

When eWOM is Pushed Too Hard: The Adverse Effects of Consumers' Tendency to Reject eWOM Sharing Incentives

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Marketers spend considerable resources on incentivizing social media users to engage in disseminating promotional electronic word of mouth (eWOM). In this research we theorize that users' innate tendency to reject such incentives lowers their own intent to purchase the promoted product. Study 1 ($N = 256$) showed a causal effect of the tendency to reject incentives on purchase intention, and that this effect was serially mediated by persuasion knowledge and consumer trust in the eWOM message. Study 2 ($N = 416$) revealed a moderated mediation effect: the tendency to reject incentives activated more persuasion knowledge when incentives were high (vs. low). Persuasion knowledge decreased consumer trust in eWOM, which in turn lowered purchase intention. Paradoxically, for people who are offered *higher* financial incentives (i.e., *more* money) for engaging in sharing promotional posts, the tendency to reject such manipulative attempts translates to a more significantly harmful reduction in product purchase intent.

Keywords: eWOM, social media, incentives, persuasion knowledge, trust.