# COVER PAGE AND DECLARATION

| | Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) |
|---|---|
| **Specialisation:** | International Business |
| **Module Code & Module Title:** | MGT590<br>Action Research |
| **Students' Full Name:** | Affan Nadeem |
| **Word Count:** | 5463 |
| **Date of Submission:** | 07/05/2024 |

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**DATE:** 07/05/2024

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# *Abstract*

This study, unique in its focus on word-of-mouth in the business-to-business context, outlines potential research directions and critically analyzes existing discourse. Eighteen academic articles formed the foundation of our systematic review. The thematic analysis uncovered three main topics: reference marketing, word-of-mouth usage, and WOM's origin. Each topic encapsulates a specific B2B WOM feature, underscoring the complexity and depth of this field. This study has identified numerous research questions that demand more investigation. Both academics and businesses acknowledge the importance of word-of-mouth to B2B marketing. The gap was determined, as no prior studies specifically pursued the analysis of WOM in a business-to-business context. Although existing research into B2C WOM reveals its significant influence on organizational performance, for managers, it is essential to apply these results to more than just the B2B market. Expanding on core insights about the critical necessity of word-of-mouth in the business-to-business setting, this inquiry plunges into poorly-studied dimensions contributing to making WOM in B2B marketing strategy so complex and impactful. At its core, WOM's functioning in B2B interactions is defined by its capability to affect purchase behavior on the one hand and create longstanding business relationships, trust, and good brand reputation on the other hand.

First, the question of how reference marketing works in B2B contexts is begging to be asked. Reference marketing is a critical component of B2B WOM, referring to using current customer testimonies and endorsements to attract work opportunities. However, in contrast to B2C, where the emotional element of testimony often leads to consumer action on referent power, B2B is traditionally more rational and focused on detailed accounts of performances. It means that businesses have a challenge choosing and producing case studies, testimonies, and endorsements that inform rather than sell – this topic can ensure more exploration. How much "selling" is too much in a B2B setting when many target customers already have high awareness and skepticism? Another point is which platforms are best used: in a world booming on emotional appeal, are print and digital media social media the best messages to reach the target audience?

Furthermore, understanding the origins of WOM in B2B settings should focus on generating knowledge about the factors that encourage customers to express their opinions. Indeed, satisfaction, trust, and perceived value are important factors in positive WOM, but those are

not the only reasons. For example, knowing positive WOM might make you look good as a thought leader or a peer whose advice clients could follow; in this case, individual reputation impacts WOM.

Therefore, uncovering all possible reasons why one individual or company will give one will provide B2B marketing experts with the opportunities to develop a good WOM strategy. Additionally, based on the increasing impact of digital transformation, B2B experts should pay attention to how WOM works in the digital realm. Given that various social media, online forums, and professional networks are used in B2B sectors, the question of how exactly WOM works online should be asked. It could help develop effective online reputation strategies and digital endorsements. Finally, what happens when negative WOM is generated in B2B settings should be answered. While the negative impact of such WOM is well documented in the B2C sectors, the amount of money involved in B2B contracts could make the negative WOM halcyon more destructive. Therefore, practical strategies for negative WOM management should be developed.

Exploring WOM in this context should consider these unique features of the B2B market – the extended sales cycle, the complex DMU, and the high stakes attached to each transaction. In addition, the role of digital transformation in communication should be examined more closely to understand the dynamics of B2B WOM better. With the advent of the digital era, information dissemination has changed dramatically – social networks, forums, and review sites have become the epicenter of business storytelling. The distribution of digital WOM is so powerful because it can spread at the speed of light, overcoming space and time boundaries.

Understanding digital mechanisms that facilitate or inhibit WOM transfer between B2B companies may give more insights into how to communicate efficiently. Another area of research that deserves attention is the relationship between personal communication and digital interaction in WOM in B2B. Personal relationships ensure credibility, but digital channels offer reach and convenience. Understanding the merger of these two factors is critical to unlocking the mechanisms of transmitting positive WOM in B2B. It is also possible to study the measurement and tracking of WOM. In B2B markets, every message is crucial due to the lower number of transactions compared to B2C. Hence, measuring and tracking WOM – researching its measurement and identifying who and in what conditions the harmful or positive message spreads – can be helpful for business. Finally, the influence of

CSR on the positive WOM of businesses is a topic that is just beginning to be discussed. Corporate social responsibility initiatives can impact WOM.

Therefore, it is interesting to study how they affect the interaction between companies and how they can be used strategically to create a positive image. To sum up, WOM in the B2B market is a significant field of research with plenty of undiscovered territories. Our interpretation of the concept should evolve because the way businesses work continues to change. A multidisciplinary approach, combined with digital tools, will help us uncover the full potential of WOM and build stronger relationships. There are plenty of opportunities for such discoveries in the future, and as long as researchers remain interested in exploring them, we can better understand what WOM is in modern B2B.

The significance of WOM in B2B marketing is evident, but there is still a vast expanse of directions that require more extensive research. By unraveling the mechanisms, motives, and means through which B2B WOM is transmitted, researchers and marketers can pave the way for leveraging positive endorsement and mitigating the impact of the negative one. As the B2B market evolves into a more complex and diversified landscape, understanding WOM intricacies becomes paramount to ensure that business relationships are more robust, reliable, and efficient.

# Introduction

Word-of-mouth (WOM) plays a significant role in B2C marketing by shaping customers' buying habits. Word-of-mouth influences electronic or in-person purchases more than other marketing components like advertising and personal selling. Product awareness is raised, and sales are stimulated by customer evaluations (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). According to You et al. (2015), consumers' purchase intentions and product assessments are improved by both types of word-of-mouth, positive or negative. WOM-acquired long-term customers are twice as valuable to a business as other types of customers. WOM also has a significant impact on business-to-business (B2B) marketing. Acquisition executives, for example, frequently use WOM from partners or colleagues inside the company to choose new suppliers or assess industrial goods. B2B purchasers employ electronic word-of-mouth from peers and create online communities (Steward et al., 2018). Seller companies invite current customers to promote their goods or post customer evaluations as case studies to employ word-of-mouth (WOM) in reference or referral marketing (Goers, 2018; Hada et al., 2013; Jalkala & Salminen, 2009). As a result, in both B2C and B2B settings, researchers and marketing managers have become interested in WOM. However, most studies concentrate on WOM for B2C, and it is vital to investigate WOM for B2B marketing. Our study aims to use a systematic review technique to assess and analyze WOM research in the B2B setting, synthesize findings, and identify future research paths. This technique guarantees thorough literature searches while minimizing subjectivity. The structure of the paper is as follows: WOM and associated concepts are defined in Section 2; the review process and data collection are covered in Section 3; descriptive and thematic analyses of reviewed publications are presented in Sections 4 and 5; management implications, analysis, and future research directions are covered in Sections 6 and 7.

# Topic: A Systematic Review of B2B Word of Mouth

## Word of Mouth Definition

According to Barretto (2014), Word-of-mouth is an informal process of exchanging and learning knowledge through written or spoken communication between a sender and a recipient or set of recipients, independent of the recipients' social networks. It is one of the oldest ways of communicating information. Aarikka-Stenroos and Sakari Makkonen, 2014; Toth et al., 2020) note that while WOM is regularly used in conjunction with other words, such as recommendation (Olaru et al., 2008) and referral (Hartmann & de Grahl, 2011; Wallenburg, 2009), they are frequently used synonymously. Remember that Word of Mouth and reference marketing cannot be used interchangeably. In 1966, Katz and Lazarsfeld gave one of the first definitions of word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing: they defined it as the interchange of marketing information among customers that materially changes their perceptions of products and services and significantly impacts their behavior. A personal communication technique between a sender and a recipient, word-of-mouth (WOM), is defined by later writers like Arndt (1967) as one in which the recipient views the information as non-commercial and about a brand, product, or service. Similarly, customer communication about a firm, product, or service that is seen as coming from sources free from commercial influence is what Litvin et al. (2008) described as word-of-mouth (WOM). While referencing marketing is the active, seller-initiated exploitation of customers' word-of-mouth (WOM) as a sales and marketing strategy. WOM is informal customer communication that occurs amongst customers without the seller involved. There are two types of WOM in B2B marketing: "reference marketing" and "pure WOM." Communicating with a potential client or an internal colleague is pure word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. Suppliers may indirectly incentivize senders to produce WOM, but this is not direct supplier involvement. By intentionally selecting the sender as a reference customer, a supplier can use word-of-mouth (WOM) from a sender to inform a receiver.

WOM sender, recipient, and supplier are the three parties involved in B2B WOM marketing. The sender of word-of-mouth (WOM) communicates experiences with suppliers to external buyers or internal colleagues, either positively or negatively. When making purchase decisions, the WOM receiver analyzes the information sent by senders. As a marketing strategy, the supplier leverages WOM information from reference customers or encourages current

customers to forward WOM information to potential customers. A systematic review will be conducted in the next part, considering these categories and terminology.

**Review Questions**

In a systematic review, the research questions guide the creation of search strings for database queries, determine inclusion or exclusion criteria, and define the overall process for gathering pertinent literature. As mentioned, our objective is to consolidate research findings and pinpoint future research avenues regarding WOM's role in B2B marketing. Consequently, we formulated two review questions:

What is the current understanding of WOM in B2B marketing?

What gaps exist in our knowledge of WOM in B2B marketing?

## *Research Methodology*

We used a systematic review technique to look at the existing literature on B2B WOM research that is currently being conducted. Chawla et al., 2020 Minerbo and Brito, 2021 Yaghtin et al., 2021as well Hulland and Houston, 2020 Transfield et al., 2003 favor using this approach to condense information on a topic of interest. Using the Transfield et al. (2003) method, we started gathering information like the research topic, the scope of our study, and the approach for gathering pertinent publications. We used this methodology to look for, collect, and assess the articles' quality and applicability. Then, descriptive and thematic analyses were carried out to extract specific and thorough information from the articles, and the major takeaways from the literature were summarized. These findings were then synthesized into a conceptual framework. The procedure for gathering and combining data is described in this section.

## Database and Search Terms

We started our search utilizing three well-known online databases: EBSCO Business Source Complete, Science Direct, and Emerald, drawing on previous systematic reviews (Cartwright et al., 2021; Christofi et al., 2021; Dobrucalı, 2019; Novais et al., 2019). These platforms, which provide title, abstract, and keyword searches, are well-known worldwide for their thorough business and marketing publications coverage. The results and gaps in B2B WOM research are the main focus of our review questions, meaning papers in the business markets or B2B marketing environment must be given special attention.

We searched the databases for keywords for word-of-mouth (WOM), business word of mouth that included phrases like "WOM," "referral," "customer reference," "business-to-business," "industrial markets," "industrial marketing," and "supplier." These databases were used to locate papers that included any combination of these keywords in the article's title, abstract, or body. We found 102 articles by this search: 31 from Science Direct, 27 from Emerald, and 44 from EBSCO Business Source Complete. Seventy-eight publications were left for additional evaluation after duplicates were eliminated.

## Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

**The criteria for inclusion:**

1. Publicly available articles that are published in English.
2. Publications that covered word-of-mouth (WOM) in quantitative research as independent or dependent variables.
3. Investigations that contrasted the impacts of word-of-mouth in (B2B) and (B2C) contexts.

**The criteria for exclusion:**

1. Articles that discussed word-of-mouth (WOM) in a B2C setting, either broadly or specifically.
2. Studies that describe the use of social media as a word-of-mouth (WOM) phenomenon without contrasting its impacts in business-to-business (B2B) and consumer contexts.

## Selection of Relevant Articles

The vast majority of the 78 references discussed social media use by business-to-business (B2B) companies and word-of-mouth (WOM) in a business-to-consumer (B2C) setting. These references were eliminated based on our inclusion/exclusion criteria. After removing the latter research, fifteen papers examined how B2B firms used, designed, and managed social media. The citations of these 15 papers were examined, and three more significant articles were found.

## Extraction, Analysis, and Synthesis

After deciding which literature should be included, we used Microsoft Excel to develop a data extraction form to facilitate the following theme and descriptive analysis. This form recorded the title, authors, publishing journal, year, article type, sample size, industry background, nation, key study results, and kind of word-of-mouth (WOM). Each of the 18 references was examined, and the spreadsheet's mandatory fields were completed.

## Descriptive Analysis of the Data

The late 19th century saw the start of research on word-of-mouth (WOM) in B2B marketing, emphasizing the distinctions between B2B and B2C tactics and industrial buying patterns. WOM can originate from outside firms (interfirm) or from within the same firm (intrafirm), according to early research by Martilla (1971) and Webster (1970). This can have a significant influence on corporate decision-making. The issue received little investigation until the 2000s, when there was a rise in publications despite early curiosity. This comeback was ascribed to the emergence of online review sites, the growing use of social media in business-to-business (B2B) networking, and the growth of the internet, which encouraged companies to display client testimonials on their websites.

Methodologically, most studies were empirical (94%), with quantitative analyses through surveys being the most common approach (47%). Qualitative interviews were also frequently used (25%), particularly in the early stages of research, to explore new phenomena. No literature reviews were found, and there has been a recent increase in experimental methods, although they are less common in B2B marketing due to the complexity of purchase processes. Geographically, most empirical studies were conducted in Europe and the USA, with a few in Asia and other regions. This suggests that most research on B2B WOM has focused on developed Western countries, and findings may only sometimes apply to different areas.

The studies primarily examined B2B services, particularly IT and software procurement, logistics and transportation, and financial services. Due to the intangible nature of services, these sectors often rely on WOM to make purchasing decisions. Other focus areas included

telephone and food services, with some research on tangible industrial goods like pharmaceuticals and electronic machinery.

## *Thematic Analysis*

Based on the body of knowledge on word-of-mouth (WOM) in the business-to-consumer (B2C) sector, the "pure WOM process" may be separated into two phases: creation and application. At least two parties are involved in these stages: the sender, who starts the WOM-generating process, and the receiver, who uses the WOM. There are notable differences between each stage's procedures, ideas, and theoretical frameworks. As a result, academics studying B2C WOM have divided research into these two separate stages. After implementing this classification and comparing it to the categories of the "pure WOM process" and the "reference marketing process," three main themes come to light: (1) WOM generation, (2) WOM consumption, and (3) reference marketing.

## Theme I: Word-of-Mouth Generation

16 research (or 44% of the 36 examined publications) fall under the first category, which focuses on the creator or source of WOM. "What motivates customer firms to disseminate positive or negative WOM messages?" is the main issue this research attempts to answer. This subject highlights two important traits by looking at the causes of WOM communication. First, prior studies have frequently included good word-of-mouth (WOM) communications, including recommendations and referrals, as markers of favorable consequences, like satisfaction, loyalty, and the ability to maintain relationships. WOM is "a widely studied outcome variable within the relationship marketing literature," according to Brock and Yu Zhou (2012), underscoring its importance as a performance indicator in B2B research (p. 372). Building on the results of B2C marketing research, studies conducted in the B2B space have found that essential preconditions for WOM creation include satisfaction, loyalty, quality, perceived value, and trust (de Matos & Vargas Rossi, 2008). Furthermore, moderating factors specific to the B2B setting have been investigated in B2B WOM research. Olaru et al. (2008), for instance, showed that variables like the nature of the organization (government versus private enterprise) and the duration of the contract (long versus short) influence the effect of service value on positive WOM production. Positive word-of-mouth (WOM) is produced by satisfaction with seller businesses and loyalty to individual salespeople, according to Anaza

and Rutherford's (2014) analysis of the inter-organizational interaction between the buyer and seller at both the personal and organizational levels.

Research on this topic has also shown factors that influence WOM creation but are typically not examined in the B2C context, such as organizational capabilities, corporate strategy, strategic orientation, and interfirm contacts. Hartmann and de Grahl's (2011) study focused on organizational flexibility. They suggested that logistics service providers may encourage customer referrals by adapting to changing environmental conditions and customer demands. Mo et al. (2020) claim that a rise in the perception of being out-of-the-channel-loop—a channel member's feeling of exclusion from a supplier's distribution channel networks—causes a decline in the formation of good word-of-mouth.

Wang and Huff (2007) found circumstances in which purchasers produce unfavorable word-of-mouth (WOM) when a vendor betrays their trust by not living up to their expectations. In particular, it was discovered that consumers who are still building their confidence or believe there is a significant chance of future breaches have strong, unfavorable reactions when there is a breach of trust.

From earlier research, firm features and interfirm variables contribute to creating WOM or mitigating its impacts. On the other hand, more research needs to be done on who in a company produces word-of-mouth (WOM) and how this affects buying managers and buyer businesses. These are topics for deeper study, which we discuss in greater depth in the following section.

## Theme II: Word-of-Mouth Usage

This theme talks about the utilization of word-of-mouth communication by companies, the reasons behind their reliance on WOM messages for making purchasing choices, and what these choices result in. These are exclusive to the business-to-business (B2B) marketing space and are rarely investigated in the context of business-to-consumer (B2C) WOM research. The third subject, reference marketing, delves into the strategies used by B2B companies and their outcomes. About 70% of the studies on this issue in B2B marketing research have been published in the last ten years. The fact that qualitative interviews are used in almost half (44.4%) of this research indicates that this issue is still in its early phases and is focused on developing theories.

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is pivotal in evaluating and purchasing business-to-business (B2B) services, particularly information technology, software procurement, logistics, transportation, and financial services. These sectors heavily rely on WOM for selling firms to market their services and buying firms to make informed purchasing decisions (Faroughian et al., 2012; Hada et al., 2014; Money, 2004). The impact of service value on positive WOM generation is moderated by factors such as the organization type (government vs. private firm) and the length of the contract (long vs. short) (Olaru et al., 2008). This highlights the importance of considering the organizational context when examining WOM in B2B settings. Furthermore, positive WOM is influenced by loyalty to individual salespersons and satisfaction with seller firms, indicating the significance of both personal and organizational levels of inter-organizational relationships in the B2B WOM generation (Anaza & Rutherford, 2014).

Referrals are highly valued in B2B marketing, with 84% of B2B decision-makers starting the buying process with a referral (Steward et al., 2019). Additionally, referred customers have a 16% higher lifetime value than non-referred customers, and 86% of B2B businesses with referral programs experienced revenue growth in the past two years (Schmitt et al., 2011). This underscores the crucial role of referrals in B2B marketing strategies. This emphasizes leveraging existing customers' recommendations in B2B marketing efforts.
B2B marketers report an average referral conversion rate of 11%, higher than other marketing channels. Moreover, B2B businesses with referral programs managed by marketing departments are three times more likely to achieve revenue goals (Steward et al., 2019). These statistics highlight the effectiveness of referral programs in driving conversions and revenue growth in the B2B sector.

## Theme III: Reference Marketing

The third theme in B2B marketing research focuses on reference marketing, which explores how B2B firms implement this approach and its consequences. Seventy percent of the studies on this issue have been published in the last ten years, making it a relatively new theme. The fact that qualitative interviews are used in almost half (44.4%) of this research indicates that this issue is still in its early phases and is focused on developing theories. Reference marketing encompasses three distinct parties: the selling business, the supplier, and the potential consumer, who serves as the source or sender of word-of-mouth recommendations.

When a provider uses offline reference marketing, they urge their satisfied customer to tell others about their goods or business. The reference customer then tells prospective buyers about their interactions with the supplier's brand (Wu & Wang, 2015; Li et al., 2016). The provider uses the reference customer's feedback as testimonials or success stories on their website as part of online reference marketing. This is done to convince prospective buyers to purchase the brand and establish a commercial connection with the provider (Bhagwatwar et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2017).

Reference marketing research encompasses a broad spectrum, including supplier analysis, reference customer interactions, and potential customer assessments. Research focusing on suppliers examines how B2B companies employ reference marketing and whether or not these strategies result in good company performance. B2B companies, for instance, use word-of-mouth (online references) gathered from reference customers for both internal (employee training and customer understanding) and external (promoting sales and enhancing reputation) purposes, as demonstrated by Bhagwatwar et al. (2013) and Liu et al. (2017). Both uses result in high sales performance. Few studies have explicitly examined reference customers; however, several have reviewed the advantages of reference marketing from the supplier, customer, and future consumer points of view. As per Li et al. (2016), reference customers aim to strengthen their business relationships with suppliers by sharing their experiences with potential clients. Yet, they bear the risk of divulging information that might harm their reference.

Understanding B2B client habits is the goal of prospective customer-focused research. Wu & Wang (2015) demonstrated that source credibility is only essential when reference customers have a good reputation. They also found that positive references are more significant when potential purchasers have prior business experience.

## *Managerial Implications*

1. Treat loyal customers carefully, considering their direct and indirect contributions to sales through WOM promotions to other companies (Anaza & Rutherford, 2014).
2. In highly competitive environments, prioritize word of mouth from high-performing firms when selecting business partners (Yang et al., 2017).

3. Use customers' opinions and success stories as promotional tools and learning materials for sales representatives (Terho & Jalkala, 2017).
4. For Purchasing Managers:
5. Leverage WOM as a customer reference to build close business relationships with suppliers and potential customers (Jaakkola & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2019).
6. Consider WOM from firms with high expertise and similarity when purchasing decisions to reduce the likelihood of switching business partners (Kim, 2014).
7. General Implication for B2B Marketing Managers:
8. Recognize the growing influence of WOM in the B2B context, driven by online review websites and communities among purchasing managers.
9. Consider using word-of-mouth (WOM) as a strategic strategy for business success, understanding its potent impact in B2B and B2C marketing environments.

## *Discussion & Future Directions*

A thorough understanding of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication in business-to-business settings is provided by synthesizing findings from 36 academic publications. It shows that even while the WOM generation and its advantages are well understood, further research is necessary to grasp the underlying reasons fully. Corporations disclose information about other companies primarily to maintain their market position and build partnerships. The personal behavior of buying managers plays an equally important part in the spread of WOM. However, little is known about their intentions, the extent of their networks, or the ultimate results of these interactions. Other issues need to be examined more about the supplier's role in this discussion, namely how they start WOM and how they handle their connections to improve it.

Businesses' usage of word-of-mouth (WOM), particularly with complex or unique items, raises concerns about the characteristics of the products that lead to these kinds of conversations. Further areas that need investigation include the interactions between various information sources, their combined impact on purchase decisions, and the role of opinion leaders in this mix. Research incorporating the cultural and organizational context may be encouraged as the actual effectiveness of WOM in producing positive outcomes, including decreased ambiguity in decision-making and increased satisfaction, has yet to be empirically confirmed. Marketing emphasizes how well different tactics work to increase firm performance indicators like sales and market penetration. It is recommended that an investigation be conducted into

the conditions that enhance the influence of reference marketing, the use of customer references in sales tactics, and the incentives provided to customers to serve as references.

An essential element of strategic brand development and innovation is the gathering and handling word-of-mouth (WOM) about a brand. Subsequent research endeavors may explore efficacious techniques for gathering word-of-mouth (WOM), particularly the more elusive negative input, which presents significant product improvement opportunities. In the digital age, maintaining brand impression requires careful management of online word-of-mouth (WOM), predominantly negative WOM. Studying the most effective ways for B2B companies to manage unfavorable internet reviews will be crucial.

# Conclusion

A thorough summary of the function of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication in business-to-business (B2B) marketing is given in this paper. Key topics and gaps in the research, such as WOM generation, WOM consumption, and reference marketing, have been discovered through a systematic examination of 36 academic articles. Our results underscore the significance of word-of-mouth (WOM) in shaping consumer behavior, the influence of company attributes and interfirm dynamics on WOM production, and the tactical use of reference marketing to improve firm efficacy.

Despite the insights obtained, more investigation is still needed. Subsequent research endeavors should expand upon the incentives driving companies' word-of-mouth (WOM) communication, examine the dynamic interplay among diverse information sources, and evaluate the efficaciousness of diverse WOM tactics in attaining favorable consequences. Investigating how digital platforms influence B2B word-of-mouth (WOM) communication is essential, especially in handling unfavorable online reviews.
This work emphasizes the importance of WOM in the B2B setting and lays the groundwork for further studies. Scholars and practitioners may have a better understanding of and ability to use WOM to propel commercial success by filling up the gaps that have been highlighted.

This paper further investigates additional layers and aspects of relationship building and the mechanisms on which WOM is based and utilized. For example, building upon the existing literature, the researcher might discover that corporate culture and employee-driven WOM

are not receiving enough attention. Thus, a novel perception of employees' role in disseminating loyal customer-made WOMs can be implemented even through traditional marketing channels. Further study of the interaction between internal corporate practices/employee satisfaction and external WOM could provide a novel approach to their utilization. Exploring the concepts of WOM in combination with digital marketing and B2B relations is another exciting field to consider. Due to the spread of digital transformation over the years, traditional WOM exchanges were converted into a hybrid form of traditional face-to-face communication and online interactions.

The paper might investigate how the conventional dynamics of social media influencers, LinkedIn influencers, and industry-specific online communities influence the digital field of B2B WOMs. Combining traditional and digital WOM would further consolidate the knowledge of WOM strategies, which could be effectively used in the B2B market. They finally investigated the role of customer experience in B2B WOM. Due to the complexity and long duration of sales cycles in B2B, single-case cumulative customer experiences throughout their contact with a business might play a crucial role in WOM formation. Investigating the correlation between various dimensions of CXs and propensities to share positive reviews could result in novel strategies to build customer satisfaction.

Overall, the foundational work listed throughout this paper has provided a comprehensive understanding of the complex and multifaceted WOM phenomena within B2B marketing. However, numerous themes and areas have yet to be thoroughly researched, presenting exciting opportunities for future investigation. By addressing these research gaps, future inquiries could significantly contribute to creating and expanding the current knowledge base. This, in turn, could empower scholars and practitioners to gain better perspectives and adopt WOM to gain a competitive edge in the ever-evolving and interconnected global community.

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# *Appendices*

## Appendix A: Self-Reflection

I take this opportunity to reflect on my academic journey during this research. Firstly, I have an overwhelming feeling of accomplishment in successfully conducting the research project. I consider this project a significant milestone in my life because I was not confident conducting independent research before starting this paper. More than just an academic title, this paper incorporates the unrest native to comprehending word-of-mouth communication dynamics in a business-to-business context. While conducting this research, I realized that word-of-mouth had been thoroughly explored in the business-to-consumer marketing dimension; however, the dynamics in the business-to-business context are not as clean-cut. I found going through the extensive literature to be intellectually draining. I identified 18 studies with the results I deemed valuable from an ocean of data during the data collection.

The data extraction stage, as mentioned before, was more straightforward, although I still had to be meticulous and critical. To identify the themes, I had to sort through them manually with a pen and paper. I had to immerse myself in many research methodologies from different social scientists to understand how to pinpoint the themes. One of the themes I found unusual from this review was the intricacy associated with the WOM generation in B2B settings. While WOM generation in B2C marketing settings is relatively well-established, the same is not valid for the B2B market. The firm's strategy, organizational capabilities, and the nature of IFRs are some factors identified as predictors of WOM generation.

As I reflect on this research journey, I recognize the intricate web of findings that this review has produced through innovative patterns. It has expanded my comprehension of WOM functions in B2B and sparked a fascination with the unexplained phenomena that this study has unveiled. Realizing that there is still more to understand is humbling and energizing, as a desire for further exploration drives me. I am grateful for the existence and accessibility of the public data that enabled me to complete the research paper. What was once self-doubt has transformed into knowledge on this topic, and I now have a solid background in thematic exploration and B2B word-of-mouth. I am excited to continue researching the acknowledged rising themes, such as data compiling and management of WOM for the supplier brand. This endeavor also elucidated the advantages of resilience and flexibility. Every obstacle and point of confusion was a learning opportunity, and traversing through them has contributed to my

capacity to navigate for research. The lessons I have retrieved from this project will impact my future academic engagements.

This research project has been an essential learning opportunity for me. It was like a challenging course where every step forward taught me about B2B marketing and how fantastic word-of-mouth is vital in the marketplace.

In today's digital world, the internet and social media are essential in promoting information and experiences about our businesses. Those can be very advantageous to some companies' image and a specific percentage of sales. I have also become more confident in analyzing extensive data and making valuable conclusions.