly, in Table 11, just a little less than three-quarters of the respondents held the view that having a similar interest with a sender of a message in offline WOM did

contribute to believability of the message. In online WOM the number was even higher (85%).

Table 11 *Degree of importance of sharing a similar Interest in believability of online and offline WOM by respondents*

Online			Offline		
Degree	Frequency	Percent	Degree	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	33	33.0	Strongly agree	32	32.0
Agree	52	52.0	Agree	46	46.0
Neutral	6	6.0	Neutral	16	16.0
Do not agree	5	5.0	Do not agree	4	4.0
Strongly disagree	4	4.0	Strongly disagree	2	2.0
Total	100	100.0		100	100.0

4.2.4 Degree of importance of sharing Family ties in believability of online and offline WOM by respondents

Remarkably, cumulatively, about six in 10 (63%) of the respondents subscribed to the view that shared family ties was key in believability of online WOM while almost the same number (66%) had a similar view regarding offline WOM. Table 12 also shows that as much a quarter of the population was uncertain as to whether shared family ties influenced the believability of the message or not in online WOM. About the same number also felt similarly in offline WOM.

Table 12. *Degree of importance of sharing family ties in the believability of online and offline WOM by respondents*

Online			Offline		
Degree	Frequency	Percent	Degree	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	20	20.0	Strongly agree	26	26.0
Agree	43	43.0	Agree	40	40.0
Neutral	25	25.0	Neutral	19	19.0
Do not agree	8	8.0	Do not agree	8	8.0
Strongly disagree	4	4.0	Strongly disagree	7	7.0
Total	100	100.0	Total	100	100.0

4.2.5 Degree of importance of sharing friendship ties in believability of online and offline WOM by respondents

Table 13 indicates that while 80% of the respondents were convinced that sharing friendship ties did contribute to their believability of offline WOM, a little less than that (78%) of them felt that friendship could do likewise in online WOM. It is significant that in both offline and online, less than 10% of the respondent felt that friendship ties did not contribute to the believability of the message.

Table 13. *Degree of importance of sharing friendship ties in the believability of online and offline WOM by respondents*

Online			Offline		
Degree	Frequency	Percent	Degree	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	30	30.0	Strongly agree	26	26.0
Agree	48	48.0	Agree	54	54.0
Neutral	17	17.0	Neutral	13	13.0
Do not agree	4	4.0	Do not agree	4	4.0
Strongly disagree	1	1.0	Strongly disagree	3	3.0
Total	100	100.0	Total	100	100.0

4.2.6 Degree of importance of Education level ties in believability of online and offline WOM by respondents

Out of the total number of respondents, four-fifth of them supported the view that having a similar education level with a message sender could contribute to the believability of the online WOM while just a little over that (82%) answered similarly in the offline WOM, as shown in Table 13. Also the same number (4) of respondents of both offline WOM and online WOM disagreed with the view that similar education could contribute to believability.

Table 14. Degree of importance of Educational level ties on the believability of online and offline WOM by respondents

Online			Offline		
Degree	Frequency	Percent	Degree	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	32	32.0	Strongly agree	27	27.0
Agree	48	48.0	Agree	55	55.0
Neutral	13	13.0	Neutral	11	11.0
Do not agree	7	7.0	Do not agree	6	6.0
Strongly disagree	0	0	Strongly disagree	1	1.0
Total	100	100.0	Total	100	100.0

4.2.7 Degree of believability of online and offline WOM on purchase decision

Table 15 and shows that, significantly, more than twice the respondents who said that it was extremely likely that online WOM could lead to their purchase decision, said offline could do similarly. Also cumulatively, more than seven times the number of respondents who disagreed that offline WOM could lead to their purchase decision said similarly for online.

Table 15. Degree of believability of online and offline WOM on purchase decision

Online			Offline		
Degree	Frequency	Percent	Degree	Frequency	Percent
Extremely likely	24	24.0	Extremely likely	56	56.0
Likely	39	39.0	Likely	34	34.0
Neutral	15	15.0	Neutral	7	7.0
Unlikely	21	21.0	Unlikely	3	3.0
Extremely unlikely	1	1.0	Extremely unlikely	0	0
Total	100	100.0	Total	100	100.0

4.3 Cross-Tabulations

Cross-tabulations were done in a few cases to help illustrate and explain some of the research questions. It was to find out whether gender had any relationship with decision purchase in both the online and offline. It also depicted the relationship between the number of close friends in the preferred WOM and degree of believability in that WOM.

4.3.1 Crosstabs of gender and degree of online and offline likelihood of purchase

Figure 6 shows that nearly four in 10 of the respondents who indicated that they were inclined to purchase due to online WOM were males, while a quarter of the respondents were females. In the offline WOM, Figure 7 depicts that even more males (52%) indicated that they were inclined purchase. Here the women who were inclined to purchase were just about four in 10.

Figure 5. *Gender and degree of online WOM and the likelihood of purchase Decision*

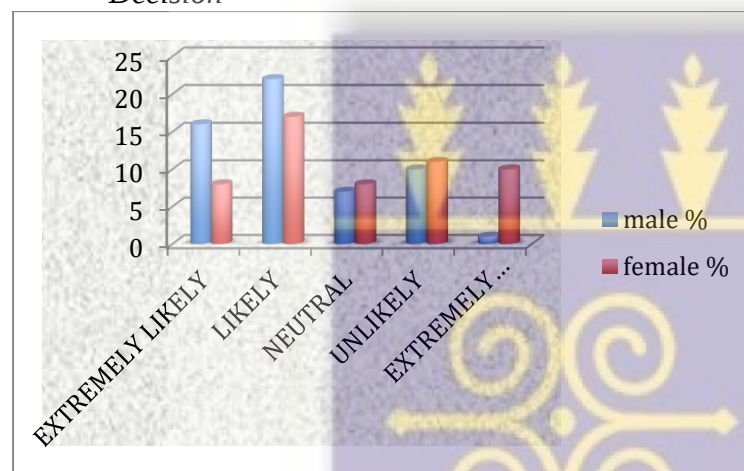
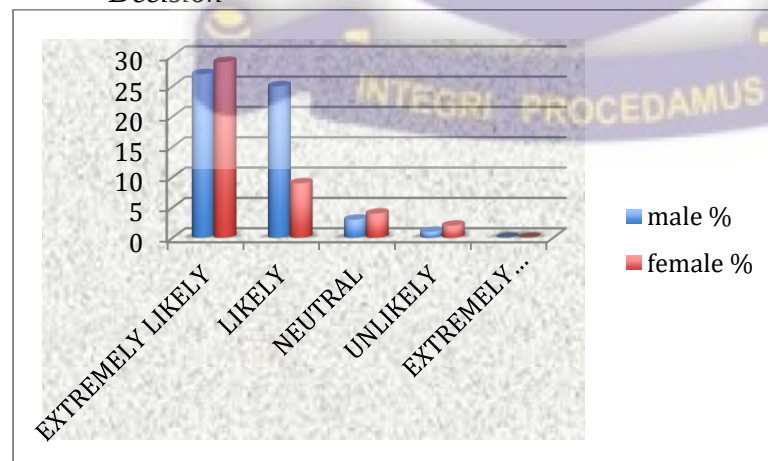


Figure 6. *Gender and degree of offline WOM and the likelihood of purchase Decision*



4.3.2 Number of close friends online/offline and degree of believability of preferred WOM

Tables 16, and Figure 8 show that nearly half (45%) of the total number of respondents had more than three close friends offline. As much as four-fifth of the sample said that offline WOM could contribute to their believability while just about half (48%) reported the same in online (Table 17 and Figure 9). Remarkably, in Table 17, the highest number of respondents without close friends online, which was 11, said online WOM had minor effect. Surprisingly, eight, which was the highest number of respondents without close friends offline, said offline had a major effect. (Table 16)

Table 16. *Crosstabs of number of close friends offline and degree of believability*

Degree	NONE	1-3	4 or more	Total
Major effect	8(22.2%)	17(47.2%)	11(30%)	36(100.0%)
Moderate effect	2(4.3%)	21(44.7%)	24(51.1%)	47(100.0%)
Neutral	3(33.3%)	2(22.2%)	4(44.4%)	9(100.0%)
Minor effect	0(.0%)	4(57%)	3(42%)	7(100.0%)
No effect	0 (.0%)	1(100%)	0(.0%)	1(100.0%)
Total	13(13.0%)	45(45.0%)	42.0%	100(100%)

Table 17. *Crosstabs of number of close friends online and degree of believability*

Degree	NONE	1-3	4 or more	Total
Major effect	4(22.2%)	10(55.6%)	4(22.2%)	18(100.0%)
Moderate effect	9(22.5%)	20(50.0%)	11(27.5%)	40(100.0%)
Neutral	4(26.7%)	7(46.7%)	4(26.7%)	15(100.0%)
Minor effect	11(44.0%)	7(28.0%)	7(28.0%)	25(100.0%)
No effect	2 (100.0%)	0(.0%)	0(.0%)	2(100.0%)
Total	30(30.0%)	44(44.0%)	26(26.0%)	100(100%)

Figure 7. Number of close friends offline and degree of believability(%) online

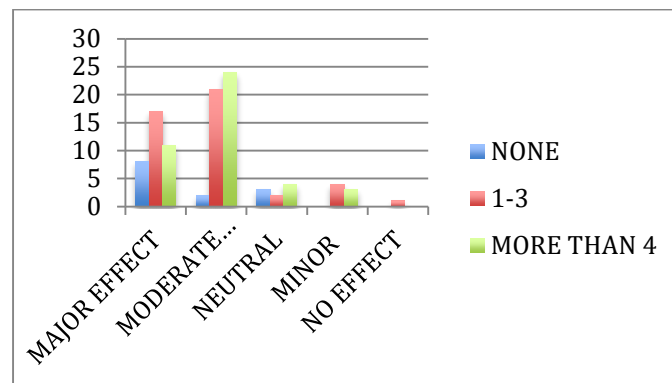
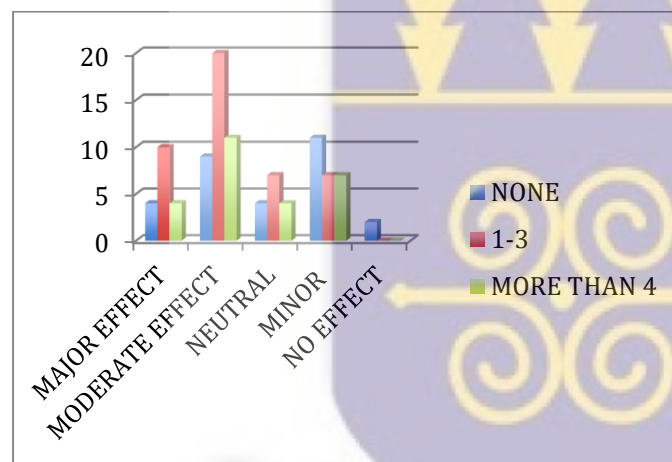


Figure 8. Number of close friends online and degree of believability(%) online



4.3.3 Hypotheses testing

The study tested two hypotheses namely:

H1: The more friends one has offline the more one would believe in offline WOM

H2: The more friends one has in online the more one would believe in online WOM

The hypotheses were generated from the premise that the friendship or familiarity with a sender of a message was likely to influence the believability or otherwise of a message. It is probable that the number of friends one has can influence the messages

received especially when they share similar views at a particular moment in time. Chu and Yoojung (2011), indicate that making more friends online can be lead to increased credibility of messages shared. The study wanted to find out whether this observation was valid. Consequently, the study conducted a Pearson Chi square correlation tests to find out the extent of the relationship between the number of close friends of respondents in a preferred WOM and the believability of that WOM. The result ($p > 0.05$), showed that there was no significant relationship between the number of close friends and the believability of his or her preferred WOM

H1 was rejected because the test result was 0.265 being more than 0.05, which indicated that there was no significant relationship between the number of friends one has offline and ones belief in offline WOM. This indicated that one's number of friends and one's offline belief were independent of each other. (Chi-square = 9.995, $df = 8$, $p = .265$)

Similarly H2 is also rejected because the test result was 0.096 being more than 0.05, which indicated that there was no significant relationship between the number of friends one has online and ones belief in online WOM. The means the relationship occurred by chance. One's number of friends and one's belief in online WOM were not related. (Chi-square = 13.478, $df = 8$, $p = .096$)

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter deliberated on the findings, detailing them in tables and figures. It also discussed hypotheses tests conducted and their implications for the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study by discussing the findings in relation to the research intentions and questions projected. The study examines students believability preference between online and offline WOM and makes inferences about them. It also discusses the gaps it tries to fill, enumerates its challenges and then its limitations. Further, this chapter suggests future research, which could contribute to its subject area.

5.1 Degree of believability between online and offline WOM by respondents

The over-riding objective of this study was to establish the extent to which undergraduate students of the University of Ghana believe communication messages they receive through offline compared to online. Literature noted in the introductory chapters of this study indicated that there was no consensus on which WOM was more believable among young people. The study affirmed the view postulated by Keller Fay (2010) and Xiabo (2015), which found that young people found offline WOM more credible/believable than online WOM.

Just like Keller Fay (2010), this study showed that a significant number (nearly six out of 10 in this study) of respondents found it extremely likely that offline WOM more than online WOM could contribute to young people's purchase decision. Also, in investigating the degree of trust the respondents had in either WOM, the study supported the view that offline was more trustworthy.

As many as nearly seven in 10 were of the view that they could trust offline WOM while a lesser number of almost four in 10 said they could trust online. Unsurprisingly the same number (40%) said they did not trust online WOM while less than 10 said they did not trust offline WOM. These findings seem to suggest that offline WOM has something that online WOM struggles to match up to. It is in consonance with Keller Fay (2010), which espouses the view that social context cues are likely to contribute to its credibility. This can be explained employing the Attribution theory. The Attribution theory, which is a framework that grounds this work, notes that if a sender is perceived by the receiver as trustworthy then the receiver is likely to be influenced by the relationship with the sender and consequently lead to trust of the message (Martensen & Groholdt, 2015). The finding of this study can also be explained in relation to Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) who found that young people enjoy the opportunity to connect with others online but are not persuaded towards a purchase decision because they cannot be assured by the trust and honesty of online WOM.

The scholars' views agree with the responses obtained in this study. When asked to rate the degree to which they needed to trust the sender to believe the message, almost every respondent (95%) agreed that it was important to trust the online and offline sources to believe the message. Remarkably, the responses on degree of importance for either WOM did not parallel the lopsided believability preference for offline WOM against online WOM. Instead it showed that almost the same number of respondents (75%) in both online and offline WOM attached high importance to their preferred WOM.

5.1.1 Homophily and believability of preferred WOM

Homophily or strength of social ties is the degree to which an individual is similar in terms of shared characteristics (Rogers 1983, in Gfrerer and Pokrywka 2012). One of this study's research questions measured the variable of social ties because according Brown and Reingen (1987), individuals are likely give value to information based on how familiar or socially close they are with the sender. Steffes and Burgee (2009), Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) and Bayraktar and Erdogan (2015) analyzed strength of ties in terms of the extent to which it contributed to online and offline WOM believability. Unlike the Steffes and Burgee (2009), Bayraktar and Erdogan (2015) and Gfrerer and Pokrywka (2012) found that strength of ties plays a key role in enhancing the value of offline WOM but not online WOM. According to the responses, this study falls short of affirming this observation in absolute terms. Just a little over six in 10 agreed that sharing similar characteristics was essential to the value of the message in both offline WOM (65%) and online WOM (63%). The individual variable shared ties examined such as *friendship* (78% & 80%) *family* (63% & 66%), *gender* (35% & 39%), and *educational level* (80% & 82%) did not reveal significant differences between online and offline WOM.

However, in investigating the specific shared tie of *age*, and shared tie of *similar interest*, there were marked differences between online and offline WOM. Half of the total respondents felt that sharing a similar *age* with a sender was key in enhancing the value and trust in the message in the offline WOM while four in 10 felt it was important regarding online WOM. Also, regarding the variable similar *interest*, as much as nearly nine in 10 (85%) said that it was key to believability of online WOM while almost eight in 10 (78%) believed similarly in offline WOM. The data indicated

that, in all but the variable of shared *interest*, respondents regarded ties as essential more in offline WOM than online WOM. It can be inferred from this that in conversations online, having similar interest is likely to be the main facilitator. This is probably because in the online environment, personalities could be anonymous but still carry on a conversation held on by their common interest. One can thus conclude that ties or homophily is likely to improve the trust one associates to WOM albeit not significantly.

5.1.2 Number of close friends in online/offline WOM and influence

With the intent of determining the information seeking behaviour between online and offline WOM, Steffes and Burgee (2009) examined the number of close friends of respondents in an effort to draw a relationship between the number friends and the likelihood of being influenced through offline or online WOM. Likewise, it was investigated in this research and concluded that majority of respondents (44%) of the respondents were in the category of 1-3 close friends.

It also found that, out of respondents who had just a few (1-3) friends in online, three in 10 of them thought online WOM could contribute to believability. However out of those who had more than four close friends online, less than two in 10 believed that online WOM had influence on them. This differed in the case of offline. Here, nearly the same number of respondents for both those with 1-3 (38%) and those with four or more (35%) close friends believed that offline could contribute to their believability of messages from their friends. In this regard, one can conclude that influence WOM was not based on the number of friends. (refer to 5.1.4)

5.1.3 Crosstabs of gender and the degree of likelihood to purchase by respondents

Another objective of the study was to examine the relationship between gender and the degree to which it could contribute to their purchase decision. The study found that more males than females were more inclined to be led to purchase in both online and offline. This may be due to the uneven sample population (55% males/ 44% females) as more men answered the questionnaire. This notwithstanding, differences in the result were significantly higher than 10% (gender difference). For instance in online WOM, while four in 10 were males, a little above two in 10 were females with an inclination to be led to purchase. This was mirrored in offline WOM, which showed that more than half (52% males) of the total respondents and less than four in 10 (38% females) indicated their inclination to be influenced to purchase. Males more than female thus were likely to purchase based on the recommendations of friends.

5.1.4 Hypotheses

Pearson's chi-square test were conducted to find out whether there was any significant relationship between the number of friends of respondents and the degree of believability of their preferred WOM. The test showed that in both offline and online WOM there was no significant relationship between the number of friends and the preferred WOM. This study concludes that having a high number of friends on one's preferred WOM did not mean one was likely to necessarily find that WOM preference any more or less believable.

5.1.5 CONCLUSION

As the Internet grows in its platform options, more WOM is engendered online with a concomitant increase in number of users. Internet-based WOM is therefore rising in prominence, calling on managers and communication scholars to evaluate its comparability to conventional WOM. This study chose to evaluate this relatively new medium of online against the traditional or older medium of offline. It set out to discuss the differences between online and offline WOM and find out the degree to which young people were inclined to either of them. This study was triggered by the work of scholars who were in disagreement as to which WOM was more persuasive. This study found that in general terms messages received through offline WOM were more believable than online. In arriving at the conclusion, the study measured a number variables which included “importance attached to the preferred WOM”, the “degree of inclination to believe by of a preferred WOM”, “trustworthiness of a preferred WOM”, “strength of ties and ones preferred WOM” and “degree to which a preferred WOM relates with purchase”. In almost all these variables, more importance was attached to offline WOM. Offline WOM was seen as more influential and trustworthy. It scored high marks on informational credibility because it gained more from the value by virtue it social context circumstance.

5.1.6 Limitations of the study

Despite its limitations, the study is likely to stimulate future investigations in WOM. This study was limited primarily in the sample population chosen. Its intent was to sample the regular University of Ghana undergraduate students. However due to time constraints of the need to meet the deadline for submission, the study employed convenience sample on available undergraduate students that were on the University

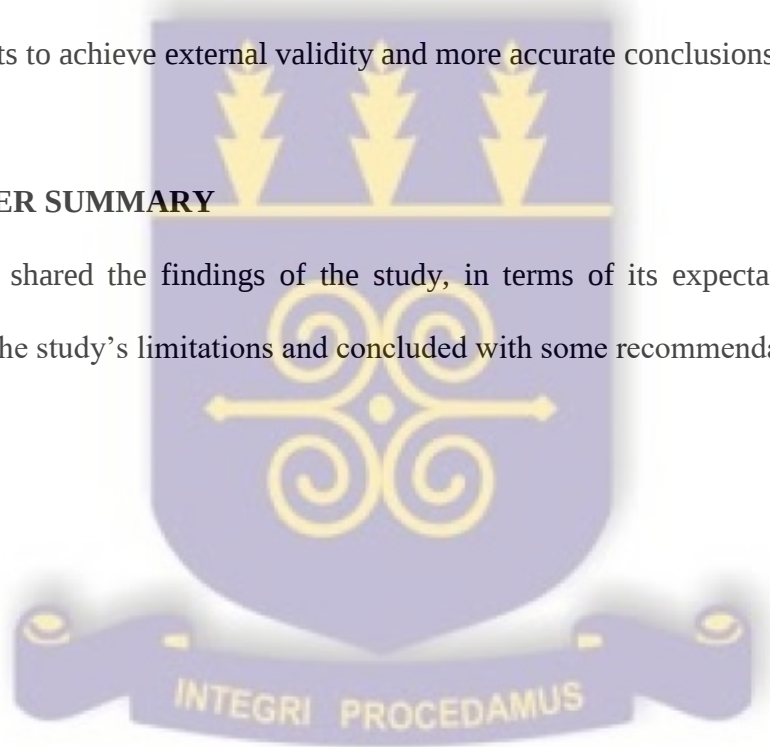
of Ghana campus during the long vacation period. In effect it limits the ability to generalize as the sample may not very representative of the population.

5.1.7 Recommendations

It is suggested that future studies are undertaken in this area because WOM is a subject that is employed whether directly or indirectly in our daily lives. It is essential to understand WOM in the Ghana context, as literature is limited. It is important that future studies are done with more representative sampling methods and rigorous statistical tests to achieve external validity and more accurate conclusions.

5.2 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter shared the findings of the study, in terms of its expectations. It also enumerated the study's limitations and concluded with some recommendations.



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APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello

I am Alex Sackey-Eshun.

I am a student of this university undertaking research work for the award of M.A in Communication Studies. My research topic is '*Believability of Online and Offline WOM among young people: A study of the undergraduate students of the University of Ghana*'

I will be glad if you could answer this questionnaire as honestly as you can. It will enable me generate valid data for analysis.

Your responses will be kept confidential
It will take just about 10 minutes of your time.

First, some questions about your demographics

1. Level

- [1] 100
- [2] 200
- [3] 300
- [4] 400

2. Age

- [1] under 18
- [2] 18-30
- [3] over 30

3. Gender

- [1] Male
- [2] Female

4. Are you employed?

- [1] Yes
- [2] No

5. How many close friends do you have?

	Online	Offline (face-to-face)
None	[1]	[1]
1-3	[2]	[2]
4 or more	[3]	[3]

6. How sociable are you?

- [1] very sociable
- [2] sociable
- [3] not sociable

7. Do you use the Internet?

- [1] Yes
- [2] No

8. What media device(s) do you use access the Internet

- [1] Cell phone
- [2] Tablet
- [3] Laptop
- [4] Desktop computer
- [5] Other

9. How often do you use the Internet (for respondents who use the Internet)

- [1] daily
- [2] a few times a week
- [3] once in a while

10. I search for WOM information about products, brands and services via online

- [1] always
- [2] often
- [3] sometimes
- [4] rarely
- [5] never

11. I search for WOM information about products, brands and services via offline (face to face conversation)

- [1] always
- [2] often
- [3] sometimes
- [4] rarely
- [5] never

12. The more important the product is to me, the more I search for WOM information via online regarding that information.

- [1] strongly agree
- [2] agree
- [3] neutral
- [4] do not agree
- [5] strongly disagree

13. The more important the product is to me, the more I search for WOM information via offline (face-to-face) regarding that information

- [1] strongly agree
- [2] agree
- [3] neutral
- [4] do not agree
- [5] strongly disagree

14. Online WOM can make me believe information about products, brands and services
- [1] major effect
 - [2] moderate effect
 - [3] neutral
 - [4] minor effect
 - [5] no effect
15. Offline WOM (face-to-face) can make me believe information about products, brands and services
- [1] major effect
 - [2] moderate effect
 - [3] neutral
 - [4] minor effect
 - [5] no effect
16. I trust the WOM information I receive about products brands and services via online
- [1] very much
 - [2] much
 - [3] neutral
 - [4] not much
 - [5] not at all
17. I trust the WOM information I receive about products brands and services via offline (face-to-face)
- [1] very much
 - [2] much
 - [3] neutral
 - [4] not much
 - [5] not at all
18. It is important that I trust the offline source of WOM information to believe the message I receive about products, brands and services
- [1] strongly agree
 - [2] agree
 - [3] neutral
 - [4] do not agree
 - [5] strongly disagree
19. It is important that I trust the online source of WOM information to believe the message I receive about products, brands and services
- [1] strongly agree
 - [2] agree
 - [3] neutral
 - [4] do not agree
 - [5] strongly disagree

20. It is important that I and the online message senders share similar characteristics in order for me to trust the WOM message

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Do not Agree	Strongly disagree
Age	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Gender	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Interest	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Family	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Friendship	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Education level	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]

21. It is important that I and the offline (face-to-face) message senders share similar characteristics in order for me to trust the WOM message

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Do not Agree	Strongly disagree
Age	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Gender	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Interest	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Family	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Friendship	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Education level	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]

22. WOM Information about products, brands and services that I receive via offline (face-to-face) can make me decide to purchase

- [1] extremely likely
- [2] likely
- [3] neutral
- [4] unlikely
- [5] extremely unlikely

23. WOM Information about products, brands and services that I receive via online can make me decide to purchase

- [1] extremely likely
- [2] likely
- [3] neutral
- [4] unlikely
- [5] extremely unlikely

Thank you for your time!