The growing importance of customers as spokespeople for products and brands in an online context has prompted researchers to analyze parameters of word of mouth messages. However, customer-to-customer communications vary according to qualities that go far beyond referral volume. At present, the measures of positive WOM behavior do neither capture the richness nor the content-related specificity of customer referrals, especially in the context of offline WOM. A thorough investigation of distinct message dimensions is needed to better utilize customer referrals as a targeted marketing instrument. Based on a large-scale customer survey across diverse product and service categories, this paper empirically confirms eight generalizable facets of positive WOM messages. The derived customer referral scale is applied to describe specific referral patterns across channels and industries and to investigate the influence of pre-purchase marketing measures on post-purchase consumer referral. The findings allow marketers to monitor recommendation activities on specific dimensions and to determine targets for future planning. Derived referral dimensions enable researchers to better predict specific consequences of customer WOM and to investigate its marketing-related antecedents in causal effect models.

1. Introduction

Since its inception, scholars have found word of mouth (WOM) to be a more effective means of communication than other marketing tools (Engel/Kegerreis/Blackwell 1969), because it has a greater persuasive effect than traditional media (e.g. Herr/Kardes/Kim 1991). At present, various interactive online communication tools, such as e-mails, tweets, instant messages, online discussion boards, and blogs, facilitate an even broader diffusion of product-related comments among consumers (Vehl/Choi 2011). However, one should not assume all positive WOM messages to be equal. There is a wide spectrum between a declaration like “I really like the design and features of my new tablet” and excessive statements about a beloved product that can be closely intertwined with the customer’s self-concept.

Even though WOM drives purchase decisions in 20 to 50 percent of cases (particularly initial purchases or expensive goods) (Bughin/Doogan/Vetvik 2010), marketers have few insights into the specific persuasion paths involved in WOM transmission (see Toder-Alon/Brunel/Fournier 2014). Mazzarol/Sweeney/Soutar (2007, p. 1476) state that “[...] WOM is a potentially richer construct that needs more detailed examination, especially given its recognized importance.” To date, few studies have accounted for the multidimensionality of WOM messages. Typically, empirical studies utilize one-dimensional measures of WOM and ignore differences in persuasive potential associated with specific customer referral content or intent. Although there has been an increase in efforts to analyze the language and rhetoric of customer online reviews automatically, still basic research on referral message dimensions needs to be carried out (Berger 2014).

This study aims to develop and validate a generalizable conceptualization of distinct customer referral dimensions. We follow the argumentation of Rossiter (2011)
that any construct definition needs to be specified according to three dimensions: (1) the object which needs to be specified, (2) the attributes to be rated on, and (3) the rater entity. Following this conceptualization, we do not intend to measure overall WOM but restrict our measurement approach to positive WOM. We characterize positive WOM by its content dimensions as well as by senders’ intent. Our rater entity is the sender perspective. Going above and beyond the initial scale explorations of Harrison-Walker (2001) and Sweeney/Soutar/Mazzarol (2012), we develop and test a comprehensive measurement model that can be utilized for both goods and services and across categories. Although we do not provide a holistic input-outcome model of WOM, inferences on contingency factors and marketing related antecedents of the derived referral measures are drawn. Practitioners from different categories can measure recommendation activities on specific message dimensions or gain knowledge about the relevance of these dimensions within their category. Moreover, the scale can be utilized to infer ambassador-types.

We conducted a large-scale online survey in which subjects reflect about their actual recommendation behavior based on real-life customer experiences. Unlike most recent research on WOM content, we do not focus on online recommendations alone. We use a literature-based approach to select items as a basis from which to measure distinctive customer recommendation behavior. If needed, existing measurement scales (e.g. Harrison-Walker 2001; Sweeney/Soutar/Mazzarol 2012) are applied or modified. New items are drawn from a reflection of existing WOM research or derived from related research disciplines (e.g. traditional advertisement or communication theory). The multitude of items are reduced by factor-analytic methods and integrated in a measurement scale of customer referral dimensions.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Conceptualizations and measurement approaches for WOM

WOM is characterized as „informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers“ (Westbrook 1987, p. 261). For a long time, WOM was treated as a single dependent variable of consumer behavior besides customer satisfaction or repurchase intention. Such one-dimensional conceptualizations and measures of WOM primarily refer to:

- Volume of WOM: e.g. Westbrook (1987); Anderson (1998); Godes/Mayzlin (2004); Carroll/Ahuvia (2006); Liu (2006); Shao (2012).
- Probability of WOM: e.g. Kim/Han/Lee (2001); Babbin et al. (2005).
- Positive versus negative WOM: e.g. Arndt (1968); Herr/Kardes/Kim (1991); Bone (1995); Liu (2006).

Even the one-dimensional measurement approaches of WOM take the underlying complexity of real customer referral into account. For example, Babin et al. (2005, p. 136) measure WOM according to the sum of the following three items: „I will say positive things about this restaurant to other people,“ „I will recommend it to someone who seeks my advice,” and „I will encourage friends and relatives to visit the restaurant.“ This example of a one-dimensional WOM measure indicates the richness of WOM as a construct and hints at the need to measure multiple dimensions: The indicators range from merely intending to report one’s own experiences to addressing selected receivers to intending to actively persuade others. Clearly, these three intentions do not need to coincide and should therefore be differentiated in the measurement.

Harrison-Walker (2001) was among the first to identify and measure two major dimensions of WOM using a standardized scale. By utilizing six items, content quality aspects were incorporated to measure the praise and activity of WOM. Based on the conceptual work of Mazzaroll/Sweeney/Soutar (2007), Sweeney/Soutar/Mazzarol (2012) empirically tested a multidimensional conceptualization of WOM by discriminating between WOM content and delivery characteristics. Tab. 1 provides an overview of the scarce (questionnaire-based) multidimensional measurement approaches of WOM from the sender’s perspective, which serves as valuable basis for our further scale development.

Textual analyses of customer reviews provide additional evidence for the multidimensional nature of WOM (e.g. Liu/Zhan 2011; Pani/Zhang 2011; Schindler/Bickart 2012). Among other variables, these analyses refer to review length (Pani/Zhang 2011; Schindler/Bickart 2012), linguistic styles (e.g. Ludwig et al. 2013) and the diverse rhetorical repertoire, including explanation versus endorsement (Kozinets et al. 2010), or advice framing and foundation of authority (Toder-Aloni/Brunell/Fournier 2014). Unfortunately, the methodological approaches of these research works are highly different, and the heterogeneous databases do not yet allow to be integrated into a unified scale. Moreover, the method-driven focus on electronic WOM ignores the majority of all WOM activities, which still occurs offline. Thus, there is a need to integrate different dimensions of positive WOM into a generic WOM scale that fits both the online and offline contexts.

We integrate existing measurement approaches and propose a simple yet powerful pyramid structuring of WOM messages, in particular customer referrals (see Fig. 1). On the basis of a review of WOM literature, the content and intent of customer referral emerged as two key dimensions that explain WOM behavior: Referral content characterizes the message as such, especially in terms of the quality and quantity of the information provided. Referral intent brings the message into the broader context of the sender-receiver framework: How is the message...
linked to the object (product) and the subject (receiver)? Based on a broad interdisciplinary literature review, we identify two key (sub-) dimensions for each of the four WOM characterizations. Altogether, this framework highlights the multi-faceted patterns of consumer referrals and allows practitioners to evaluate appropriate referral designs according to marketing goals.

2.2. Proposed referral dimensions

This research framework provides a differentiated and comprehensive understanding of WOM activities according to eight (sub-) dimensions related to content and intent of consumer referrals. This conceptualization provides the basis to study antecedents of distinct customer referral behavior as well as product- or channel-specific contingencies. In the following, we specify and operationalize each of these dimensions based upon previous research and outline its marketing relevance. Whenever feasible, we illustrate our argumentation by quoting original customer referrals from recent restaurant reviews on TripAdvisor.com [1]. These examples demonstrate the extent to which message design aspects vary even if always rated positively.

2.2.1. Measurement dimensions of referral content

Quantity of WOM is an issue within WOM research that receives a great deal of attention (e. g. Westbrook 1987; Anderson 1998; Babin et al. 2005; Liu 2006; Shao 2012). While early research works simply counted the number of WOM messages with respect to frequency or number of contacts, recent research works try to quantify as well the length of a single WOM message (see Section 2.1). Building on this recent research, we propose two separate measurement dimensions of WOM quantity.

The first WOM facet we suggest is intensity of referral, which measures the spread of WOM messages in terms of incidents and number recipients. A high volume referred to as "intensity of referral" should be regarded as an important marketing goal for businesses.

From a comprehensive perspective, WOM intensity can be decomposed into two separate measurement dimensions: WOM activity and WOM frequency.

WOM activity refers to the number of contacts initiated by a sender to a receiver. This dimension captures the volume of WOM dissemination, highlighting the extent to which the sender has reached the intended audience.

WOM frequency, on the other hand, measures the number of contacts made by the sender within a specific period. This allows researchers to gauge the regularity with which a sender engages in WOM activities.

To operationalize these dimensions, we follow previous research in using survey data to collect WOM content and activity information. For example, Sweeney/Soutar/Mazzarol (2012) propose the following items to measure WOM activity:

- How often do you engage in WOM activities?
- How many contacts do you make per week?

By incorporating these items into a survey, we can empirically assess the WOM activity level of an individual, thereby providing a quantitative measure of WOM intensity.

To illustrate the measurement dimensions, we provide an example from TripAdvisor.com. A recent review of a restaurant in New York City highlights the sender's WOM activity:

"I had the best experience ever! I will definitely recommend this place to all my friends. The service was outstanding, and the food was delicious. I will be back soon!"

This review demonstrates a high level of WOM activity, as the sender has initiated multiple contacts to share their positive experience with potential customers. By quantifying the number of such contacts, we can assess the intensity of referral and its potential impact on the restaurant's reputation and sales.

Fib. 1: Multidimensional customer referral framework

Tab. 1: Multidimensional measurement scales of WOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Industry Description</th>
<th>Dimensions/ Factor Structure</th>
<th>Higher-order Structure</th>
<th>Method/Measures</th>
<th>Method/Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harrison-Walker (2001)</td>
<td>WOM</td>
<td>Services (veterinary clinic and hair salon customers)</td>
<td>(1) Frequency (2) Number of contacts (3) Detail (4) Praise</td>
<td>(1) Praise (2) Activity</td>
<td>EFA/CFA with 471 consumers; six from the 13 original items suggested</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goyette et al. (2010)</td>
<td>eWOM</td>
<td>Electronic services (like Amazon, Ebay, or Expedia)</td>
<td>(1) WOM intensity (2) Positive valence (3) Negative valence (4) WOM content</td>
<td></td>
<td>CFA with 218 respondents; nine items suggested</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweeney/Soutar/Mazzarol (2012)</td>
<td>WOM</td>
<td>Consumer services</td>
<td>(1) Cognitive content (2) Richness of content (3) Strength of delivery</td>
<td>(1) Content perspective (2) Delivery perspective</td>
<td>EFA/CFA with 500 respondents for positive WOM and 501 for negative WOM; 12 from 46 items suggested (validated for sender and receiver)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sents a prerequisite from a marketing perspective even though there are heterogeneous results on the consequences of WOM volume on sales (e.g. Liu 2006; Gopinath/Thomas/Krishnamurthi 2014). We expect the number of referrals to be of relevance, when positive WOM is used as means of marketing communication.

We complement this facet by detail of referral as a second quantitative measure. In the realm of online customer reviews, text-mining approaches increasingly integrate quantitative measures of review length, in terms of a „content-related quantity of WOM“ (e.g. Mudambil/ Schuff 2010; Pau/Zhang 2011). While Schindler/Bickart (2012) utilize word counts to study the helpfulness of electronic WOM (eWOM), Harrison-Walker (2001) and Sweeney/Soutar/Mazzarol (2014) have addressed WOM detail in the offline WOM context. In line hereto, we propose detail of referral as a second (sub-) dimension of WOM quantity. This dimension characterizes the length of single WOM messages by means of different indicators. The following (full) review on TripAdvisor illustrates a strongly positive customer referral with few details: „Food was good, entertainment was great! Make sure you make a reservation because this place was packed!“ Among others, a minimum referral detail might be needed as a necessary precondition for successfully delivering complex marketing messages via WOM.

Regarding the quality of WOM, we differentiate between an emotional and a functional referral dimension. Hedonic and utilitarian customer experiences are frequently differentiated in consumer behavior research (e.g. Babin/Darden/Griffin 1994; Babin et al. 2005; Lemke/Clark/Wilson 2011; Moore 2015). Hence, it is plausible to presume that a hedonic (or rather utilitarian) consumer experience is communicated in the same way. At the same time, Liang et al. (2014) stress that a customer review can contain both descriptive and evaluative (valenced) linguistic units which impact receivers’ perceived helpfulness of a review. This leads us to the second set of dimensions for positive WOM: emotional and functional referrals.

The importance of emotionality of referral has been stressed again and again within the context of WOM transmission. Sundaram/Mitra/Webster (1998) emphasize the role of WOM to express positive feelings of excitement. Yin/Bond/Zhang (2014) reveal the impact of discrete (positive and negative) emotions on review helpfulness. Gopinath/Thomas/Krishnamurthi (2014) even find an indirect impact of emotional online WOM on firm performance. Apart from the work done by Harrison-Walker (2001), who covers aspects of positive emotional advocacy as part of his WOM dimension praise, little is however known about the underlying experiences which might cause emotional referrals like: „Absolutely fantastic. I wish this restaurant was in my home town.‟ Analogously to the general relevance of emotional appeals in persuasion (MacInnis/Rao/Weiss 2002), we expect comparable effects of emotional recommendations. Thus, we include this dimension in our measurement model.

Supported by the work of Willemsen et al. (2011), we refer to the factual-descriptive and informative nature of WOM as functionality of referral. Literature informs us about the importance of such functional referral for WOM to successfully support marketing actions: Schindler/Bickart (2012) and Liang et al. (2014) provide evidence for a positive relationship between product-descriptive statements and receivers’ assessed value of reviews. Cheemal/Kakati (2010) conceptualize the mere mention of product details. Toder-Alon/BruneI/Fournier (2014, p. 50f) contrast „paradigmatic advice framing‟ (reasoned arguments and validation) with narrative advice framing. The following example illustrates a more functional-descriptive message design: „The restaurants architect and style is very unique and refreshing. The waiters are all very classy and knowledgeable.‟

2.2.2. Measurement dimensions of referral intent

Referral messages are embedded into a broader framework of communication and are thus related to an object (the product) as well as to a subject (the receiver): With regard to the object, the message can be formulated by either a one-sided or a two-sided argumentation line and can be more or less prescriptive. Concerning the subject or addressee, the message can be more or less targeted and communicated proactively or not. These four dimensions of customer referrals and their relevance for marketing are outlined below.

Object-wise, the persuasive potential of WOM messages has been emphasized for a long time: Herr/Kardes/Kim (1991) argue that WOM communication has a greater impact on product judgments than less vivid, printed information. Woodside/Sood/Miller (2008) examine consumer storytelling within WOM and incorporate selling words and normative statements in their measurement approach. Kozinets et al. (2010) correspondingly extract „endorsement‟ as a rhetorical blogging strategy. Recommendations of this kind actively encourage the WOM receiver to comply: „If you are in the Alentejo you have to experience this little restaurant!‟ Sweeney/Soutar/Mazzarol (2012) measure strength of advocacy and find evidence in a subsequent study that a strong advocacy increases both the message influence and receivers’ willingness to adopt the corresponding behavior (Sweeney/Soutar/Mazzarol 2014). Thus, we include prescriptive-ness of referral as a dimension of customer recommendation which is relevant for any targeted marketing actions.

Although we focus on positive consumption experience, WOM messages can also be characterized by a balanced information content of more positively and less satisfying aspects: „Helsinki menu and the wine menu were great. Service was a bit slow, maybe because the place was full, but otherwise good.‟ Previous WOM research (e.g. Godes/Mayzlin 2004) distinguishes between posi-
tive, negative and mixed valence in online conversations. Other studies investigated contradictory information or opposing viewpoints within written eWOM communication (e.g. Mudambi/Schuff 2010; Lil/Zhan 2011; Liang et al. 2014). The favorability of a one-sided or two-sided argumentation typically depends on the degree of the receivers’ involvement. Hovland/Junius/Kelley (1961) provide early evidence of the persuasive impact of one-sided versus two-sided communication. Rucker/Petty/Britton (2008) point out situations where consumers develop a higher attitude certainty if they are influenced by two-sided frames. Furthermore, Crowley/Hoyer (1994, p. 563) emphasize the ability of two-sided information to evoke attributions of an „honest“ or „truth-telling“ advertiser. Such an enhanced credibility perception (e.g. Settle/Golden 1974; Kamins et al. 1989) may strengthen a positive product evaluation by WOM receivers. Marketing should thus foster two-sided referral in case of high-involved recipients, whereas it might favor one-sided referrals for impulse buying products. Thus, we propose two-sidedness of referral as another dimension shaping customers’ online and offline recommendation messages.

Subject-wise, addressee of referral describes whether the sender of a message targets a specifically interested or otherwise fitting audience. Limited benefits will arise from WOM if a customer engages vibrantly in WOM activities but does not select appropriate receivers for a specific object. Thus, Berger (2014) states in his review on WOM behavior that it is of crucial interest for marketers to know whether consumers provide product-related information to a particular audience or just spread their WOM recommendations at random. „It’s a great place to go with kids as it has kid friendly portions, fun decor to keep kids interested and as I said before entertaining waitresses and waiters.” This statement clearly addresses the relevant target group. Thus, we differentiate situations with and without a conscious focus on the addressee of a message. Especially offline WOM might be distributed according to the interests or needs of the audience (Berger 2014). However, there is evidence that most of the motives for sharing WOM are self-focused (e.g. Hemmig-Thurai et al. 2004; Brown et al. 2005) and not necessarily target-group oriented. It is questionable whether marketing communication objectives are adequately addressed in such settings where there is only limited object relevance in WOM. Interestingly, this perspective has not gained much prominence within WOM research thus far. We conceptualize addressee of referral from a (target) marketing perspective: Is a WOM-message directed at an appropriate receiver or not?

Marketing practice typically strives for proactively shared recommendations of satisfied consumers. Dichter (1966, p. 149) states that sharing WOM helps customers to „dispose of the excitement aroused by use of the product.” Highly emotional and arousing products or services often lead to higher levels of activation and tend to boost sharing (Berger 2011). Thus, proactively communicated WOM should depend on accessibility, which might be stimulated by product features of particular interest, emotion, or utility (Berger 2014). Therefore, our final dimension of proactivity of referrals accounts for self-initiated recommendation activities, as opposed to reacting solely to conversation partners or a broader audience. Vice versa, we expect proactivity of referral to be correlated partially negatively with addressee of referral.

3. Data collection and sample description

We surveyed WOM senders about their recommendation behavior in order to empirically investigate the eight conceptualized dimensions of customer referral and to enrich existing measures. A large-scale online survey with \( N = 1000 \) customers forms the basis of the following empirical analysis. A professional market research agency (Lightspeed GMI) carried out the data collection in cooperation with KNSK media agency in 2012. Based on representative quotes for age and gender cohorts, the sample retrieved respondents who memorized a consumption incident which they recommended to others. After screening (based on time and recognizable „clicking-through” patterns), 808 respondents were incorporated into the final analysis. While completing the online survey, respondents explained details about their most recent or salient consumption experience, which they had been recommending to others.

Initially, respondents were prompted to name the particular product or service they were recommending to others and its brand (if applicable). Thereafter, respondents were asked to articulate their motivation for recommending and to rate both the characteristics of the underlying experience and the multiple measures on the specific WOM behavior. Such a recall of consumption incidents has been utilized in cross-categorical studies of (dis)satisfaction with customer service experiences (Bitner/Booms/Tetreault 1990) or in a motivational analysis of positive and negative WOM drivers (Sundaram/Mitral Webster 1998). Relying on a particular incident allows us to relate specific referral dimensions to real customer experiences in varying product categories. Thereby, we avoid methodological shortcomings concerning the link of measured WOM intentions and real WOM behavior (Matos/Rossi 2008).

Respondents referred in their answers to a broad range of products and services from diverse categories. As shown in Fig. 2, our dataset thus contains offerings from multiple categories, which supports a cross-categorical generalizability of the aspirated WOM conceptualization. The diversity of goods and services includes businesses like car-glass replacements, banking services, telecommunication equipment and even restaurant visits. Note however that not all categories are referred to with equal intensity. Both category-specific as well as gender-specific effects are to be observed in Fig. 2. This is mirrored by an in-depth comparison at the brand level: The most rec-
ommented brands among the 808 customer experiences are Samsung (83), Apple (48), and Amazon (23). However, many recommendations have also been made about relatively unknown online brands (27) or regional brands (15).

Even though only about 10% of all WOM communications is expected to take place online (Keller/Fay 2012), the majority of current WOM research utilizes the available data of online customer reviews or blogs (e.g. Trusov/Bucklin/Pauwels 2009; Archak/Ghosel/Pepiotis 2011; Li/Zhan 2011; Schindler/Bickart 2012; Ludwig et al. 2013). This study includes both online and offline recommendations to provide a generalizable measurement instrument which can be applied to customer referral messages across categories. In our dataset, the overwhelming majority of customers (71% of all respondents) recommended their experiences exclusively in personal conversations (offline WOM). Some 26% of all respondents engaged in both online and offline WOM activities and only 3% used online WOM channels exclusively. The latter finding can be explained by the fact that 16–24 years (17%) and 25–34 years (16%) constituted the smallest cohorts in the data set.

Most recommendations are provided to friends and family rather than to colleagues or other contacts. The role of WOM to strangers is negligible, which is explainable given the small amount of (exclusively) online WOM. Analogous patterns can be found among those customers who recommended goods or services online: Personal messages (e.g. e-mail or other private message services) constitute the most popular channel for eWOM, followed by „like“ buttons and consumer reviews (e.g. on retailer websites or in forums) [2]. Respondents thus favored online channels which allowed for a specific richness of WOM content, which points to the need to investigate differentiated referral behavior patterns.

4. Scale development

4.1. Item generation and purification

An extensive literature review was performed to generate an initial item list for measuring the distinctive dimensions of customer recommendation. If available, existing multidimensional measurement scales were applied, adjusted, or transferred to fit for an item-based questionnaire in German language (e.g. Harrison-Walker 2001; Sweeney/Soutar/Mazzarol 2012). Whereas studies of eWOM for instance often utilize word counts as a measure for massage detail, we referred to a validated scale of Harrison-Walker (2001). In the absence of existing and approved measures, items were created based on a theoretical-conceptual reflection or were derived from online WOM methodology (e.g. (n)ethnographic analysis of customer reviews from Kozinets et al. 2010 or Tober-Alon/Bruneau/Fournier 2014). New items, which have not been utilized in WOM research so far, were derived from related disciplines: Traditional advertisement research was referenced in order to gain indicators of two-sided WOM communications (e.g. Eisend 2006). Finally, exploratory in-depth interviews were carried out with selected marketing research experts. Tab. A1 (Appendix) displays the conceptualized dimensions, respective items and their origins in detail. The multitude of items was reduced by means of iterative exploratory factor analysis to empirically reveal underlying referral dimensions. In the following, we provide the documentation procedure aligned to Holzer/Batt/Bruhn (2015).
Starting with the initial list of 35 items, we conducted exploratory factor analysis (principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation). We used Varimax rotation since there was no indication for a higher order structure and the aim was to derive distinct dimensions of customer referral which can be stimulated by means of marketing specifically. The applicability of this method was ensured by statistical tests as a significant Bartlett test of sphericity (chi-square = 15364.728, p < .001) and measures of sampling adequacy (MSAs) consistently above .5 ("mostly meritorious"). Moreover, the appropriateness of the data for carrying out a principal component analysis was successfully tested by a value of .91 for the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure. An iterative process eliminated items with factor loadings lower than .7 [3], cross-loadings above .4 or communalities below .5. The final factor analysis revealed eight factors (providing eigenvalues > 1), which explain 72.7% of the total variance.

4.2. Scale testing and refinement

A confirmatory factor analysis was performed using Amos 23 to assess reliability and validity of the derived scale. The dimensionality of customer referrals described above can be confirmed with an excellent fit of the global model (Chi²/DF = 2.794, RMSEA = .047, CFI = .953, SRMR = .048). Since composite factor reliability for each referral dimension lies above .7, and the average variance extracted (AVE) always exceeds .5, these measures can be considered as proof of convergent validity (Weiber/Mühlhaus 2014).

On the item level, only two of 27 items (one for two-sidedness and one for functionality of referral) possess indicator reliabilities (IR) just below .4. However, Cronbach’s alpha did not improve when items were dropped for functional referrals and only marginally improved (.82 vs. .86) in the case of two-sided referrals. Thus, we proceed with three items for each of those two factors.

Tab. 2 presents the final list of 27 items retained from confirmatory factor analysis and their allocation to the eight factors.

Discriminant validity is investigated by the Fornell-Larcker criterion (FLC), which suggests distinctive factors if the average variance extracted (AVE) of a factor is higher than the squared correlations between this factor and the others (Fornell/Larcker 1981). Since the FLC are met across all factors (see Tab. 3), the eight distinctive dimensions of WOM messages are validated.

The low cross-loadings between all eight dimensions demonstrate the high independence of all facets of WOM referral. Major correlations can be observed only between intensity, detail, and prescriptiveness of referral. The highest correlations can be found between detail and intensity of referral (correlation of .62). This is plausible since both dimensions refer to quantitative aspects, either within a message or because of the amount of messages. Thus, there is neither need nor potential for any further aggregation.

5. Scale utilization and discussion

Even though we built our eight-dimensional referral conceptualization incorporating different categories and WOM channels, significant differences might exist with regard to the relative relevance of specific referral dimensions. In the following, we examine to what extent the relevance of the eight referral dimensions varies between the WOM channel and across product categories. Following this, we present indicative evidence for marketing related antecedents of the derived referral dimensions.

5.1. Referral dimensions across WOM channels

Despite the widespread adoption of online tools for eWOM, 71% of all respondents of our online survey exclusively recommend salient experiences offline. This finding underlines the importance of traditional (offline) WOM. In the following, we further investigate to what extent online and offline WOM differ with respect to specific referral dimensions. Differences are expected because certain online recommendation types, e.g. “like” buttons, provide only limited options for articulation.

Results of analyses of variance (ANOVA) per dimension and based on the z-standardized factor scores show that customers who make recommendations both online and offline exhibit stronger recommendation patterns than customers who recommend solely either offline or online (see Tab. 4). This pattern seems intuitive, since the joint usage of personal conversations and online offerings inherently increases the quantitative aspects of referral activities. In contrast, online formats (e.g. “like” buttons, reviews, tweets, etc.) provide opportunities to articulate positive feelings immediately – directly after buying or consuming a product or service – whereas offline WOM is on hold until a personal conversation occurs. Consumers who actively engage in online and offline WOM channels thus tend to recommend more proactively, in a highly emotional and extensive manner, and to report about conflicting aspects of their consumption experience (more than offline recommenders).

The group of customers who recommend exclusively online is very small (28 out of 808 respondents), thus, obtained results have to be treated carefully. Nonetheless, online recommendations seem to be less focused on adequate addressees as combined online and offline recommendations: By calculating the post-hoc test of least significant difference (LSD) between two means, findings indicate weakly (LSD, Sig. .07 > .05) that WOM taking place solely within personal communications (offline WOM) contains more addressee-focused referrals than online WOM. This finding seems plausible, because the utilization of discussion boards or social media posts decreases control over the targeted message receivers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>Indicator Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensity of Referral</td>
<td>Ich habe einer Vielzahl von Personen von dem Produkt/Service bzw. der Marke berichtet.</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ich habe einer vergleichsweise großen Anzahl an Personen von dem Produkt/dem Service erzählt.</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ich habe das Produkt/den Service besonders vielen Menschen weiterempfohlen.</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wie häufig haben Sie das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen?</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detail of Referral</td>
<td>Sobald ich über das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke gesprochen habe, war es schwer, mich zu stoppen.</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ich habe viele Details und Einzelheiten erwähnt, wenn ich mich über das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke geäußert habe.</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meine Ausführungen zu dem Produkt/Service bzw. der Marke waren sehr umfangreich.</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionality of Referral</td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, ging es insbesondere darum, wie ich mich dabei gefühlt habe.</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, stand mein persönliches Erlebnis und Empfinden im Mittelpunkt.</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, waren meine Ausführungen eher emotional geprägt.</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, betonte ich, wie ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functionality of Referral</td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, habe ich primär die wesentlichen Argumente aufgezählt.</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, habe ich versucht, sachlich zu informieren.</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, habe ich versucht, objektiv die Funktionalität des Produktes/Service darzustellen.</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescriptiveness of Referral</td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, habe ich versucht, andere zum Kauf oder zur Nutzung zu bewegen.</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, war dies mit einer klaren Aufforderung zum Kauf oder zur Nutzung verbunden.</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, habe ich dazu angehalten, das Produkt/den Service ebenfalls zu nutzen.</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, sollte meine Botschaft andere zum Kauf oder zur Nutzung ermuntern.</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, habe ich an andere appelliert, das Produkt/den Service ebenfalls zu nutzen.</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Sidedness of Referral</td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, habe ich sowohl Vor- als auch Nachteile erwähnt.</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, habe ich zweiseitig argumentiert (sowohl Pro als auch Contra).</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, habe ich versucht, alle Aspekte zu beleuchten.</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address of Referral</td>
<td>Ich habe das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke nur an Personen weiterempfohlen, für die das Produkt/den Service relevant sein könnte.</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ich habe nur Menschen von dem Produkt/Service bzw. der Marke erzählt, die sich für das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke interessieren könnten.</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity of Referral</td>
<td>Ich habe von mir aus über das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke gesprochen, weil ich es einfach weiterzählen wollte.</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ich habe unaufgefordert von dem Produkt/dem Service bzw. der Marke berichtet.</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ich wurde nicht explizit nach dem Produkt/dem Service bzw. der Marke gefragt, habe anderen aber dennoch davon erzählt.</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 2: Multidimensional customer referral scale
5.2. Referral dimensions across categories

ANOVPAs and post-hoc tests provide evidence that specific referral dimensions vary across different product and service contexts. Tab. 5 reveals insightful cross-categorical discrepancies.

Concerning the dimensions proactivity, intensity, and addressee of referrals, multi-group comparisons do not provide significant differences across all categories. These referral dimensions are likely to depend on senders' personality and not as much on the product category. In the following, significant mean differences across product categories are discussed successively for the remaining referral dimensions.

Initially, we observe a higher emphasis on functionality of referral for WOM about complex consumption experiences, as automobiles (Z-score mean = .19) or technical durables (Z-score mean = .19). In a similar vein, one would assume a particular high detail of referral for those products that have a high need for explanation. According hereto, we observe more detailed recommendations for technical durables than for body care and hygiene products (Z-score mean diff. = .35; Sig. = .01 (LSD)). However, convenience goods (Z-score mean = .15) or telecommunication and entertainment offerings (Z-score mean = .17) are communicated in great detail as well. Thus, distinct products and/or categories seem to provide certain levels of “talkability” [4] which drives referral detail within customer communications.

Two-sided argumentation appears to be prominent within high involvement contexts. Robust statistics undermine this tendency in a comparison between technical durables and food products (Z-score mean diff. = .69; Sig. = .000 (LSD)) or body care and hygiene (Z-score mean diff. = .70; Sig. = .000 (LSD)). Emotional referrals, on the other hand, are of high relevance for customer experiences which incorporate sensual and bodily experiences (see Brakus/Schmitt/Zarantonello 2009 for sensory and behavioral brand experiences). Accordingly, we observe a high emotionality of referral for body care and hygiene (Z-score mean = .32), as well as food products (Z-score mean = .37). It seems rather intuitive that a delightful restaurant visit is strongly framed in emotional terms as opposed to technical durables, like a vacuum cleaner (Z-score mean = -.21). Automobiles are the only high-involvement product category recommended in strongly emotional terms (Z-score mean = .11).

Thus far, we have analyzed differences on single referral dimensions between categories. The case of the automotive referrals suggests the existence of distinct referral profiles as combinations of multiple referral dimensions. The joint presence of functional and emotional message cues in automobile referral shows that strong feelings about a beloved brand do not necessarily impede the articulation of functional information. Automobile brands are thus well advised to continue investing in both technical excellence and emotional branding campaigns, since consumers tend to recommend both facets.

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Tab. 5: Discriminant validity measures (FLC) for eight referral dimensions

*Note: Diagonal values = root of the average variance extracted (AVE), the other values = correlations.

Tab. 4: Means of referral dimensions among WOM channels

Notes: Scale values are z-standardized factor scores; standard errors of means are presented in the parentheses (italics)

(adjusted by number of observations, total mean over all groups = .00)

* = Sig. < .05; ** = Sig. < .01; *** = Sig. < .001; N = 808
High intensity and detail of recommendations appear to compensate for the lack of proactive referrals for convenience goods. A high social acceptance of convenience goods might inspire consumers to talk about it. This contrasts with body care & hygiene products, where referrals show the strongest addressee focus. Body care & hygiene products are recommended with lower intensity than convenience goods (LSD, Sig. .045). Intimacy aspects might be an explanation for this difference in WOM patterns. Finally, customers recommend apparel items less proactively than food products (LSD, Sig. .001) or non-technical durables (LSD, Sig. .005). Need for uniqueness might provide an explanation for this (Berger 2014). For apparel, „like” buttons or other social media activities might be effective means to foster WOM intensity and help to overcome the inherently low referral content. Marketers should thus be aware of the dominant referral profile in their category.

5.3. Indicative evidence for marketing triggers of referral dimensions

The previous section outlined referral patterns and category-specific needs for complementary marketing action. However, the ability to influence referral dimensions by means of marketing tools remains unexplored. We thus investigate a set of prominent marketing triggers and empirically test for their effects on customer referral dimensions.

In order to explore the impact of marketing-related antecedents, we asked respondents to assess whether pre-purchase marketing activities triggered their specific recommendation behavior after purchase (subjectively assessed on five-point Likert scale). Investigated marketing measures ranged from traditional instruments of (mass-) marketing to novel marketing instruments with high degrees of customer integration [5].

Multiple, stepwise linear regression analyses (forward selection) were used to describe explorative insights about how marketing managers can stimulate specific referral dimensions. Several significant causal relationships were identified, although small R-square values (between 1.2 % and 11.1 %) point toward other, non-investigated drivers of customers’ recommendation behavior. Fig. 3 displays the identified marketing triggers which exert significant effects on the eight referral dimensions.

Classic advertisement plays an important role in triggering customer referrals: Both referral detail (β = .1) and emotionality of referral (β = .11) are enhanced by prior exposure to (classic) advertising. Those effects are plausible, since advertising provides product information and incorporates emotional conditioning or affective primes. The persuasive mission of traditional advertising successfully transfers to prescriptive referrals (β = .13) with high intensity (β = .09). Viral marketing campaigns are aimed at inducing contagion effects and thereby complement traditional advertising by stimulating the intensity of referral (β = .14) and seeding prescriptive referrals (β = .16). Vivid guerrilla marketing campaigns succeed by fostering emotional referrals (β = .13).

Whereas (online) consumer reviews from others drive own referral quantity, other co-produced means of mar-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensity</th>
<th>Detail</th>
<th>Emotional-</th>
<th>Function-</th>
<th>Prescrip-</th>
<th>Two-</th>
<th>Addressee</th>
<th>Pro-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apparel (46)</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile (58)</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body care &amp; hygiene (72)</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.41</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience goods (47)</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durables (tech.)</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durables (non-tech.)</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.30</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food products (71)</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service sector (119)</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecomm. &amp; entertainment (153)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANOVA F (Sig) 1.30 (n.s.) 2.18 * 6.22 * 3.40 * 2.13 * 4.29 ** 1.07 (n.s.) 1.79 (n.s.)

Notes: Scale values are z-standardized factor scores and standard errors of means are presented in the brackets (italics) (adjusted by number of observations, total mean over all groups = .00)

* = Sig. < .05; ** = Sig. < .01; *** = Sig. < .001; N = 808.

Tab. 5: ANOVA results for each referral dimension across categories
Marketing facilitate more reflected recommendation patterns: test reports stimulate elaborated, two-sided referrals ($\beta = .15$) combined with functionally rich information ($\beta = .11$). Most interestingly, the number of „likes“ by other users (read as input) reduces the two-sidedness of own referrals ($\beta = -.09$): When consumers report about their own experiences in the context of unspecific „likes“ from other buyers, they seem to reflect less and develop fewer arguments by themselves. Thus, marketers should emphasize collective „likes“ if they want to prevent two-sided argumentation-styles. By contrast, critically reflected information, e.g. test reports, should be distributed among consumers to encourage their balanced argumentation when they make recommendations (e.g. within a high involvement context). Lastly, monetary incentives can be used to engage customers as „co-producers“ and thereby increase proactivity of referrals ($\beta = .12$).

6. Conclusions and future research

Previous research typically conceptualized WOM by simple measures of quantity or valence of WOM activities (e.g. Liu 2006; Lovett/Perez/Shachar 2013). Such a simplified measurement approach lacks the ability to explain the persuasive potential that stems from specific customer referral patterns. This study contributes to WOM research by exploring the multidimensional message structure of positive customer recommendations. The proposed measurement model can serve as a comprehensive measurement tool to study both offline and online customer referral behavior in various categories. Its broad applicability within the goods and services sector fulfills the request from Sweeney/Soutar/Mazzarol (2012) to operationalize a generalizable, multidimensional WOM measurement.

Existing measures of customer engagement already incorporate referral or complaining behavior (Verhoef/Reinartz/Krafft 2010). However, even academically recognized approaches, such as the Net Promoter Score (NPS; Reichheld 2003) or Customer Referral Value (CRV; Kumar/Petersen/Leone 2007; Kumar/Petersen/Leone 2010), do not discriminate between distinct referral dimensions. We thus encourage future research to distinguish between the derived referral dimensions instead of solely referring to the number of posts or direct customer referral programs.

Marketing practice increasingly strives for „clicks,“ „likes,“ or „followers,“ which media agencies are paid to increase. The present study offers a much richer toolbox to marketing managers, which comprises distinct dimensions of desirable WOM behavior. Distinct reactions to (more or less involving) marketing instruments indicate...
that marketing actions can trigger different customers’ referral patterns. Thus, marketing practitioners should analyze patterns of referral behavior based on the eight derived referral dimensions. By clustering customer experiences based on their specific referral patterns, „brand-experience-profiles” can be derived, which provide insights into the viral potential of customer-brand interactions.

Different marketing-related antecedents stimulate different referral dimensions. This highlights the need to distinguish referral dimensions in order to steer customer referral. However, none of the investigated marketing stimuli was capable to elicit addressees-focused referrals. This shows that pre-purchase marketing cannot influence all patterns of post-purchase customer referral behavior. In this regard, customers’ experiences with both the brand and the product are expected to be more important and thus key drivers of customer referral.

The scope of the derived referral dimensions is substantiated by an in-depth analysis of theoretical concepts. However, there may be additional rhetorical message qualities that are still missing. New language-related research on online customer reviews (e. g. Liu/Zhan 2011; Ludwig et al. 2013) may be utilized to extend our approach in the future. As is, the customer referral scale already provides an adequate measurement basis for empirical research on the antecedents of specific customer recommendation patterns. Limitations of the acquired data prevent us from analyzing the behavioral consequences of specific referral dimensions on the WOM receiver. Future research should thus examine the behavioral consequences of WOM referrals on the receiver. As a first step, it should be investigated how distinct combinations of the referral dimensions are related to perceived helpfulness of a recommendation.

This study demonstrates that online surveys and measurement scales are not outdated within the realm of WOM research. Surveying WOM participants made it possible to connect (on- or offline) customer referral to specific (offline) customer experiences. Results show the explanatory potential of specific customer referral dimensions. Insights are provided on contingency factors explaining the relevance of specific referral dimensions in different product categories or WOM channels. However, findings about the antecedents of referral dimensions remain indicative, this topic has to be investigated further. Here, we urge future research to focus more on product related drivers of customer referral, instead of relying on personal dispositions as e. g. extraversion or market mavenism. A focus on the antecedents of customer referral dimensions should empower marketers to promote distinct modes of WOM by traditional or new marketing instruments.

Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of Referral</th>
<th>Original items (Harrison-Walker 2001):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Since I have been with this service organization, I have mentioned the name of this service organization very rarely (RC).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) I mention this service organization to others quite frequently.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) I rarely have occasion to mention the name of this organization to others (RC).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) I’ve told more people about this service organization than I’ve told about most other service organizations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) I seldom miss an opportunity to tell others about this service organization.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) I’ve told very few people about this service organization (RC).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Initial items used:
2) Ich habe kaum eine Gelegenheit verpasst, anderen von dem Produkt/Service bzw. der Marke zu erzählen. 
4)* Ich habe das Produkt/den Service besonders vielen Menschen weiterempfohlen. 
5)* Wie häufig haben Sie das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen? (einmal – mehr als 50 mal). 

Type of scale: 5-point Likert scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detail of Referral</th>
<th>Original items (Harrison-Walker 2001):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) When I tell others about this service organization, I tend to talk about the organization in great detail.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) I seldom do more than mention the name of this service organization to others. (RC)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Once I get talking about this service organization, it’s hard to me to stop.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Initial items used:
1) Wenn ich anderen von dem Produkt/Service bzw. der Marke berichtet habe, geschah das sehr ausführlich. 
2) Ich habe anderen gegenüber weit mehr als nur den Namen des Produkt/es/Service bzw. der Marke erwähnt. 
3)* Sobald ich über das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke gesprochen habe, war es schwer, mich zu stoppen. 
4)* Ich habe viele Details und Einzelheiten erwähnt, wenn ich mich über das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke geäußert habe. 
5)* Meine Ausführungen zu dem Produkt/den Service bzw. der Marke waren sehr umfangreich. 

Type of scale: 5-point Likert scale

Tab. 1: Measurement items and origins of referral dimensions

40 MARKETING · ZFP · Heft 1 · 1. Quartal 2016
Prescriptiveness of Referral

Own scale development based on Woodside et al. (2008):
Initial items used:
Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, ...
1)* ging es insbesondere darum, wie ich mich dabei gefühlt habe.
2)* stand mein persönliches Erlebnis und Empfinden im Mittelpunkt.
3)* waren meine Ausführungen eher emotional geprägt.
4)* betonte ich, wie ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke erlebt habe.
5) habe ich versucht, meine Botschaft mit Leben zu füllen.

Type of scale: 5-point Likert scale

Functionality of Referral

Own scale development, referring to narrative advice framing (Toder-Alon/Brunel/Fournier 2014):
Initial items used:
Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, ...
1)* habe ich primär die wesentlichen Argumente aufgezählt.
2)* habe ich versucht, sachlich zu informieren.
3) habe ich bestimmte Produktmerkmale/Merkmale des Service hervorgehoben.
4)* wollte ich über besondere Merkmale des Produktes/Service informieren.
5)* habe ich versucht, objektiv die Funktionalität des Produktes/Service darzustellen.

Type of scale: 5-point Likert scale

Addresssee of Referral

Own scale development referring to research on advertisement (Eisend 2006):
Initial items used:
Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, ...
1)* habe ich nur die Vorteile des Produktes/des Service erwähnt - habe ich sowohl Vor- als auch Nachteile erwähnt.
2)* habe ich einseitig argumentiert (nur Pro, kein Contra) - habe ich zweiseitig argumentiert (sowohl Pro als auch Contra).
3)* habe ich versucht, einen zentralen Aspekt zu betonen - habe ich versucht, alle Aspekte zu beleuchten.

Type of scale: Semantic Differential (7-point scale)

Proactivity of Referral

Own development referring to the uni-dimensional WOM measure of Babin et al.(2005):
Initial items used:
1)* Ich habe von mir aus über das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke gesprochen, weil ich es einfach weitererzählen wollte.
2)* Ich habe unaufgefordert von dem Produkt/dem Service bzw. der Marke berichtet.
3)* Ich wurde nicht explizit nach dem Produkt/dem Service bzw. der Marke gefragt, habe anderen aber dennoch davon erzählt.

Type of scale: 5-point Likert scale

Emotionality of Referral

Own scale development, referring to narrative advice framing (Toder-Alon/Brunel/Fournier 2014):
Initial items used:
Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, ...
1)* ging es insbesondere darum, wie ich mich dabei gefühlt habe.
2)* stand mein persönliches Erlebnis und Empfinden im Mittelpunkt.
3)* waren meine Ausführungen eher emotional geprägt.
4)* betonte ich, wie ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke erlebt habe.
5) habe ich versucht, meine Botschaft mit Leben zu füllen.

Type of scale: 5-point Likert scale

Two-sidedness of Referral

Own scale development referring to research on advertisement (Eisend 2006):
Initial items used:
Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, ...
1)* habe ich nur die Vorteile des Produktes/des Service erwähnt - habe ich sowohl Vor- als auch Nachteile erwähnt.
2)* habe ich einseitig argumentiert (nur Pro, kein Contra) - habe ich zweiseitig argumentiert (sowohl Pro als auch Contra).
3)* habe ich versucht, einen zentralen Aspekt zu betonen - habe ich versucht, alle Aspekte zu beleuchten.

Type of scale: Semantic Differential (7-point scale)

Functionality of Referral

Own scale development, referring to paradigmatic advice framing (Toder-Alon/Brunel/Fournier 2014):
Initial items used:
Wenn ich das Produkt/den Service bzw. die Marke weiterempfohlen habe, ...
1)* habe ich primär die wesentlichen Argumente aufgezählt.
2)* habe ich versucht, sachlich zu informieren.
3) habe ich bestimmte Produktmerkmale/Merkmale des Service hervorgehoben.
4)* wollte ich über besondere Merkmale des Produktes/Service informieren.
5)* habe ich versucht, objektiv die Funktionalität des Produktes/Service darzustellen.

Type of scale: 5-point Likert scale

Note: * = final items

Tab. 1: Measurement items and origins of referral dimensions
Reckmann/Teichert, Decomposing Positive Word of Mouth: Scale Development and Marketing Application

Notes

[1] Reviews on restaurants were retrieved from TripAdvisor.com on the 17th of March 2016.

[2] Respondents who used only “like” buttons as a type of WOM were excluded, since no differentiated message qualities can be derived from these actions.

[3] The second item for addressee of referral has been included, even though its factor loading amounts to .69.

[4] The term „talkability“ primarily refers to creative content stimulating WOM (e.g. Williams/Battle/Bigge mann 2012, p. 8).

[5] In our explorative set of marketing stimuli, we included: (classi c) advertising, viral marketing campaigns, availability of „tell-a-friend“ buttons, number of „likes“ (by other users), customer reviews, test reports, monetary incentives, means of public relations, flash mobs, exhibitions, and guerilla marketing.

References


Reckmann/Teichert, Decomposing Positive Word of Mouth: Scale Development and Marketing Application

... Positive Word of Mouth: Scale Development and Marketing Application

Keywords

Word of mouth; customer referral; scale development