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The Effects of Expertise and Tie Strength on Word-of-Mouth Business-to-Business Transaction*

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This research focuses on word-of-mouth (WOM) as a marketing tool for business-to-business marketing. In business-to-business transactions, a company's facilities expert connects the company's purchasing decision-maker with the supplier; by providing information about the supplier's products and companies to this decision-maker, the expert plays an important role in the purchasing decision-maker's choice of suppliers. Therefore, this study aims to improve expert WOM intentions and examines the strategies that influence them. Statistical verification is employed by considering 103 engineering experts' answers, and a hierarchical multiple-regression analysis is used to test this study's hypotheses. As a strategy for influencing expert WOM intentions, the supplier's expertise, purchasing decision-maker's expertise, and the tie strength with the supplier are examined; the tie strength with the purchasing decision maker is considered as the moderating variable. Three of the four hypotheses are supported. The empirical research results provide three important theoretical and practical implications in identifying the possibility of WOM as a means of business-to-business marketing. First, the supplier's expertise increases the WOM intention. Second, the expert has a tendency to convey WOM from high-expertise suppliers to the purchasing decision-makers they have strong ties with, and third, the purchasing decision-maker's expertise exhibited an inverted U-shaped influence on the experts' WOM intentions.

Keywords: Word-of-Mouth intention, BtoB marketing, Expertise, Tie strength

I. Introduction

The majority of researchers in business- to-business (B2B) transactions believe that managers make purchase decisions based on objective and technical factors, such as price, quality, function, and service, and that their decisions are directed toward long-term transactions based on these factors (Cullinane 2006). But with recent rapid technological advances, differences in product quality have gradually faded, making it no longer possible for only technical factors to guarantee sustainable growth of a company (Jena, Guin and Dash 2011). This leads one to wonder what other marketing strategies, besides technical factors, can differentiate companies.

Purchasing decision-makers also face uncertainty

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about the purchase of products from companies that are not well-known. Industrial goods are considered vital purchasing decisions as they are generally expensive durable goods and can only stay competitive when the goods are managed reliably over the long term. Of the many companies that do not substantially differ in their technology, which supplier should buyers choose?

Internal and external information sources, such as facility experts, are frequently used in these high-risk purchase decisions. In particular, advice from experienced facility operations experts within the enterprise is considered critical to decision-makers. According to Havaldar and Dash (2020), the word-of-mouth (WOM) of experts in the field is critical information for industry buyers.

Voluntary sharing of information, such as WOM, is an important form of knowledge sharing and transfer within the company. In B2B transactions, facility experts are those who are not only familiar with the characteristics of the various companies and products in the industry, but also operate the facilities within the company. Further, facility experts continuously evaluate information about suppliers and the facilities they provide and, as important influencers in the company, are critical in connecting suppliers and purchasing decision-makers by communicating such information to the purchasing decision-makers.

Based on previous studies (Jung, Won, Lee and Kim 2019; Roth, Money and Madden 2004), which posit that the relational factors between buyers and suppliers are important in B2B transactions, this study focuses on the relational factors with facility-operating experts that connect suppliers with purchasing decision-makers in B2B companies.

While B2B WOM is a relatively less-studied field compared to research on business-to-consumer WOM, it is always a highly significant market factor. Therefore, this study aims to improve the WOM intentions of facility experts, who are critical in initiating transactions between purchasing decision makers and suppliers, by examining influential factors.

Ⅱ. Literature Review and Hypotheses building

1. Word-of-Mouth

Existing literature provides various definitions of WOM; these range from personal communications in which individuals share their experiences (Borgida and Nisbett 1977), to consumers communicating their experience of a company and its products (Richins 1984). WOM characteristically involves transmitting information that affects the information receiver's attitude and future purchasing behavior. Generally, customers are highly concerned with the information that they receive from others and consider it important (Cha and Park 2016; Price and Feick 1984); in particular, buyers tend to rely more on WOM information when they perceive some risk about purchasing a product (Arndt 1967). Thus, WOM information has a variety of positive effects, such as reducing risk (Murray 1991); improving psychological states, including beliefs, convictions, and empathy (Sweeney, Soutar and Mazzarol 2008); and increasing purchasing possibilities (Wilson and Peterson 1989).

Further, WOM is critical in the decisions involving

B2B as well as consumer purchase transactions (Havaldar and Dash 2020). Purchasing decision-makers tend to evaluate products longer as they often face uncertainty in terms of the product's quality and price (Rauyruen and Miller 2007). Decision-makers purchasing industrial products can reduce uncertainty through longer search times, but it is difficult to reduce the risks associated with the quality of the product or service that they purchase. Therefore, purchasing decision-makers in the B2B market may seek objective, professional information about products and services from a trusted intermediary that serves to connect them with suppliers. Specifically, WOM is important in choosing and building supplier relationships (Oppel et al. 2001). The B2B industry is characterized by relatively few potential customers in selling products and services. Further, the customer facility's operation experts are well aware of the supplier's capabilities and attitudes, and the former's positive, trustworthy WOM is critical in marketing the facility's products. Therefore, this research will focus on WOM in the B2B facility industry.

2. Expertise

2.1. The Supplier's Expertise

Expertise is the ability to successfully perform product-related work (Alba and Hutchinson 1987) and involves highly skilled practitioners with experience in delivering outstanding results in a particular field (Ericsson and Lehmann 1999). While researchers have proposed different definitions, they commonly include consistently high-performing individuals with above-average skills, knowledge, and attitudes in a particular field.

Researchers have provided various components of expertise, although they generally focus on knowledge, experience, and problem-solving skills (Herling 1998). However, it is common opinion that these alone cannot fully define expertise; in addition to these three factors, researchers also discuss experts' quality or intuition, value, and creativity (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986).

2.2. The Purchasing Decision-Maker's Expertise

Recipients can react differently to messages depending on their various personal characteristics (Ajzen 1991). Among them, the recipient's expertise is defined as the ability to successfully perform the tasks associated with a product (Alba and Hutchinson 1987); these affect purchasing decisions as well as the degree to which the recipient actively seeks WOM information (Bansal and Voyer 2000). As WOM clarifies unclear information through communication with the sender (Murray 1991), recipients will attempt to gain WOM information to decrease risk as the perceived level of risk increases (Arndt 1967). Specifically, the greater the recipient's perceived risk, the greater their willingness to accept WOM information. In fact, many researchers have noted that the lower the recipient's expertise, the more information they will seek (Gilly et al. 1998).

The recipient's expertise is also important in understanding the decision-maker's behaviors, such as exploring information (Rao and Sieben 1992), judgments (Frankenberger and Liu 1994), and purchasing (Park and Kim 2009). The greater the recipient's experience with the product or service, the less

external information he or she will seek (Brucks 1985). Compared to cases of information recipients with low expertise, recipients with higher expertise look for relatively less information (Gilly et al. 1998); further, it is also argued that highly experienced consumers who are knowledgeable about the product tend to judge based on the information that they have, and therefore, may not recognize the need for additional information (Ratchford, Talukdar and Lee 2001). These experts also tend to expend less effort to explore the information needed to make purchasing decisions (Bloch, Sherrell and Ridgway 1986). In other words, less specialized consumers seek other people's opinions about the product more than consumers with more expertise and experience (Furse, Punj and Stewart 1984).

3. Tie Strength

3.1. Tie Strength Between Suppliers and Experts

Tie strength is the power that exists between two people and connects their relationships (Frenzen and Davis 1990). Given the transfer of information from a specific relational network of suppliers and experts-rather than from the simple movement of information through a two-person dialogue (Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993)-the tie strength between the supplier and expert should be considered as an important factor in understanding the WOM between them. Many researchers have examined social relationships' effect on WOM, as WOM activity occurs through the influence of social relationships (Reingen and Kernan 1993). This study assumes that the stronger the bond strength, such as the depth of intimacy and the time spent with each other, the closer the relationship between the supplier and the expert; subsequently, the current research focuses on the effects of the strength of this relationship.

3.2. Tie Strength Between Purchasing Decision Makers and Experts

According to the information-sharing theory, consumers want to help those around them make purchasing decisions and tend to share their information with those around them to gain impressions of their capabilities and receive their goodwill (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). In particularly uncertain purchasing situations, buyers actively seek to find and rely on those around them to gain the information needed to make decisions (Aggarwal and Mazumdar 2008).

Social network theory argues that members acquire and utilize the new information generated within social networks to increase their individual performance (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). As the access to WOM information resources is also based on collaborations within this social network (Sparrowe et al. 2001), this information is more easily exchanged when strong ties exist. Therefore, this study defines the ties between the sender and receiver as the depth of emotion, intimacy, and the duration of the relationship between the expert and purchasing decision-maker.

4. Building Hypotheses

4.1. Expertise in the Supplier's and Expert's WOM Intentions

Expertise refers to the ability to successfully perform product-related tasks (Alba and Hutchinson 1987). This section discusses existing studies on the effect of the information provider's expertise on WOM acceptance. First, Dabholkar (1996) observed that suppliers can obtain loyalty-as expressed through repurchasing intentions or WOM-if they continue to transact with extraordinary knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Similarly, Bimbaum and Stegner (1979) stated that expertise is the extent to which the purchaser recognizes that the supplier can provide accurate judgements of, and correct answers to, the purchaser's problems. If the supplier offers products that exceed the purchaser's expectations, the buyer's satisfaction increases (Kotler 2000). Therefore, if the provider has expertise and the facility expert has facilities and services that exceed expectations, the latter will not only share these positive experiences with others but will also generate WOM to the decision-maker for additional positive experiences. Thus, the following hypothesis is established:

H1: The supplier's expertise positively influences the expert's WOM intentions.

4.2. The Tie Strength Between the Supplier and Expert and the Expert's WOM Intentions

Differences exist in the motivation to exchange information with others depending on the nature of social relationships. The reasons why people want to access others differ because the differences in social contexts with the other person can result in a variety of behaviors (Bloch, Sherrell and Ridgway 1986). Further, intimacy occurs among similar people (Carley 1991) and what develops over time through frequent interactions and increased affinity. Intimacy not only improves cooperation and communication, but also contributes to essential intimacy and emotional commitment in relationships (Brass 1992). Additionally, individuals exchange both social and emotional support in close networks (Brass 1992), while these emotional commitments and altruistic behaviors are linked to this intimate network interaction (Wiseman 1986).

The ties between suppliers and facility experts-which occur due to physical distance or familiarity with each other-can be strengthened through frequent encounters, or specifically, transactional experiences. This social bonding between suppliers and experts affects experts' decision-making processes by actively providing information about suppliers to the purchasing decision-makers (Brown and Reingen 1987). Thus, it can be inferred that the expert's WOM intentions will be enhanced under strong supplier-expert ties, and the following hypothesis is established based on these inferences:

H2: The tie strength with suppliers positively influences the expert's WOM intentions.

4.3. Moderating Effect of Tie Strength Between the Expert and Purchasing Decision-Maker

The social network structure is critical in both

WOM processes and purchasing decisions (Ozcan 2004). The tie strength concept, in particular, represents the degree of the relationship as an element of social network characteristics; it is measured by such variables as the frequency of social contacts (Granovetter 1973), intimacy and social support (Frenzen and Davis 1990), and the type of social relationships between members (Ibarra 1997). The tie strength is also associated with trust. As trust is developed through a mutual disclosure of information between individuals, the stronger the bond, the more trust the other person tends to exhibit. From a macro-perspective, WOM information is transmitted at a social network level, rather than simply between two people (Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993); consequently, the strength of the connections between people, senders and receivers, and suppliers and purchasing decision-makers is an important element of the social network itself (Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993). This demonstrates that groups with higher degrees of intimacy with each other communicate through more diverse media than those with lesser intimacy. Further, members who perceive themselves as highly similar to the information provider tend to more easily accept the arguments that the information provider conveys (Feick and Higie 1992). This WOM information is more often sought in strong tie relationships due to the high trust and close physical proximity to the sender, as well as the high levels of acceptance of this information. Thus, WOM communication in intimate relationships can affect purchasing behavior or decision-making (Richins 1983); this study establishes the following hypothesis based on this information:

H3: The tie strength with a purchasing decision maker has a positive, moderating effect on the expert supplier's influence on WOM intentions.

4.4. The Non-Linear Effect of the Purchasing Decision-Maker's Expertise on the Expert's WOM Intentions

Purchasing decision-makers who receive WOM information may have different reactions to these messages due to their different personal characteristics (Ajzen 1991). Previous studies also report conflicting results. Among studies on former recipients' expertise, Bloch (1986) said that highly specialized receivers tend to avoid hard work to obtain additional product information or assessments or the opinions of those around them in decision-making, because they already have sufficient information for their purchasing-related decisions. In other words, a negative relationship exists between the WOM receiver's expertise and the willingness to accept WOM information. Furse, Punj and Stewart (1984) also confirmed the negative impact on the WOM recipient's expertise and the value of WOM information. Recipients with high expertise can more easily obtain the information that they need (Shanteau 1992) and are more likely to obtain the information that they want even in poorly structured environments (Brucks 1985). Therefore, high-expertise recipients will not attempt to obtain WOM information from others or negatively react toward receiving WOM information from others.

Some studies present opposing arguments, in that consumers without sufficient prior knowledge of products to be purchased tend to avoid efforts to obtain the information necessary to make purchase decisions (Gilly et al. 1998), while more informed

consumers tend to acquire this information (Johnson and Russo 1984). Moreover, Herr, Kardes and Kim (1991) argued that decision-makers with high expertise are likely to collect more information. In other words, a decision-maker with higher expertise regarding a particular product may be more willing to accept WOM information. Johnson and Sathi (1984) argued that WOM information has a stronger effect among high-expertise WOM receivers than those who have low expertise, as high-expertise decision-makers can detect missing information and make appropriate judgments (Sanbonmatsu, Kardes and Herr 1992).

To summarize these conflicting arguments, it can be observed that the recipient's expertise in seeking and receiving information also causes variations in the extent to which they understand and analyze the information associated with the product or service (Alba and Hutchinson 1987). Further, Bansal and Voyer (2000) noted that customers with moderate level of advanced knowledge of a product tend to exhibit the highest information exploration, but customers with sufficient or no prior knowledge demonstrate low information exploration.

These existing studies allow for the following inference regarding low-expertise purchasing decision-makers: the higher the purchasing decision-maker's expertise, the greater the expert's WOM intentions. In contrast, regarding high-expertise purchasing decision-makers, the higher the purchasing decision-maker's expertise, the lower the expert's WOM intentions. Thus, the following hypothesis is established based on this previous research:

H4: The expert's WOM intentions appear to increase and then decrease again, or follows a reverse U-shape, due to the purchasing decision-maker's increased expertise.

Ⅲ. Methodology

1. Samples

This study distributed a questionnaire using the items with reliability and validity verified by previous research. The data was collected from facility experts who participated in plastics and rubber exhibitions held in India, Germany, the United States, Italy, and Saudi Arabia from January to November 2015. All the subjects provided informed consent for their inclusion before they participated in the study. Event participants included facility experts from plastics manufacturing companies worldwide who are appropriate for this study, which targets B2B companies' technical experts. Facility experts refer to those who belong to a particular company and are responsible for the operation of its facilities; these are people with sufficient experience working with the facility provider and its sales representatives. The 103 survey respondents ranged in experience, from 4 to 21 years, with an average experience of 9.98 years. They are qualified to respond as experts given their sufficient knowledge of the products and sufficient understanding of the suppliers of plastics manufacturing machines.

2. Measurements

Items from existing studies were used in the

<Table 1> Measurements

Variable	Items	Source
Supplier's expertise	The supplier is knowledgeable.	(Bansal and Voyer 2000)
	The supplier is competent.	
	The supplier is an expert.	
Tie strength with Supplier	We share a close bond.	(Wiseman 1986)
	We are supportive of each other.	
	Our association is strong.	
Purchasing decision-maker's expertise	The purchasing decision-maker is knowledgeable.	(Bansal and Voyer 2000)
	The purchasing decision-maker has enough experience.	
	The purchasing decision-maker has enough information.	
Tie strength with purchasing decision-maker	We share a close bond.	(Wiseman 1986)
	We are supportive of each other.	
	Our association is strong.	
WOM intention	I would recommend the provider to a buyer who installs the machines.	(File, Judd, and Prince 1992)
	I would recommend the provider to a buyer who is interested in the machines.	
	I would speak directly about the provider's experience with this buyer.	

3. Measurements Test

3.1. Reliability and Validity

This study uses a Cronbach's α coefficient to verify the internal reliability among multiple items; the

Cronbach's α value for all variables is greater than or equal to 0.7. As Table 2 demonstrates, the composite reliability also exceeded the 0.6 threshold (Bagozzi, Yi, and Nassen 1998), ensuring all indicators' internal consistency.

After verifying reliability, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed using AMOS 16.0 software to verify the factors' validity. The measurement

current work's survey but were modified to suit the context. Table 1 displays the measurement questionnaires and sources for each variable.

model was then verified-including both exogenous and endogenous variables-to confirm both convergence and discriminative validity (Bollen 1989). The analysis reveals that the values of the λ estimates linking the measurement items to the

corresponding variables are all significant, and hence, convergence validity is ensured (Table 2).

The discriminant validity results indicate that the measurement variable explaining the latent variable suggested in the research model is appropriate, as it portrays inter-construct correlations with the shared average variance extracted (Table 3).

<Table 2> Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Variables	Items	Estimate	SE	t-value	α	CR	AVE
Supplier's expertise	SX1	0.74			0.74	0.76	0.61
	SX2	0.67	0.13	6.27			
	SX3	0.71	0.11	6.76			
Tie strength with supplier	RSX1	0.70			0.78	0.79	0.64
	RSX2	0.81	0.18	6.75			
	RSX3	0.72	0.17	6.33			
Tie strength with purchasing decision-maker	RXB1	0.78			0.87	0.88	0.69
	RXB2	0.87	0.11	8.70			
	RXB3	0.83	0.12	8.29			
Purchasing decision-maker's expertise	PdX1	0.76			0.83	0.82	0.6
	PdX2	0.82	0.14	7.62			
	PdX3	0.73	0.13	7.17			
WOM intention	WI1	0.74			0.80	0.81	0.60
	WI2	0.76	0.15	6.75			
	WI3	0.81	0.16	7.14			

Note: CMIN = 1248.462, df = 80, CMIN / df = 1.560, RMR = 0.066, GFI = 0.859, NFI = 0.893, TLI = 0.911, CFI = 0.933, RMSEA = 0.077.

<Table 3> The PHI Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Supplier's expertise	0.78				
2. Tie strength with supplier	0.693	0.80			
3. Tie strength with purchasing decision-maker	0.585	0.433	0.83		
4. Purchasing decision-maker's expertise	0.597	0.504	0.390	0.77	
5. WOM intention	0.735	0.535	0.692	0.320	0.77

Note: Diagonal values indicate the root average variance extracted.

4. Measurements Test

To prevent multiple collinearity, which can be noted in H3 and H4, a mean centering method was used; the results were then presented and interpreted in accordance with work by Aiken, West, and Reno (1991).

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis is required to verify the hypotheses presented in this study, in which the research model has been validated step by step as follows: Model 1 identified the influence of the expert's professional experience,

which should be controlled because it can affect the expert's WOM intentions. The supplier's expertise and the tie strength between the supplier and expert were added to Model 1 to verify H1 and H2.

Study Model 3 adds the moderating variable-the tie strength between the expert and purchasing

decision-maker-to Model 2. Study Model 4 adds the supplier's expertise*the tie strength between the expert and the purchase decision-maker to verify H3, regarding the moderating effect of the tie strength between experts and purchasing decision-makers.

Study Model 5 adds the square value of the purchasing decision-maker's expertise to verify H4, regarding the inverse U-shaped influence of the purchase decision-maker's expertise on the expert's WOM intentions.

1. Model 1: WOM = $\beta 0 + \beta 1Yr + \varepsilon 1$
2. Model 2: WOM = $\beta 0+\beta 1Yr+\beta 2Xpt\_Su+\beta 3T\_Su+\varepsilon 2$
3. Model 3: WOM = $\beta 0+\beta 1Yr+\beta 2Xpt\_Su+\beta 3T\_Su+\beta 4T\_Pd+\varepsilon 3$
4. Model 4: WOM = $\beta 0+\beta 1Yr+\beta 2Xpt\_Su+\beta 3T\_Su+\beta 4T\_Pd+\beta 5Xpt\_Su*T\_Pd+\varepsilon 4$
5. Model 5: WOM = $\beta 0+\beta 1Yr+\beta 2Xpt\_Su+\beta 3T\_Su+\beta 4T\_Pd+\beta 5Xpt\_Su*T\_Pd+\beta 6(Xpt\_Pd)2+\varepsilon 5$

where,

WOM = Expert's word of mouth intentions
Yr = Expert's career (in years)
Xpt_Su = Supplier's expertise
Xpt_Pd = Purchasing decision-maker's expertise
T_Su = Tie strength with supplier
T_Pd = Tie strength with purchasing decision-maker

This study statistically verifies the moderating effect of the tie strength between experts and purchasing decision-makers, as well as the nonlinear influence of purchasing decision-makers' expertise by using an F-test of the amount of changes in R2 as presented by Taylor and Baker (1994) and Slater and Narver (1994). Table 4 displays the results.

The variables were added hierarchically to ensure that the proposed models could better predict WOM intentions with the addition of these variables. First, Model 1 only has a control variable, and it was found that the longer the expert's career experience, the more likely the WOM intentions (R2=0.048).

The R^2 in Model 2-which adds supplier expertise and the tie strength between the supplier and expert to Model 1-demonstrates that the R2 increased by 0.316 compared to Model 1, and the F-value of the increase in R2 exhibited significant differences at the 0.05 level.

The R^2 in Model 3, which adds the tie strength between the expert and purchasing decision-maker, is 0.370. Although this is an increase of 0.006 over R2 in Model 2, it is not a statistically significant difference. This demonstrates that the tie strength between the expert and purchasing decision-maker is not a variable that directly explains the expert's WOM intentions.

The R^2 of Study Model 4, which adds the (supplier expertise * tie strength between the expert and purchasing decision-maker) to Model 3 was 0.440, and the increase in R2 due to the input variables was statistically significant. This reveals that the supplier's expertise * tie strength with purchasing decision-maker variable affects WOM intentions. The R^2 of Model 5, which adds the purchasing decision-maker's expertise2 to Model 4, is 0.530, with an increase of 0.09 in the R2 compared to that in Study Model 4; this is also statistically significant.

The hypotheses suggested in this study are then

individually summarized. First, the supplier's expertise significantly and positively affects WOM intentions (β = 0.48, t = 3.98), and thus, H1 is supported. Second, H2 was not supported, as the supplier-expert tie strength was not found to significantly affect WOM intentions (β = 0.15, t = 1.50). Regarding H3, the (supplier's expertise x the tie strength between the expert and purchasing decision-maker) significantly influenced WOM intentions, indicating that this tie strength has a moderating effect to enhance supplier expertise's influence on WOM intentions (β = 0.33, t = 3.11). H4, regarding the purchasing decision-maker's expertise^2, was found to be significant, and exhibited an inverted U-shaped nonlinear effect; therefore, this hypothesis is also supported (β = -0.15, t = -4.44).

<Table 4> Hypotheses Test Results

	Variable(s)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	(Constants)	5.07 (16.7)	5.29 (20.62)	5.29 (20.63)	5.41 (21.76)	5.67 (24.24)
Control Variable	Expert's career (in years)	0.05 (2.19)	0.04 (1.78)	0.04 (1.75)	0.02 (0.91)	0.01 (0.24)
H1	Supplier's expertise		**0.48** **(3.98)**	0.45 (3.58)	0.35 (2.87)	0.25 (2.16)
H2	Tie strength with supplier		**0.15** **(1.50)**	0.12 (1.22)	0.14 (1.46)	0.19 (2.12)
H3	Tie strength with purchasing decision-maker			0.09 (0.99)	0.21 (2.19)	0.22 (2.65)
	Supplier's expertise * tie strength with purchasing decision-maker				**0.33** **(3.11)**	0.48 (4.59)
H4	(Purchasing decision-maker's expertise)2					**-0.15** **(-4.44)**
	F-value	4.83	17.92	13.66	13.88	17.19
	R2	0.048	0.364	0.370	0.440	0.530
	ΔR2		0.316**	0.006	0.070**	0.090**

Note: (1) ** p<0.05; (2) non-standardization value; (3) ( ) is t-value

V. Conclusion and Discussion

1. Summary

This study focused on expert WOM intentions based on both the expertise and relationship of the supplier and purchasing decision-maker. First, expertise of suppliers was found to increase WOM intentions. This conforms to the common knowledge that suppliers' expertise will be important in the B2B industry. Second, @erts' WOM intentions. Finally, the purchasing decision-maker's expertise exhibited an inverted U-shaped influence on the experts' WOM intentions. In other words, if a purchasing decision-maker has very low or very high knowledge of a facility, the expert is less likely to

engage in WOM for this particular supplier. Conversely, experts have demonstrated an increased intention to engage in WOM for the supplier to the purchasing decision-makers with moderate (not low and not high) expertise.

2. Implications

B2B facility companies should have specific strategies that differ from those in other industries. In this regard, this research focuses on facility experts' knowledge-sharing intentions with purchasing decision-makers to provide the following important practical implications.

This study found that supplier companies can increase sales by building relationships with facility experts, the latter of which can convey positive WOM to the purchasing decision-maker. Therefore, the supplier must constantly manage its relationships with experts.

Second, this study's results revealed that the intent of the reverse U-shaped sphere can be predicted depending on the purchasing decision-maker's expertise. In other words, if the expert recognizes that the purchasing decision-maker's expertise is either low or high, the facility expert will exhibit low WOM. If the purchasing decision-maker is deemed to have sufficient knowledge of the facility, the expert will not want to infringe upon the decision-maker's authority; if decision-makers are unfamiliar with the equipment, it is inferred that the expert will have fewer WOM intentions as the expert is fully responsible for the facility as determined by his or her recommendation. Subsequently, the supplier can prevent the expert's decreased WOM intention when the decision-maker is not knowledgeable by operating a collective credit program to alleviate the burden of responsibility incurred by the expert's WOM.

3. Limitations

Despite this study's significant theoretical and practical implications, some limitations must be addressed. First, although the B2B facility industry exhibits different characteristics, and the relationships among suppliers, experts, and purchasing decision-makers may vary, this study provides results limited only to the plastics injection industry. Further studies could consider the characteristics of various B2B facility industries. Second, although business etiquettes may vary between cultures, this research was conducted by selecting purchasing decisionmakers and experts in the facility industry without distinguishing the country or culture; thus, future research must consider cultural characteristics. Despite these limitations, this study is significant in that it has demonstrated the WOM that occurs in the B2B facility industry.

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기업간 거래에서 전문성과 유대 강도가 구전의향에 미치는 영향*

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ABSTRACT

본 연구는 기업간 거래에서 마케팅 수단으로서 구전의 가능성을 확인하는 것을 목표로 한다. 기업간 거래의 경우 구매 기업의 설비 전문가는 구매 담당자와 공급자를 연결하는 매개자로서의 역할이 있다. 구매 기업 설비 전문가는 자사의 구매 의사결정자에게 공급자의 제품과 서비스에 대한 정보를 제공함으로서, 구매 의사결정자의 공급업자 선택에서 중요한 역할을 한다. 그리하여 본 연구는 구매 의사결정자들에 대한 설비 전문가들의 구전의향에 영향을 미칠 수 있는 전략을 개발하고자 한다. 103명의 설비 전문가들의 응답을 바탕으로 통계적 검증을 하였으며, 위계적 다중회귀분석을 통해 본 연구에서 제안한 가설들을 검증하였다. 설비 전문가들의 구전 의향에 영향을 미치기 위한 전략으로 공급자의 전문성, 구매의사결정자의 전문성, 공급자와 설비 전문가와의 관계가 고려되었으며, 구매의사결정자와 설비 전문가의 관계를 조절변수로 고려되었다. 네개의 가설 중에서 세 개가 지지 되었으며, 지지된 결과는 다음과 같다. 첫째, 공급자의 전문성은 설비전문가의 구전 의향을 증가시킨다. 둘째, 설비전문가는 강한 유대강도를 지닌 공급업자가 높은 전문성을 지녔다고 판단할 경우, 구매 의사결정자에게 더 강력하게 추천하려는 의지를 보인다. 셋째, 구매 의사결정자의 전문성은 설비 전문가의 구전의향에 역U자형의 영향력을 지닌다. 즉, 구매의사결정자의 전문성이 낮거나 높은 경우에 설비 전문가의 구전의향은 낮고, 구매 의사결정자의 전문성이 중간 정도인 경우, 가장 높은 구전의향을 보인다. 실증결과는 기업간 거래 마케팅에 있어서 구전이 마케팅 수단으로서 가치가 있다는 이론적 실무적 함의를 제시했다.

주제어: 구전의향, 기업간 거래, 전문성, 유대강도

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