



## The Influences of Corporate's Message Appeal and Electronic Word of Mouth on Consumer Response

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### Abstract

Companies attract their consumer's attention and influence them to make a purchase by different message appeals in their marketing communications campaigns while consumer receive an increasing amount of information from other customers through electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Although there are many studies on both factors separately, none has investigated the interaction between corporate's message appeal and customer's eWOM which we often find in daily life. Their effects and interaction should have an impact on customer's attitudes and purchase intention. An experiment of 2 corporate message appeals X 4 eWOM messages reveals both message appeals and eWOM significantly affect attitudes toward the messages and the brand but without any interactions of both factors. Purchase intention has completely different results with no main effects but a significant interaction. Discussion and implications on the findings will be provided.

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**Keywords:** message appeal, electronic word of mouth, attitude toward the messages, attitude toward the brand, purchase intention, consumer response

**JEL Classification:** M31, M37

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## 1. Introduction

When companies design messages for marketing communications, they generally select an appropriate message appeal, which can be rational or emotional, to attract customer's attention and persuade them to purchase the products or services through communication mix elements e.g. advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, etc. However, marketing communications between the company and customers change dramatically with the emergence of digital technologies. Customers can access online information that flows instantaneously to their communication devices. Moreover, they can interact with other customers and companies at any time and have access to other customers' reviews and opinions through these digital devices. It is questionable whether the corporate's message appeals that have been effective are able to function appropriately while consumers are exposed to more and more electronic word of mouth (eWOM) messages. Even though there have been studies on message appeals and eWOM, none has explored both simultaneously. Therefore, this study intends to investigate the influences of corporate's message appeals which are generally classified into rational and emotional ones and different types eWOM messages: no eWOM, positive eWOM, negative eWOM and both positive and negative eWOM messages on attitude towards the messages, attitude toward the brand and purchase intention. Through an experimental study, we would be able to find out the interaction between the two variables on these consumer responses. It is hopeful the study can provide new findings to help us understand how corporate's message appeals work differently while consumers receive different types of eWOM messages.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Message appeal

In marketing communications, marketers utilize message appeals to attract customers' attention, persuade them to like the products or services and influence them to make a purchase. The appeal is the "underlying content" of the messages marketers try to communicate to its audience and it has the power to move them toward communication objectives (Weibacher, 1984, p. 197).



Two types of message appeals are rational and emotional appeals. Rational appeal motivates the consumers through the use of reasons, facts and information which respond to the need for cognition and logic of human being. It intends to provide reasons to convince the consumers that the attributes and benefits of the products or services can satisfy their needs. Therefore, rational appeal generally includes information about prices, attributes, benefits, competitive advantage, product popularity, etc. (Weilbacher, 1984).

On the other hand, emotional appeal utilizes feelings and emotions to respond to social and psychological needs of the consumers (Cutler and Javalgi, 1993). Agres (1991) contends that emotional appeal is useful when rational appeal becomes less interesting or when it is difficult for marketers to use reasons or information to differentiate the products or services. Then, emotional appeal is more favorable as it influences the feelings of the consumers. These feelings can be further classified into positive and negative ones, as both can also result in consumer response. Positive emotional appeals include humor, love, pride, joy, happiness, etc., while negative ones utilize guilt, fear, anger, embarrassment, etc. (Tautz, McQuitty & Sautter, 2011).

Even though there are several studies investigating the effects of rational and emotional appeals on consumer response, the findings are controversial. Some find rational appeal is more effective (Zielske, 1982; Golden & Johnson, 1983; Coulson, 1989), others discover the opposite (Gardner, 1985; Thorson & Leavitt, 1992; Wood, 2012). Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy (1984) state types of products should match the appropriate message appeal. Vaughan (1980) creates the FCB (Foote Coone and Belding) advertising agency model recommending rational appeal for thinking products and emotional appeal for feeling ones. Joar and Sirgy, (1991) propose expressive products, which are emotional or sensory by nature, are more suitable for emotional appeal but utilitarian products should apply rational appeal.

While most studies focus on message appeal of products, a few explore services. Abernethy and Butler (1992) and Cutler and Javalgi (1993) report emotional appeal is more effective in creating meaningful connections with consumers as they cannot assess the attributes or benefits of the services clearly. This happens because services are intangible. On the other hand, Stafford and Day (1995) study message appeals in the retail services and discover rational appeal has more positive effects on attitude toward the ad. In a more recent study of the service industries, Zhang, Sun, Liu and Knight (2014) reveal emotional appeal leads to higher purchase intention in the experience service while rational appeal is better for the credence service.

The effectiveness of corporate's message appeal in changing consumer's attitude also depends the degree of involvement while consumers process information. Rational appeal is more effective when the consumers have high degree of involvement. (Murkherjee, 2002). According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), consumers are motivated by personal relevance of the message, need for cognition, argument of the message and involvement with the products. In addition, they must have the ability to understand the message. In this case, the consumers utilize the central route to persuasion which applies rational appeal, resulting in an enduring attitude change. However, attitude change also occurs for those with low degree of involvement who do not process the information through the central route and has no motivation or ability to process the message, as persuasion can occur through the peripheral route by message executional cues, source attractiveness, and all the emotional factors, etc. An empirical finding using celebrity endorsers in an ad shows a significant level of attitude change when subjects have low degree of involvement. On the other hand, for subjects with high degree of involvement, the message arguments in the ad are more important and the use of celebrity endorsers does not affect the subjects' attitudes (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983).

Rosselli, Skelly and Mackie (1995) explain most research on attitude change, except on the fear appeal, has been dominated by the studies on rational appeal. The sequence of cognition and affect (Edwards, 1990); attitude type and argument type (Millar and Millar, 1990) have been found to affect attitude change. For the comparison between both appeals, emotional messages are found to be more effective than the rational ones to stimulate positive attitude especially for the low involvement products (Ray and Batra, 1983; Hitchon and Thorson, 1995), to reduce irritation and result in better attitude toward the ad, the brand and purchase intention (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1981; Aaker, Stayman and Hagerty, 1986) and strengthen brand premiums especially during the economic downturns (Pringle & Field, 2009).

As previous findings regarding the effects of message appeal are controversial, this study intends to explore its effects on attitude toward the messages and the brand and on purchase intention to understand the roles of message appeals in more detail. Thus we hypothesize

H1a. There is a different effect of corporate's message appeal on attitude toward the messages

H1b. There is a different effect of corporate's message appeal on attitude toward the brand

H1c. There is a different effect of corporate's message appeal on purchase intention



## 2.2. Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

The Internet has revolutionized marketing communications in many ways. It is now possible for consumers to search for information about the company more conveniently (Chatterjee, 2001). They also spread word of mouth electronically to someone they do not know especially when they have good relationships with the brand's social network (Park and Kim, 2014). Moreover, eWOM is perceived to be more credible than the messages from the company (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Allsop, Bassett and Hoskins, 2007; Bronner and De Hoog, 2010).

The unique characteristics of eWOM also contribute to its popularity. These include anonymity (Kaynar and Amichai-Hamburger, 2008), less intrusiveness than traditional media (Winer, 2009) instantaneity and interactivity (Liu and Shrum, 2005), making it virtually impossible for the company to control and react the flow of eWOM in the marketplace.

Consumers use eWOM when they are likely to make a purchase (Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006), find it useful for purchase decision (Cheung, Matthew, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008) and thereby affecting the sales of the products or services (Zhu and Zhang, 2010). Therefore eWOM is as important as the traditional one which has been found to affect both pre-and post-purchase decisions (Sweeney, Soutar, and Mazzarol, 2008; Matos and Rossi, 2008).

Past research has investigated various factors of eWOM influencing consumer's perceived helpfulness e.g. identity-relevant information of the reviewers (Forman, Ghose and Wiesenfeld, 2008); argument quality (Cheung, Matthew, Lee, Rabjohn, 2008); review extremity, review depth, and product types (Mudambi and Schuff, 2010); diversity and density of argumentation (Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner and De Ridder, 2011).

As eWOM messages are often a mixture of both positive and negative reviews, their effects are certainly not the same. Researchers discover negative messages can hurt consumer-based brand equity (Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011) and a low image brand (Chiou and Cheng, 2003; Doh and Hwang, 2009). On the other hand, Doh and Hwang (2009) and Reichelt, Sievert and Jacob (2014) concur if all the reviews are positive, the credibility of the websites and the online review messages can be damaged. Chiou, Hsu and Hsieh (2012) confirm the severity of negative eWOM leads to higher perceived negative change in brand evaluation and brand risk. Purnawairawan, De Pelsmaker and Dens (2012) find the unequal balance of positive and negative eWOM and the wrapping sequence (positive/negative/positive) and (negative/positive/negative) can improve perceived usefulness of the eWOM. Beside the positive and negative eWOM effects, Plotkina and Munzel (2016) discover source of the eWOM has an impact on purchase decision. A positive eWOM by an expert leads to higher purchase intention than the one by a peer consumer, while a negative eWOM by a peer consumer results in lower purchase intention than the one by an expert.

Furthermore, there are studies exploring the moderating factors of the elaboration Likelihood (ELM) model. For instance, both quantity and quality of eWOM can affect consumers with low involvement, while those with high involvement focus only on high quality eWOM (Park, Lee and Han (2007). High quantity and quality of eWOM can lead to high purchase intention, and consumers who have high need for cognition prefer the rational appeal, and those with low need for cognition, the emotional one. (Lin, Lee and Horng, 2011).

Some researchers focus on the message appeal of the eWOM. Wu and Wang (2009) find rational eWOM results in better attitude toward the brand than the emotional one under a high degree of product involvement. Kim and Gupta (2012) study negative and positive emotional eWOM messages and state that negative emotional expressions in a single negative eWOM can reduce the review's information value and make the product evaluations less negative, while a single positive eWOM does not affect product evaluations, multiple positive eWOM messages by multiple users do.

As witnessed from prior studies, the effects of eWOM are more complex than we expect. For instance, the positive eWOM alone does not bring about total positive responses from the customers. Thus, in this study, we investigate the roles of eWOM on the attitude of both the message and the brand and on the purchase intention. Therefore, we hypothesize

H2a. Different electronic word of mouth messages can affect attitude toward the messages differently.

H2b. Different electronic word of mouth messages can affect attitude toward the brand differently.

H2c. Different electronic word of mouth messages can affect purchase intention differently.

### 2.3 The Interaction between Message Appeal and Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Even though there have been many studies investigating the influences of message appeal and eWOM separately, no prior study has ever explored the roles of message appeal typically used in marketing communications of all the corporations to communicate with the target audience along with the effects of eWOM messages circulating among customers in the Internet at the same time. The interaction of corporate's message appeal and eWOM should affect the consumer response, so we hypothesize:

H3a. There is an interaction between message appeal and eWOM on attitude toward the messages

H3a. There is an interaction between message appeal and eWOM on attitude toward the brand

H3a. There is an interaction between message appeal and eWOM on purchase intention.



### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study is an experiment of 2 corporate's message appeals (rational and emotional) X 4 types of eWOM messages (no eWOM, positive eWOM, negative eWOM, and both positive and negative eWOM messages) between-subject factorial design.

We employ marketing communication messages of a hypermarket in Thailand. We have selected the hypermarket because it has several branches throughout Thailand and all subjects must have been to one of the stores. Moreover, the hypermarket has utilized both rational and emotional appeals in its marketing communication campaigns with recent positive and negative eWOM messages in the online discussion forum of a famous website. The website and the discussion forum on the hypermarket are frequently visited by the public. Furthermore, the hypermarket industry in Thailand consists of only two players, making it easier to perform attitudinal and intentional measures. However, we do not make any comparison between brands in this study.

#### 3.2 Stimulus Development

As Putin and Wells (1984) point out that message appeals are not mutually exclusive, the messages can be predominantly rational or emotional, depending on consumer's perception. Therefore, it is necessary to differentiate stimuli used in this experiment into different appeals.

Thirty nine subjects are randomly selected from a graduate level marketing class, the same population but different sections from the subjects of the main study. Each rates randomly placed 12 pictures from marketing communication campaigns of the hypermarket. After viewing each picture, the subjects are asked to rate the 6-item measure of rational/emotional appeals on a Likert-type scale where 0 = strong disagree and 8 = strongly agree adapted from Drolet, Williams and Lau-Gesk (2007). The questionnaire includes three rational and emotional questions, i.e. This picture makes me think (feel) about the store, has information (emotion) for me to think (feel), focuses on my thought (feelings) about the store and one overall attitude question: I like this picture. All questions are randomly placed and tested for reliability. The Cronbach's alpha of the three questions on the rational appeal is 0.88 and on the emotional one, 0.84. Therefore, we form the composite scores of rational and emotional appeals.

We then compare the rational and emotional medians of all the twelve pictures that the subjects have rated using Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Paired Samples. A totally of six out of the twelve pictures are found to be statistically significant, classifying our stimuli into rational and emotional messages. There are three rational and three emotional pictures.

The three rational pictures include : (1) transforming your used transportation tickets into a coupon worth 40 Thai baht (USD 1.10) (Median(emotional) = 5, Median(rational) = 6 ; p = 0.01) (2) number 1 in low prices featuring price discounts for various electrical appliances (Median(emotional) = 5.67; Median(rational) = 6.33; p = 0.002) and (3) fresh chicken meat wrapped on a foam tray (Median(emotional) = 4.33, Median(rational) = 6; p = 0.001).

The three emotional pictures include: (1) a mother and a son smiling at the fresh vegetable from the farm on the “Fresh from Farm” campaign (Median (emotional) = 5.33, Median (rational) = 4.67; p = 0.003), (2): a hand grabbing a lobster in the water (Median (emotional) = 5.67, Median (rational) = 4.67; p = 0.008) and (3): two girls and one boy students smiling and holding a pair of shoes for a store campaign to give shoes for poor students (Median (emotional) = 7, Median (rational) = 5.67, p < 0.0001).

There are two versions of eWOM messages: positive and negative. The messages are real messages from [www.pantip.com](http://www.pantip.com) which is one of the most famous Thai-language websites and online discussion forum, featuring actual compliments and complaints from real customers. Both positive and negative messages have been tested with thirty randomized graduate students from a different section of those who are in the main study. They are asked to rate whether they agree the message is positive or negative on a Likert-type scale where 8 = strongly agree and 0 = strongly disagree. The results are compared by Wilcoxon signed rank test for pair samples with median of the positive group = 8 and the one of the negative group = 0, (p < 0.0001), indicating the positive message is validly viewed as positive and vice versa.

The eWOM messages in the study are general compliments and complaints usually encountered by the consumer services of the hypermarket. The positive and negative versions are approximately the same length with similar proportion of rational and emotional appeals in each version. The positive version is as follows

My impressive experience at the store

I have an impressive story to share with everyone. Today I went to buy some grocery items with my mother. When we paid the money at the cashier and took the stuffs we bought to the car, we forgot to check all the items we bought including some fresh food like pork, ribs, etc. and realized we probably left them at the store. When I checked the receipt, we actually bought all these items. I decided to go back to the store to find them. At the store, the staff took care of me so well. They made a phone call and searched thoroughly throughout the store to find my stuffs and found out it would be possible I left some of them in the cart and the person behind me took them accidentally. To my surprise, the staff brought me a bag with the items I lost. I said it was my mistake and they should not have given me the stuffs worth about USD 12. However, the staff



insisted they give me the items. I was so happy not because I got the items but I was really impressed with how the staff was so nice to take their time and efforts to take care of me.

The negative version is as follows

My bad impression at the store

I shopped at the store and when it was the time for me to go to the cashier the lines were so long. I totally understood as it was Saturday. Then after paying, I checked the receipt and found out I was overcharged. I went to the customer service counter and the staff there was servicing other customers in a bad mood. When it came to my turn she also talked to me badly asking me how many items I was overcharged and by how much. She crossed the items from the receipt and refunded me without checking anything. If I told her the wrong number of items and prices e.g. 3 items of 50 each, would she still refund me the amount I told her? Then, when I drove back home, I found out I was charged USD 3.00 for a pad, the price of which was shown USD 0.50 on the shelf. Moreover, when I arrived home, I opened the bag of baby's gloves I bought and found the elastic bands were damaged and there was only one glove in it. Even though the total damage cost me only USD 4-5, I really felt very bad. Could anyone tell me what I should do next?

All the pictures and eWOM messages are printed on an A4 sized paper with a four-color inkjet printer, and they are all put in the same envelop. We use the printed version as all the pictures originally appear in print. The eWOM messages are also printed in its original format from the website. We let the subjects view the eWOM messages from the printed form instead of viewing them from a computer to avoid any interruption to the information processing of the subjects as they switch from print to computer and vice versa.

### 3.3 Samples

A total of 240 subjects from graduate-level marketing classes are randomly assigned into eight experimental conditions with 30 subjects in each group. All of the subjects report they shop at the retail store of the study at least once a month. The subjects have a job and are 52.91% female with an average age of 29 years old.

### 3.4 Procedure

The subjects receive two sets of envelops. The first one contains three pictures (rational or emotional) from the earlier test and eWOM messages (no message, a positive version, a negative version or both versions together). The pictures and eWOM messages are not stapled, and the subjects are free to view each of them in any order as if they are viewing in a natural setting.

The subjects are told to view and read all the messages in the first envelop thoroughly without any time limit. Then, they are instructed to put them back into the first envelop and do the questionnaire in the second envelop consisting of questions on: attitude toward the messages; attitude toward the brand and purchase intention, followed by demographic questions and their retail shopping behaviors. Afterwards, they are informed the hypermarket does not fund the study. Then they are thanked and debriefed. Average completion time is 25 minutes.

### 3.5 Measures

The items we use to measure attitude toward the messages are adapted from Mackenzie and Lutz (1989), Stafford (1996), Possavac, Sanbonmatsu, Kardes and Fitzsimons (2004) and Martin (2012) to suit the variety of communication tools, not just advertising. We assess attitude toward the messages from a bipolar scale of 1-7 on the following items: bad/good; irrelevant/relevant; not admired/admired; negative/positive; ineffective/effective unimportant/important; dislike/like; not meaningful to me/meaningful to me (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.90).

For attitude toward the brand, the items are adapted from Aggrawal and McGill (2012) consisting of seven questions on a 7-point Likert-type scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree: I am happy to be at the store, Shopping at the store is fun (negative), This store suits me (negative), I admire the store; I feel good about the store (negative), I try to deal with the store (negative), I like the store (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.79).

For purchase intention, the items are from Chiu, Hsieh and Kuo (2012) consisting of three questions on a 7-point Likert-type scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree: It is possible for me to go to the store again; I intend to go to the store; I will go to this store if I need to buy what I need (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.81)



## 4. Results

**Table 1** Means and Standard Deviations of Consumer Response (Standard deviation in parentheses)

Message Appeals	Rational				Emotional			
	No	Positive	Negative	Positive and Negative	No	Positive	Negative	Positive and Negative
eWOM	No	Positive	Negative	Positive and Negative	No	Positive	Negative	Positive and Negative
Attitude toward the Messages	4.01 (1.20)	4.33 (0.94)	3.87 (0.97)	4.39 (0.96)	4.85 (0.91)	4.93 (0.95)	4.34 (0.85)	4.70 (1.11)
Attitude toward the Brand	4.40 (0.89)	4.42 (0.79)	4.34 (0.71)	4.61 (0.62)	4.97 (0.85)	4.64 (0.76)	4.24 (0.54)	4.79 (0.76)
Purchase Intention	4.51 (1.03)	5.01 (1.05)	5.10 (1.06)	4.79 (1.07)	5.21 (1.01)	4.51 (1.35)	4.67 (0.98)	4.46 (1.12)

Source: Author's findings

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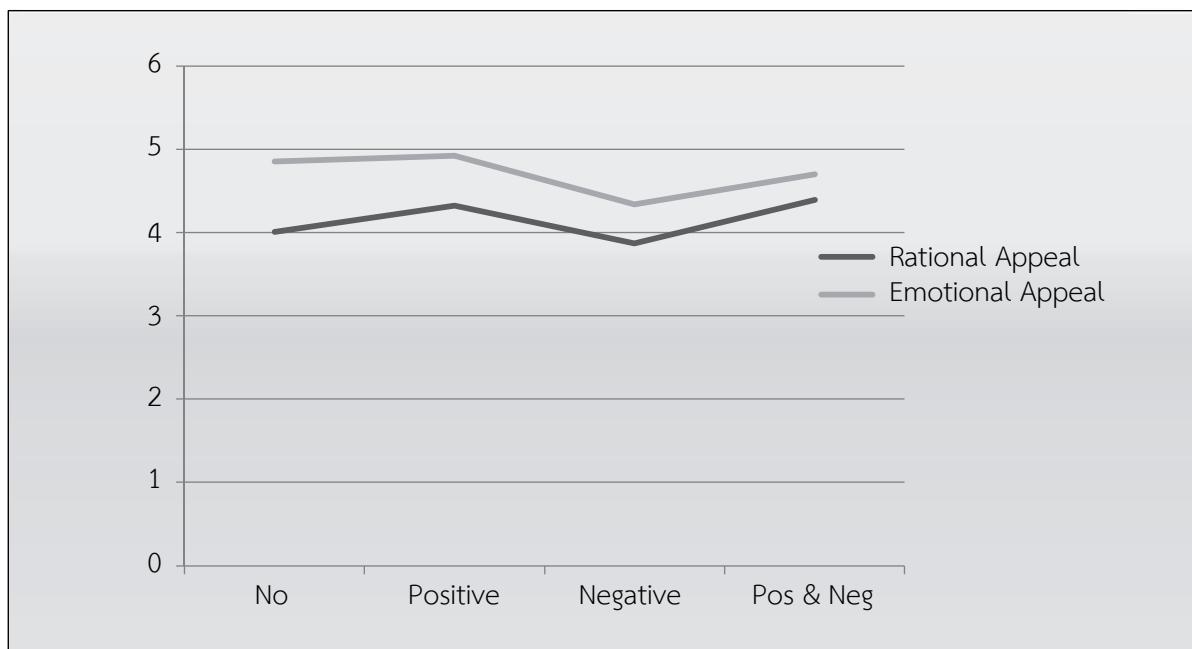
**Table 2** Main effects and Interactions on Consumer Response

Consumer Response	Message appeals (df 1,232)		Electronic Word of Mouth (df 3,232)		Interaction (df 3,232)	
	F	p	F	P	F	p
Attitude toward the messages	18.82	<0.001*	3.20	0.02*	0.78	0.50
Attitude toward the brand	5.02	0.03*	3.79	0.01*	2.04	0.11
Purchase intention	1.01	0.31	0.72	0.34	4.04	0.01*

\*p < 0.05

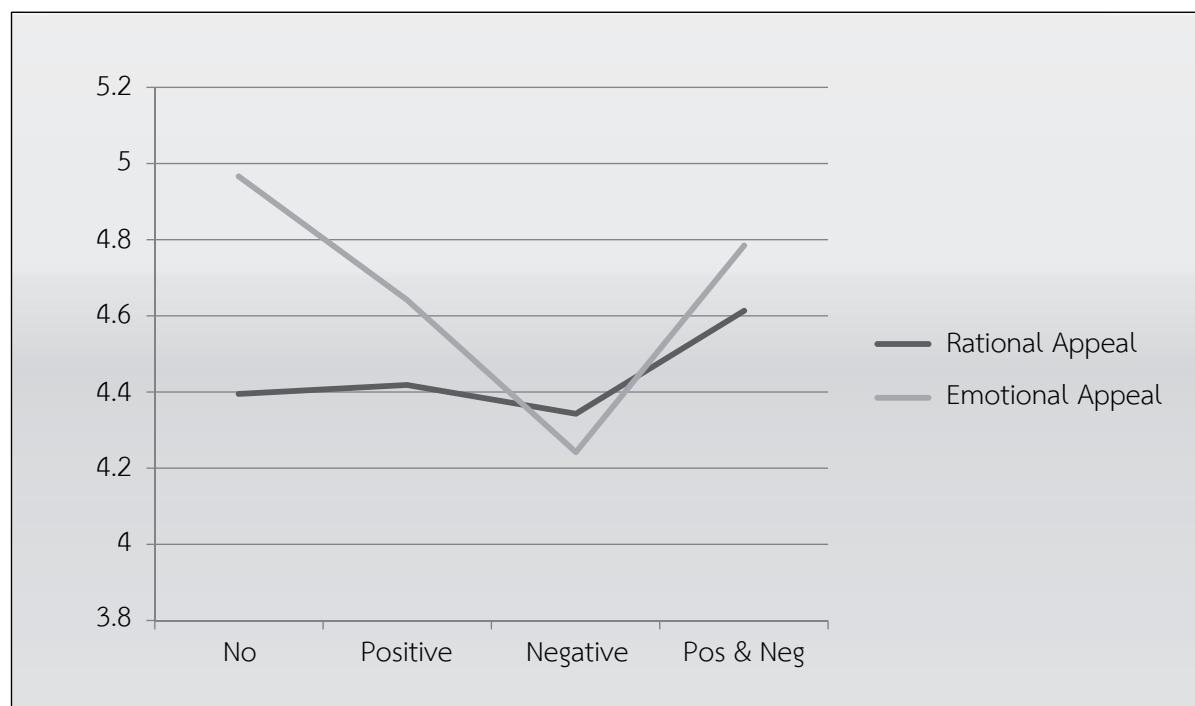
Source: Author's findings

An analysis of variance is used to test the hypotheses to determine whether corporate's message appeal and eWOM messages have any significant effect on attitude toward the messages, attitude toward the brand and purchase intention. Tukey's HSD Q statistics is used to further explore the differences between the means of the experimental groups.



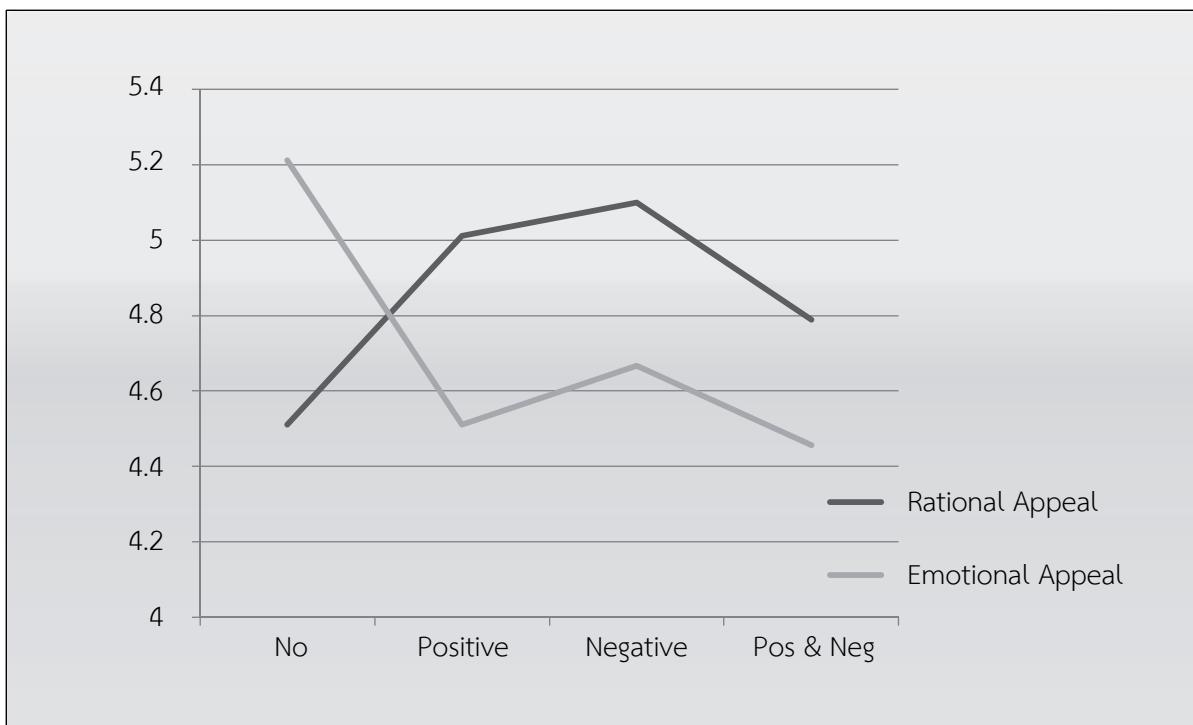
**Figure 1.** Means of Attitude toward the Messages of Both Message Appeals on Different types of eWOM Messages

For attitude toward the messages, we find significant differences on corporate's message appeal ( $F(1,232) = 18.82, p < 0.0001$ ) and eWOM ( $F(3,232) = 3.20, p = 0.02$ ). Thus, H1a and H2a are supported. There is no interaction between both variables, so H3a is not supported. For the groups without eWOM, emotional appeal is significantly better than the rational one for attitude toward the messages (Tukey's HSD Q statistics (no exposure) = 4.67,  $p < 0.05$ ). All the emotional scores are higher than their counterparts. The negative eWOM groups have the lowest scores.



**Figure 2** Means of Attitude toward the Brand of Both Message Appeals on Different types of eWOM Messages

For attitude toward the brand, the results are the same as the attitude toward the messages with significant differences on corporate's message appeal ( $F (1,232) = 5.02, p = 0.03$ ) and eWOM ( $F (3,232) = 3.79, p = 0.01$ ). Thus H1b and H2b are supported. No interaction between both variables is found, so H3b is not supported. Again, for the groups without eWOM, emotional appeal is significantly better than the rational one for attitude toward the brand (Tukey's HSD Q statistics (no exposure) = 4.18,  $p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, among those receiving emotional messages, those who view negative eWOM have significantly lower attitude toward the brand than those who do not view any eWOM (Tukey's HSD Q-Statistics = 5.29,  $p < 0.05$ ). All the emotional scores are higher than their counterparts except for the negative group.



**Figure 3** Means of Purchase Intention of Both Message Appeals on Different types of eWOM Messages

Purchase intention has totally different results from the attitudinal measures with no significant difference on the main effects so H1c and H2c are not supported. However, there is a significant interaction between message appeal and eWOM ( $F (3,232) = 4.04, p = 0.01$ ). Thus H3c is supported. The rational groups report higher purchase intention than the emotional ones except the groups without eWOM.



## 5. Discussion and Implications

### 5.1 Theoretical Contributions

The findings of both attitudinal measures reveal significant main effects of message appeal and eWOM. However, there is no interaction between both variables. For the groups that receive no eWOM, emotional appeal is better to bring about attitudes toward the messages and the brand than the rational one. The results are similar to previous findings of Rosselli, Skelly and Mackie (1995); Pringle and Field (2009) and Haeck (2011). This happens because the emotional messages have power to draw customer's attention and divert them from the cognitive elaborations to the non-content based route (Rosselli, Skelly and Mackie, 1995). The results also support the study of Zhang, Sun, Liu and Knight (2014) that emotional appeal is more suitable for experiential services and for low involvement products or services without further need for cognition, (Ray and Batra, 1983; Hitchon and Thorson, 1995) such as the hypermarket in our study.

While emotional messages leads to significantly better attitudes toward the messages and the brand than the rational ones on the attitudinal measures for the groups without eWOM, these differences are not statistically significant for those exposing to eWOM. Clearly, the amount of information is the main difference between the groups that receive eWOM and those that do not. They are required to involve more with the information from different versions of eWOM messages.

Even though different eWOM messages affect attitude toward the messages differently, we do not find any statistically significant difference between groups that receive positive and negative eWOM messages. This is similar to what Doh and Hwang (2009) have found that few negative eWOM messages are better for attitude toward the products and websites and all positive messages reduce credibility as consumers doubt the ethical behavior of the company.

However, the negative eWOM has a significant effect on attitude toward the brand as Chiou, Hsu and Hsieh (2012) state that negative eWOM can affect brand evaluation, and brand attachment can mitigate this effect as the only higher attitudinal score on the rational appeal ( $M = 4.34$ ) may result from the brand attachment of consumers of the hypermarket and other promotional and price-based communication that the store provides. Attitude toward the brand is thus affected by other factors e.g. brand equity, marketing mix strategies, etc. In this study, the rational appeal includes coupons and price discounts. Consumers may rationalize these factors through the rational appeal the company provides, resulting in better attitude toward the brand (Wu and Wang, 2011). Researchers also find attitude toward the brand can be affected by source credibility (Wu and Wang, 2011) and emotional expressions of the eWOM (Kim and Gupta, 2012).

The significant interaction between message appeal and eWOM on purchase intention calls for careful consideration on both factors in different conditions. If consumers do not expose to eWOM, emotional appeal is better than the rational one. This finding is the same as those of attitudes toward the messages and the brand, but it is not statistically significant. However, with any eWOM, rational appeal is better but not significant, implying that consumers require the company to provide reasons for them in the case they need to make a purchase decision. The results are similar to Lin, Lee and Horng (2011)'s findings that eWOM can lead to purchase intention and those who have high need for cognition prefer the rational appeal.

The results from this study also reveal the same results as Aaker and Bruzzone, 1981; Aaker, Stayman and Hagerty, 1986) that emotional appeal is more effective than the rational one for all attitudinal and intentional measures, especially for those without eWOM. However, when we explore corporate's message appeal and eWOM simultaneously, this study clearly show how these two factors affect attitudinal and intentional measures differently.

Emotional appeal is useful when consumers are not required to involve with too many factors as they form their attitude toward the messages. However, for attitude toward the brand, consumers require more information and involve more with the factors affecting the brands. The involvement helps reduce brand risks especially when they expose to negative eWOM (Chiou, Hsu and Hsieh, 2012). As we can witness from the results of this study, negative eWOM brings down all the scores of the attitudinal measures and it significantly lowers attitude toward the brand if the company uses only the emotional appeal. On the other hand, rational appeal can raise the attitude toward the brand for the subjects who view negative eWOM. This finding is affirmed with the evidence from our intentional measures where the rational appeal can heighten the purchase intention score when consumers view eWOM, especially the negative one. This indicates the higher involvement level as consumers seek more information and reasons to rationalize their purchase decisions

Instead of using subjects with different levels of involvement like previous studies, this study has clearly shown subjects can possess different degrees of involvement when they form different attitudes toward the messages, the brand or purchase intention. Thus, our findings on consumer involvement with different corporate's message appeals support the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Moreover, through the investigation of both corporate's message appeals and eWOM, the results help us understand more about the influences of different eWOM messages on consumer involvement during different psychological processes. Therefore, the findings enable us to recommend marketers to apply the right message appeal while consumers expose to different types of eWOM messages in consideration of different expected communication outcomes i.e. attitude formation or behavioral intention.



## 5.2 Managerial Implications

The results from this study provide valuable insights and guidance for marketing managers especially in the retail industry to select the appropriate message appeal for their marketing communication campaign. Emotional appeal can result in better attitudes toward the messages and the brand if they do not receive any eWOM. As consumers increasingly receive more eWOM messages, companies cannot totally depend on emotional appeal to communicate with their target audience. The eWOM messages have a stronger effect as they are viewed as a more credible source of information and thus increasing their involvement in information processing. It is recommended marketers include rational appeal to counter various forms of eWOM messages especially, the negative ones.

The communication mix element that is familiar in the hypermarket business is sales promotion, which is mainly rational, e.g. price discounts, special weekly deals, sweepstakes, premiums, samples, etc. All these sales promotion tools are generally employed in marketing communications of the hypermarket business and provide reasons for consumers to make a purchase as consumers are likely to seek more information and value before taking actions.

## 5.3 Future Research and Limitations of This Study

Future research can explore the combination of rational and emotional messages which are prevalent in normal marketing communications. However, the experiments would call for a larger size of randomized samples. Moreover, other types of industries and geographical areas may yield different results.

Nevertheless, this study has achieved its intended research objectives to vividly identify the roles of both corporate's message appeals and eWOM and their interaction on attitudinal and intentional measures. The interaction between both factors is also interesting for future research to explore how both factors can contribute to purchase intention in more details. However, this study has revealed attitudes and purchase intention require different levels of involvement which affect the choices of message appeal marketers select under different types of eWOM messages consumers expose to.

In today's marketing communication environments, what we are concerned is not just only what the companies communicate with their consumers but what consumers communicate among one another is as equally as important as the results of this study have shown.

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