

# Reviews Key Features of Word-Of-Mouth (WOM) Advertising and Their Impact on Sports Consumer

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study sought to investigate the critical features of Word of mouth (WOM) advertising and their impact on sport consumer behavior. **Research design, data, and methodology:** Target population of the study consisted of all sports consumer of the Federation of Special Patients and Organ Transplantation, Tehran (Iran), who had indirectly watched the World Organ Transplant Competition documentary at least once on others' advice. For this purpose, 360 sports consumers of the federation were purposefully selected and they were asked to complete the standard WOM advertising questionnaire of Asda and Ko. Pearson correlation coefficient test and modeling of structural equations were performed using Spss24 and Smart PLS software at an error level of 0.05 used to analyze the data. **Results:** The findings show that there is a significant relationship between experience and expertise, trust and validity, content richness, and the power of message transmission through WOM advertising and its predictability. Finally, interpersonal relationships and work involvement also had a moderating role in this regard. **Conclusions:** The general conclusion is that the components of WOM advertising as well as involvement and homophily with the mediating role directly as one of the presuppositions for persuasion. The sports consumer was promoting WOM.

**Keywords:** Word of Mouth, Consumer Sports, Communication, Interpersonal Relationships, Involvement

**JEL Classification Code:** D11, D12, M31, M37

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## 1. Introduction

WOM can be defined as a message organization, credibility, and activities services passed one person (Balter & Butman, 2005). Research shows that only 14% of people like what they see in commercials. They read or hear; they trust. Besides, 90% of people trusted products or services approved by a family member, friend, or colleague because they are sure that these people will not benefit from this issue (Alire, 2007). Therefore, word of mouth about traditional marketing tools such as personal selling and advertising media are more effective (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008; López, & Sicilia, 2013). Notably, marketing literature found that WOM communication has the potential to shape attitudes and behaviors of consumers and thereby influence their decision making (Asada & Ko, 2019).

Word of mouth affects the intention to buy (East, Romaniuk, Chawdhary, & Uncles, 2017). WOM has also promoted sports (Ian, 2011). Studying the effect of WOM on sports consumers on the quality and quantity of the sports industry is of particular importance. In recent years, paying attention to sports consumers' needs and responding to their demands in the sports services sector is one of the primary and most necessary tasks or goals of the sports industry (Adlaigan & Buttle, 2002; Funk, 2017; Yoshida, 2017). The tool that has widely used to evaluate the quality of services is the Servqual's model, which based on the evaluation of 5 service dimensions including feelings are trust, accountability, confidence, and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Among the target markets, audiences of organizations, including federations, groups, teams, and clubs, are consumers of sports services, which encourages the current audience and consumers to attend more often than

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their essential goals (Fitzgerald & Kirk, 2009; Makhov, Stepanova, Shmeleva, Petrova, & Dubrovinskay, 2015). Some groups including disabled and individual patients require special attention and different perspectives, (Makhov et al., 2015). Therefore, to attract more disabled people and individual patients to sports, those in charge (welfare, delegations) should pay serious attention to games in this section of society, to witness the colorful presence of this section of society in the national arena and be international. A look at the studies and research in the field of marketing of sports services on the Federation of Special Patients' consumers shows that extensive studies cannot be found in this regard, and research in this regard seems necessary. Presenting this research can be a step to help sports managers to understand this phenomenon better and take appropriate measures to manage it. In the present study, the research model created by Asada and Ko (2016), which are a combination of four groups, message sender characteristics (credibility and expertise of the sender), interpersonal characteristics (homophily), message-related characteristics (message content richness and message delivery power) and involvement has been used.

However, they selected participants online through the Mturk's website, and the statistical population of their research included soccer viewers who had received recommendations about three months before the soccer tournament. However, in the present study, the researcher decided to measure WOM's effect on the actual behavior of consumers of the Federation of Special Patients and Organ Transplantation. Because these patients need encouragement and psychological support due to depression, the present study participants also considered. They were selected using the field method (in person). Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the critical features of WOM and its impact on sports consumers. The researcher seeks to answer these two questions: Does more emphasis and emphasis on WOM affect the sports consumer with a homophilic mediating role? What is the effect of WOM mediated involvement on the sports consumer?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Message Sender Characteristics**

Experimental and non-experimental studies show that experts are often more likely than others to think of a product class as leaders of opinion. Others imitate their decisions because their decisions are more credible (Jain & Katarya, 2019). Experts have high levels of objective knowledge about the product that stems from their ongoing interest in the product class. Stable preoccupation with the product class leads to the repetition of product experience. It brings increasing knowledge and familiarity with the product; This, in turn, develops their ability to correctly identify products and services for optimal decision making (Alba & Autchinson, 2000). In explaining most of this, it should be said that since today's false and unrealistic advertisements are full of newspapers, magazines, and television and consumers face the problem of obtaining correct information about goods and services, this is their preference. When deciding to buy, they will use the knowledge and information of past friends and acquaintances or experts who have knowledge, expertise, ability, or expertise about products or services as a reputable source of information in that area. (Jain & Katarya, 2019; Li, Wu, & Lai, 2013; Sun & Qu., 2010).

**H1:** A message senders' expertise will positively influence WOM.

There are several different ways to validate a source (message sender). We chose expertise, experience, trust, and credibility, a vital feature of WOM's sender (Birnbbaum & Stegner, 1979). Message validity means how much the recipient of the message trusts the sender and reflects the recipient's mindset about the sender (Gligor & Wing, 2011). Previous studies have shown that trust and honesty in the message's source, and similarity in perception with the message's source are essential factors in assessing the message (Bic kart & Schindler, 2001). It controlled by marketers (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003). Trust encourages consumers to make positive comments about service providers (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). More consumer confidence in an organization's products and services makes them more likely to recommend those products and services to others (Life, Simintiras, Dwivedi, & Mavridou, 2018). In this vein, satisfied customers are likely to engage in positive WOM behavior such as recommendation to other customers (Xiao, Ren, Zhang, & Kethloafetse, 2020).

**H2:** A message senders validity and trust will positively influence WOM.

### **2.2. Message Characteristics**

The first thing to keep in mind when it comes to WOM advertising is its richness, which includes the clarity of the message, depth, and intensity (Yap, Soetarto, & Sweeney, 2013). When a WOM message includes detailed information and exciting stories about a product or service, the recipient clearly understands it (Mazzarol,

Sweeney, & Soutar, 2007). According to them, WOM advertising can be created about an ordinary product, but with an emotional and fantastic message. WOM advertising messages should be both emotionally stimulating and logically persuasive. It means stimulating the consumer through emotions (Allsop, Bassett, & Hoskins, 2007).

The message's rational appeal is that the message focuses on product features that benefit the consumer, and emotional appeal means motivating the consumer through emotion (Nobel, Pomeroy, Johansson, 2013). The organization's advertising message should establish an emotional connection between the organization and the recipient of the message so that we can be sure that consumers will send this message to others, and this message will affect them (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & Wijk, 2007).

**H3:** A message sender's content richness of message will positively influence WOM.

The message delivery's power is related to WOM advertising messages' attractiveness. That is more related to how the message is conveyed and reflects the power of people's advice. WOM advertising is an essential event for both the speaker and the receiver when the message has spoken with power and enthusiasm (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2008). Also, the recommendations are not necessarily explicit, and many WOM advertisers express their advice implicitly (recounting experiences). Signs, hand, and facial gestures that the sender uses when conveying the message also affect WOM advertising's effectiveness. That stated Word expressed enthusiasm, the connection sender-receiver significantly established. In short, the power of sending a message is related to the emotional influence of the content of WOM messages, and when WOM sent to the mouth, the degree of its power is understood (Jain & Katarya, 2019). In this sense, the following hypothesis could be established.

**H4:** A message sender's power of message delivery will positively influence WOM.

### **2.3. Moderating Effect of Homophily**

Homophily is the similarity when the information source refers to the similarity of the information receiver with the data transmitter in terms of specific characteristics (Sweeney et al., 2008). In confirmation of this, Brown and Reingen (1987) showed that sources with a strong relationship with the recipients are far more significant than those with weak links. They argue that when there is a strong relationship between the recipient and the sender, the two may be more familiar with each other, and as a result, the recipient is more likely to ask the sender for the information they need. To be similar or homosexual to the message counselor is the closeness of individuals' norms, attitudes, and values (Brown & Regan, 1987; Sweeney et al., 2008). Besides, the resemblance inferred from the source increases the impact of the informed information; there are different theories. The attractiveness model states that information recipients identify themselves with similar resources. Festinger's theory of social comparison states that people tend to compare their attitudes and characteristics with others, so people implicitly assume that the same people have similar needs and pastimes (Wangenheim & Bayon, 2004).

**H5:** Homophily has a moderating effect on the relationship between WOM influence and antecedents.

### **2.4. Moderating Effect of Message Receivers Involvement**

Involvement defined the understanding issue of importance; Involvement can be defined as psychological interaction (mental involvement) an object defined (Zaichkowsky, 1985). It also defines the amount of time, search, or attention a consumer spends on a brand or service (Chaffey & Chazot, 2008). WOM advertising used as a tool to attract customers, but some researchers believe that merely accessing and attracting attention is not enough, and advertising should be able to change attitudes and be able to sell the product. Examining people's opinions toward a product is influenced by online consumer reviews, and they have shown that people who are heavily involved in the product are more likely to be affected by the quality of the product than those who are less informed (Lee, Park, & Han, 2008).

Which is considered a critical factor in processing consumer information when consumers want to choose a service or product. Their mental involvement increases. In short, the psychological involvement between product and service expresses a chain of consumer interest in products and services. Stable mental engagement with the product class leads to frequent product experience and brings increasing real knowledge and familiarity with the product; This, in turn, enhances their ability to correctly identify products and services for optimal decision making (Alba & Hutchinson, 2000). Hence, it is logical to state that the high levels of involvement with advertised products increase the likelihood of buying.

**H6:** Involvement will moderate the relationship between WOM influence and antecedents.

### 3. Methodology

The research method is quantitative-descriptive and correlational, in terms of cross-sectional time, in terms of applied purpose and data collection, it is field type. The study's statistical population was that all sports consumer of the Federation of Special Patients and Organ Transplantation were in Tehran (Iran). The population size was considered unlimited. The sample size did purpose research, testing, test power (0.8), Alpha level 0.05, in order to determine the sample size, G \* Power software was used instead of the usual sampling formulas. Considering that the test capacity is one of the most important criteria required in determining the sample size, the tool identified the number of samples for a test capacity of 80%, 360 people as a sufficient sample.

For this purpose, 360 users of the Federation of Special Patients and Organ Transplantation, Tehran (Iran), who had watched the documentary indirectly (via television) at least once on the advice of others, were selected. The present study conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the researcher first attended a group of sports consumers in the federation and talked about a documentary about the World Organ Transplant Competition that was to broadcast on television, and asked them to watch the program. Also, recommend to other patients and their friends. After the documentary aired, the researcher was among the consumers who watched the program for the second time on the researcher's recommendation and other consumers and distributed the questionnaire. Also, for better generalization of the results, 450 questionnaires were distributed among sports consumer, after collection, the questionnaire removed from 72 people due to incomplete answers, and 18 people removed because they did not receive advice from those around them. A total of 360 complete and analyzed questionnaires examined in the present study. Also, the method of selecting samples was purposefully available. After drawing attention, the researcher asked them to advise others to follow the ongoing event directly.

Also, the Asada and Ko (2016) questionnaire used to collect information. To measuring the variables, a 7-point Likert scale used (example: I agree completely, and I completely disagree). The questionnaire compiled in seven categories: comparison of WOM, experience and expertise, trust and credibility, the richness of message content, power of message delivery, involvement, and homophily. At the beginning of the questionnaire, it should be noted, "Has anyone advised you to watch a sporting event in the last few days?" Factor analysis used to validate the structure and confirm the formal Validity, the opinions of experts, and doctors of physical education used. It is symmetrical, and their elongation value was in the range of 3+, indicating that the variable distribution had a normal elongation. In the statistical section, due to the normality of the present research variables, parametric tests were used for analysis. They were considering the default confirmation of the normality of data distribution from Pearson correlation coefficient to measure the relationship between test variables, SPSS<sup>24</sup> software and structural equation model with Smart PLS software to investigate the relationships between hidden variables with each other and the items to measure each the hidden variable used with the corresponding variable at the error level of 0.05.

### 4. Results

Prior to testing hypotheses, the study examined distribution of statistical sample. Regarding to willingness of responding the questionnaire, while 129 respondents in the range of age 21 to 30 displayed the highest percentage, 35.8%, 50's showed the lowest willingness for survey response, a minimum of 4.4%. In terms of marriage status, about 63.3% (n=228) was married, 36.7% (n=132) was unmarried. Finally, in terms of education, about 17.8 percent (n=64) received undergraduate diplomas, 29.2 percent (n=106) received graduate degree, 31.1 percent (n=112) received bachelor's degrees.

Factor loading of items for WOM advertising were between 0.867 and 0.882, loading values of confidence and validity items were between 0.602 and 0.851, loading values of experience and expertise were between 0.778 and 0.879, and loading values of content richness were between 0.857 and 0.893, loading values of message delivery power were between 0.590 and 0.887, the involvement items were loaded between 0.696 and 0.826, as well as homophily was between 0.606 and 0.8344, indicating that these values are higher than the threshold (amount expected) are 0.4. Accordingly, the convergence validity of measures was established. Cronbach's alpha and validity were also established, indicating significant over than the proposed value of 0.7. All the mean values of the extracted variance presented above the proposed standard, exceeding the minimum amount of 0.50. Thus, it can be said that the measurement model of the confirmatory factor analysis of research variable is acceptable (see figure 1 and table 1).

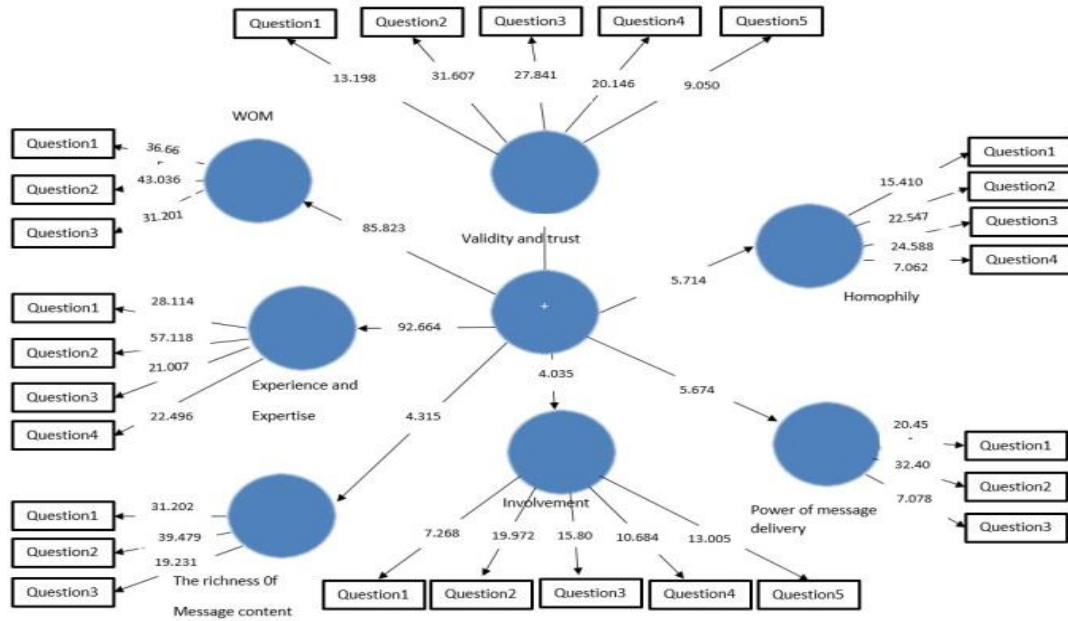


Figure 1. Factor Analysis Model

Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Research Variables

Independent variable	Dimension	T	$\lambda$	rho	CR	AVE
WOM	Question1	36.66	0.867	0.847	0.906	.763
	Question2	43.03	0.872			
	Question3	31.20	0.882			
Validity and Trust	Question1	31.19	0.665	0.803	0.865	0.565
	Question2	31.60	0.851			
	Question3	27.84	0.832			
	Question4	20.14	0.778			
	Question5	9.05	0.602			
Experience and Expertise	Question1	28.11	0.813	0.852	0.888	0.664
	Question2	57.11	0.879			
	Question3	21.00	0.786			
	Question4	22.49	0.778			
Richness of Message Content	Question1	31.20	0.893	0.882	0.912	0.775
	Question2	39.47	0.891			
	Question3	19.23	0.857			
Power of message delivery	Question1	20.45	0.841	0.721	0.823	0.614
	Question2	32.40	0.887			
	Question3	7.07	0.590			
The clash	Question1	7.26	0.696	0.849	0.874	0.583
	Question2	19.97	0.826			
	Question3	15.80	0.799			
	Question4	10.68	0.727			
	Question5	13.00	0.761			
Homophily	Question1	15.41	0.791	0.772	0.857	0.604
	Question2	22.54	0.852			
	Question3	24.58	0.834			
	Question4	7.06	0.606			

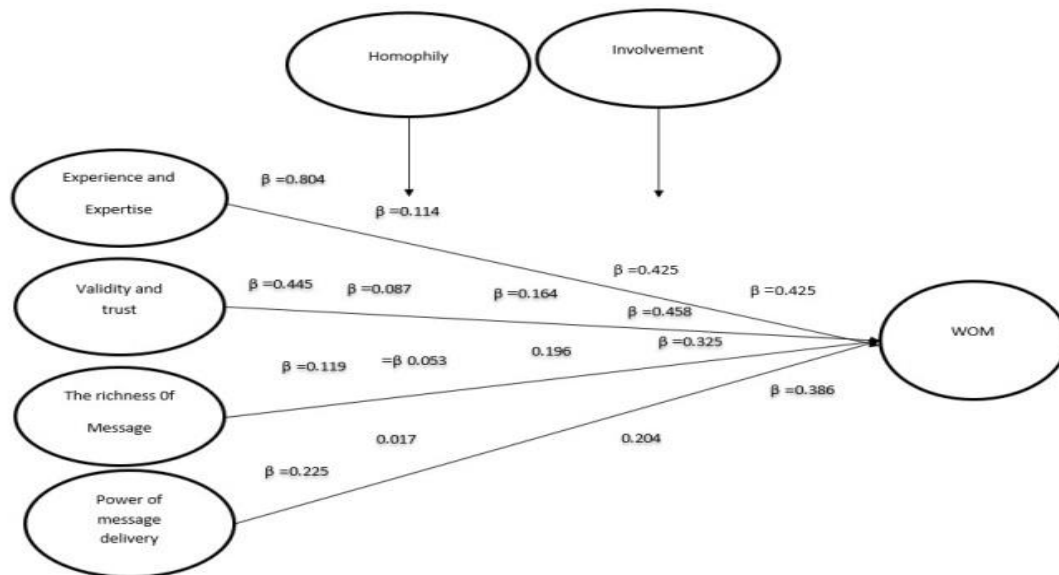
Notes. CR: composite reliability, rho: model measurement index, AVE: average variance extracted,  $\lambda$ : lambda (it is a measure of association for nominal variables)

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Independent variable		M±SD	R <sup>2</sup>	P <sup>a</sup>	r
Experience and Expertise	↔	4.702±1.287	56.59	0.001**	0.772**
Trust and Validity	↔	4.572±1.113	23.61	0.001**	0.486**
The richness of Message	↔	4.806±1.326	4.53	0.002**	0.213**
Power of message delivery	↔	4.873±1.085	9.42	0.002**	0.307**

Notes. <sup>a</sup>p < .05. \*\*p < .01.

As shown in table 2, experience and expertise, credibility and trust, the richness of message content, message delivery power were positively correlated with WOM at the 95% confidence level. Results show a significant direct and positive relationship between WOM advertising and expertise, experience, credibility, and trust. However, in the hypothesis of message richness and message delivery power, there is a significant direct, and positive relationship in the level is weak. In the experience and expertise variable, the correlation coefficient between the variables is 0.772, which shows a relatively strong correlation between the research variable (experience and expertise) and the dependent variable (WOM). Also, the value of the coefficient of determination is equal to 56.59. This value shows that the variable of experience and expertise could predict 56.59% of the changes in the dependent variable of WOM. Other hypotheses can be interpreted in the same way. As depicted in figure 2, it is noteworthy that the continuous lines that cut show the effect of the moderator variables that the numbers below these lines also indicate the degree of moderation. The extension lines also indicate the path coefficient between the variables.



Notes. Continuous lines that truncated represent the effect of multivariate variables, and the numbers listed below these lines also indicate the degree of modification among the variables. The extension lines also show the path coefficient between the variables.

**Figure 2.** Final Model

Findings showed that homophily played a role as moderator ( $\beta = 0.114$ ,  $p = .001$ ) between experience and expertise and WOM advertising. Also, as shown in the final model, involvement moderated the relationship between experience and expertise and WOM advertising ( $\beta = 0.425$ ,  $p = .001$ ). In terms of moderating effect of homophily and involvement in the relationship between validity and trust, and WOM, firstly, homophily did not function as a moderator in the relationship ( $\beta = 0.087$ ,  $P = 0.187$ ), yet involvement moderated the relationship, presenting it strengthen the effect of validity and trust on WOM ( $\beta = 0.164$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Moreover, homophily did not show the moderating effect in the relationship between power delivery of message and WOM ( $\beta = 0.017$ ,  $p = .263$ ), however, involvement played a role as moderator in the relationship between power delivery of message and WOM ( $\beta = 0.204$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

## 5. Discussion

The structural equation model results showed that knowledge and expertise could predict WOM advertising. Sun and Qu (2010) also came to this conclusion in a study because today false and unrealistic advertisements are full of newspapers, magazines and television and consumers have difficulty obtained accurate information. They are faced with goods and services, for which it would be preferable to use the knowledge and information of past friends and acquaintances when making a purchase decision. These results are consistent with the findings of the present study.

There is a positive and significant relationship between trust and credibility with WOM advertising, and the results of the structural equation model showed that trust and validity could predict the variable of WOM advertising. Those means that if the consumer understands that the source of the WOM message sent to him is valid, his attitude towards the organization's product or service will be positive. Consumers will also send these messages to others when they recognize that the message's source is valid. By increasing, expanding, and applying this type of messenger feature the WOM can be improved. These findings support prior studies suggesting the role of trust, validity, communication, competence, and WOM advertising among club customers in recommendation behavior (Khabiri, Mohammadi, & Sadeghi, 2012).

In terms of the relationship between content richness and WOM advertising, there was a positive and significant relationship. The structural equation model results showed that the richness of the content could predict the variable of WOM advertising. The clearer and more apparent the message's content, the better the chances of success and dissemination, and the consumer understands it correctly. In a similar line with this notion, Sweeney, Soutar, and Mazzarol (2014) suggested that message content, including words, increases the response to WOM advertising. Thus, if a healthy relationship is built between message holders, message clarity should be such relevant content in WOM advertising. Message's content increases the transmission message from the story, seems to add clarity to images message

There is also a link between the power of message delivery and WOM. The results of the structural equation model showed that the power of message delivery could predict the variable of WOM advertising. To convey WOM's message, organizations need to increase consumer satisfaction by improving the quality of their services, thereby encouraging potential consumers. Consumer satisfaction has introduced as the most critical determinant in the transmission of WOM advertising. Studies show that the message's content is manifest, and there will be no problem transmitting it. In this regard, Sweeney et al. (2008) showed in their research that message delivery's power is related to WOM's attractiveness. In another study, feeling of surprise, happiness, and sadness have the most significant impact on the transmission of the message (Dobele et al., 2007). Previous studies have shown that the power of message delivery has a positive effect on WOM advertising (Sweeney et al., 2014).

In the field of homophily (interpersonal relationships) on the relationship between the influence of WOM and its history has a moderating role that had hypotheses, the results showed that homophily has a moderating role in the relationship between experience and expertise with WOM. That means that the relationship between experience and expertise with WOM advertising is higher among people with more senior interpersonal relationships than those with lower interpersonal relationships. There is also one that can be effective. One of these is moderating interpersonal relationships, which, the better the link, the more it will ultimately have a more significant impact on WOM advertising. Homophily also has a moderating role in the relationship between trust and validity with WOM advertising. It means that the relationship between trust and validity and WOM advertising is higher among people with more top personal relationships than those with lower interpersonal relationships. In this regard, it should said that trust and validity created when there is a good and functional relationship between people, and in this case, people can give trust each other without any contrary views, and along with trust, validity. There will be better advertising in this case as well, and homophily has a moderating role in the relationship between content richness and WOM advertising, meaning that the link between content richness and WOM advertising is higher among people with more senior personal relationships. It is more than people whose interpersonal relationships are lower, which can undoubtedly be very useful concerning the message's content. It will cause the message to adequately convey between people, and the lower the relationship, the more acceptable it will be. The message will have a negative effect, and the message will be complete, will not be transferred. Finally, homophily has a moderating role in the relationship between message content and WOM, meaning that the relationship between the power of message content and WOM is higher among people with more senior interpersonal relationships than those with low interpersonal relationships (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Gremler, Gwinner, & Brown, 2001; Wangenheim & Bayon, 2004).

In the context of involvement, the relationship between the influence of WOM and its background has a moderating role, with four sub-hypotheses. The results showed that consumer involvement moderates the relationship between experience and expertise with WOM advertising. That means the relationship between experience and expertise with WOM advertising is higher among people with higher Involvement than those with low involvement. What is more, the results are entirely accurate, indicating that experience and expertise will increase when there is more involvement, in which case experience and expertise can manifest. Involvements over the relationship between trust worthiness and WOM have a mitigating function, referring to the relationship between integrity and WOM is higher among people with higher involvement than those with

lower levels of involvement. Like experience, specialization is more effective when there is more involvement between people, because it is at this time that people will feel trusted, and involvement plays a moderating role in the relationship between content richness and WOM advertising. The richness of content with WOM advertising is higher among people with higher engagement than those with lower involvement, and ultimately involvement over the relationship between the power of message transmission and WOM advertising means that the relationship between The power of WOM transmission through WOM advertising is higher among people with higher complications than those with lower levels of involvement. The results indicate the more involved, the more satisfied.

Consequently, it is suggested that to encourage more people to watch events in the stadiums through WOM, we should provide a memorable experience for sports consumers by providing desirable products and services to have positive experiences. Share this with others. Besides, creating strong interpersonal relationships between employees and unique consumers of sports organizations to increase consumer confidence and satisfaction, and this ultimately leads to pleasure and the formation of a pleasant and positive feeling in consumers, which causes let them do WOM for the products and services of sports organizations.

The present study also faced several limitations; first, the present study examined the impact of WOM's crucial features on consumers only in the sports industry, so the results cannot be generalized to other sectors. Therefore, to compare the results, this research can be done in different periods and other places and connections with other service industries such as the hotel industry, the manufacturing industry. It also suggested that future researchers examine the impact of a critical feature of WOM on different variables, including club profitability, competitive advantage between federations, and other factors. Besides, it suggested that a qualitative study identifies the factors affecting WOM in sports, from the experts' perspective. It is worth considering the moderating effect of other variables, such as perceived value or service quality in future research.

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