The Effect of Word of Mouth Communication on the Consumer Buying Behavior Towards Mobile Phones

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Abstract

Human beings like to interact, even before the introduction of internet and social media individuals used to socialize about different topics and try to influence each other's (intentionally or unintentionally). According to (Gartner, 2018) the number of mobile phones sold in 2017 was more than 1.53 billion devices which indicate that there's a considerable need and marketing effort conducted in this sector. Marketing as an important part of any organization's activities which tries to move consumers towards having a buying attitude towards their product/service even if it means that they might in some cases exaggerate some facts. Word of mouth communication is considered as a superhero who stood against the misleading advertisements and empowered consumers, especially in the technology field. By getting an opinion or advice from a trusted source whom have used the product/service and has zero profitable interest from the vendor of the service/product consumers tend to give a great credibility to such communications and might change their opinion according to them. This paper will focus on WOM and how it can affect consumer behavior when it comes to buying a mobile phone as this device is one of the important buying decisions that the consumer face and it has many details and attributes that not any common individual might have knowledge about.

Keywords: WOM, word of mouth, EWOM, buying behavior, buying decision.

1. Introduction:

With many mobile phone vendors and models in the market, the process of buying a mobile phone is not an easy decision, as technology is advancing day by day and the competition is rising between companies, this made users feel lost between attractive advertisements and a lot of details to follow. Whenever a new mobile phone is launched it'll be associated with a big advertisement campaign which aims to make it look and feel as the best in the market, but is it? Following the launch of the mobile and as a custom now, people start to share or post their feedback (good or bad) about their experience with it. This feedback is called word of mouth, and is considered as an important factor which can make or break the product as it mostly comes from people with no financial interest

or relation with the vendor of the mobile and this will give them some sort of credibility in the eye of other users or potential customer.

2. Word of mouth communication:

When it comes to mass media, Word of mouth communication represents an important tool which effects the consumer's attitude towards not only buying but selling and forming the image about different brands even if the consumer hasn't used them (Özdemir, et al, 2016).

Checking the background of the word of mouth will uncover that it represents one of the oldest ways of exchanging information between individuals (Alcocer, 2017). The earliest definition for WOM was introduced by (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1966) which described WOM as exchanging marketing related information between consumers in a way which plays a key role in shaping their behavior and attitude toward different products or services. When it comes to the consumer side, WOM communication considered as a trustful source of information because a friend, co-worker or a family member has no interest in promoting or demoting any product and they are giving the information or advice about the product without aiming to get a benefit (at least not directly) from the organization behind that product (Alexandru, 2010). The last point raises the question of what motivate individuals to participate in WOM communication? (Shen, et al, 2016) tackled this aspect and categorized the motivation of individuals when they participate word of mouth communication (positive WOM) even though that they are not paid for this advertisement into four groups. First, product involvement to show and share the thrill of using a new product. Second, self-enhancement, to grab attention and seek confirmation. Third, message involvement, such as sending interesting facts and advertisements and promotions. fourth, other involvement, such as helping and advising others.

3. Electronic Word of Mouth

Ever since the internet got introduced to the world it empowered consumers by giving them a voice to fight back against the one-sided media (TV, Radio and other traditional media types) and allowing them to share their own experience, reviews or opinions with others which lead to the creation of peer knowledge, thus forming what's now known as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Lin & Lin, 2018). eWOM can take a form of a positive or negative comment made online by a current/formal or potential consumer trying to take a decision about the product/service (Chiosa, 2014).

4. Mobile phone purchase and WOM

In 2008 Nokia made an advertisement to introduce their "PureView" image stabilization system included in their new mobile Lumia 920 and said that the ad was shot by the smart phone itself. Soon

after, an online blogger named "Eagle eye" draw attention to a reflection of a camera crew filming the advertisement in the advertisement. People reacted to the blog entry and it went viral which made Nokia apologize about the "confusion" in their blog (The Telegraph, 2012). The blog entry of "Eagle eye" can be considered as a type of EWOM communication and it got accepted by individuals and even the company, thus we can assume that it changed the consumers buying behavior towards buying that product as well. Without any doubts, we can say that WOM communication can effect consumer's behavior and his intention to buy a certain product or to use a service (Fine, et al, 2017) (Raluca, 2012). Importantly, WOM can affect purchase decision, and it takes an important role in the pre-purchase phase especially since there's no certainty about what is the service or usage that the consumer will get. If consumers are not sure about services benefits that they will receive, they may stay with their current services providers or do not purchase at all (Alcocer, 2017) as cited from (Brown et al., 2005).

5. Methodology

This study is used primary and secondary data. Secondary data were gathered from different resources (research papers, books, articles, thesis…etc.). The primary data were collected by an online survey targeted a random sample of 100 consumers.

5.1 Research population and tool:

The study used a random sampling method to target 100 consumers. The study used an online survey "google forms" to design and record the data. Google form is a cloud service tool provided by Google and one of the many tools included in google cloud computing productivity drive (google drive). The study distributed the survey by social media.

5.2 Survey design:

The survey consists of three parts (16) question driven from the study conducted by (Cakir & Cetin 2013):

1- Personal information (3) questions.
2- Buying behavior (4) questions.
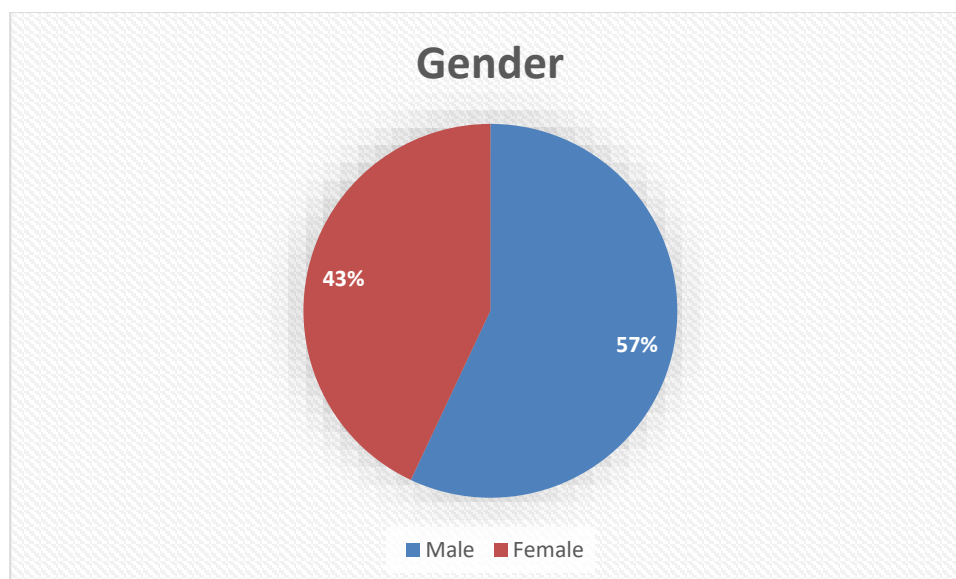3- Word of Mouth (9) questions.

5.3 Result and analysis:

In the following part, we will discuss the findings of each of the three parts of our survey.

Part 1: Personal information

Personal data were characterized as follows:

- Gender

Figure (1) and table (1) shows the gender distribution among the sample. the statistics show that 57% of the sample were male while 43% were females.
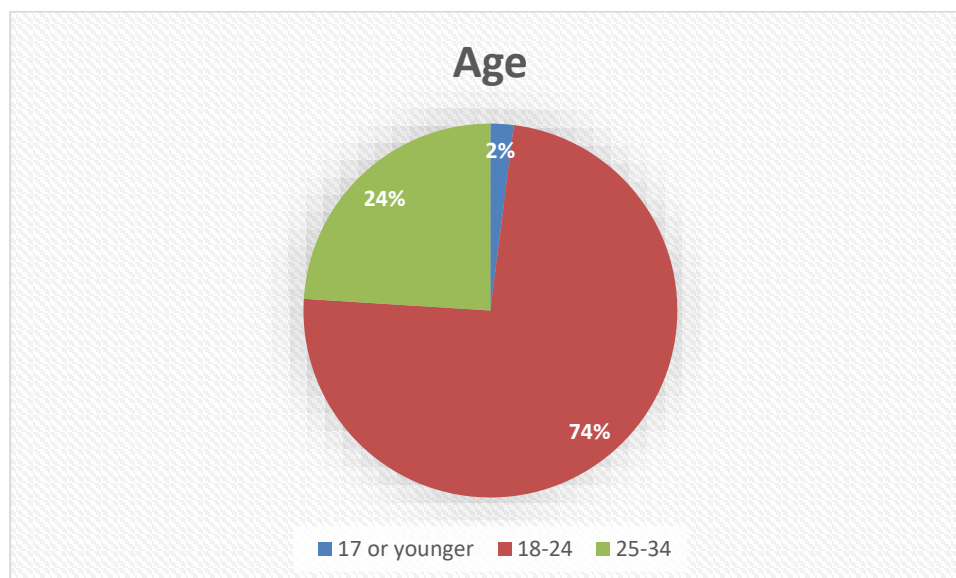

Fig. 1. The gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	57	57%
Female	43	43%
Total	100	100.0

Table (1): the gender

- **Age**

Figure (2) and table (2) shows the distribution of the age among the sample. the results show that 74% of the sample were between 18-24 of age and 24% were 25-34 while only 2% were 17 years old or younger.
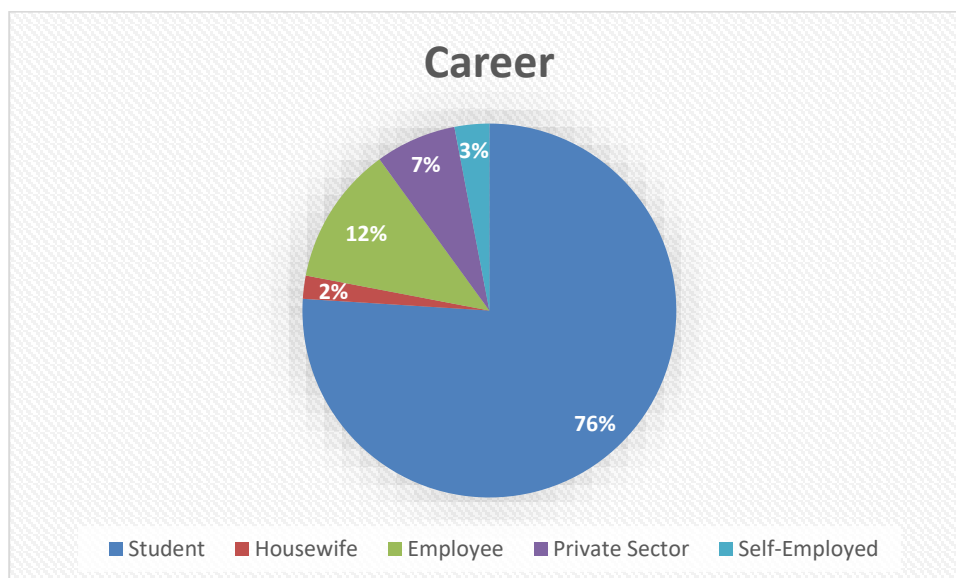
Fig. 2. The age.

Age	Frequency	Percent
17 or younger	2	2%
18-24	74	74%
25-34	24	24%
Total	100	100.0

Table. 2. The age.

- **Career**

Figure (3) and table (3) shows the results related to the career side of the sample. the majority of the sample were students (76%) follows that employees (12%) then private sector (7).
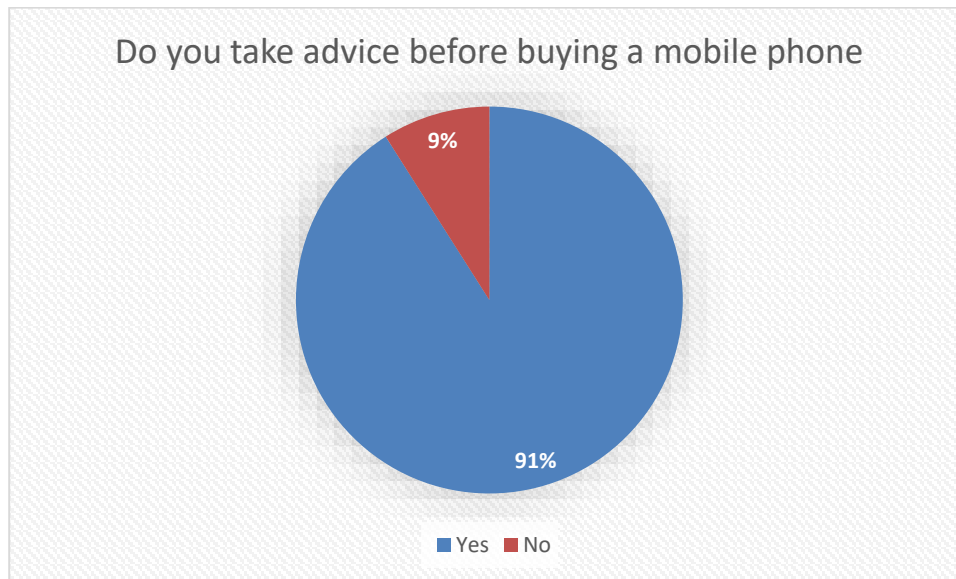
Fig.3. Career

Career	Frequency	Percent
Student	76	76%
Housewife	2	2%
Employee	12	12%
Private Sector	7	7%
Self-Employed	3	3%
Total	100	100.0

Table 3. Career

Part 2: Buying behavior

When the sample was asked about whether they take advice before buying a mobile phone or not, (91%) reported positively while only (9%) said No. Figure (4) and table (4) shows the results.
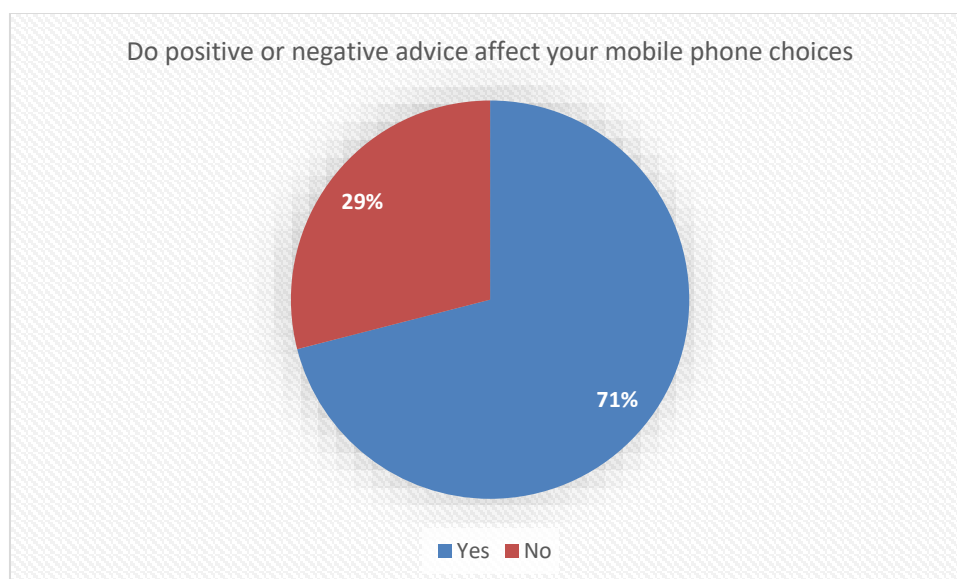
Fig.4. Do you take advice before buying a mobile phone?

Q4	Frequency	Percent
Yes	91	91%
No	9	9%
Total	100	100.0

Table. 4. Do you take advice before buying a mobile phone.

When asked about the effect of positive and negative advice on their mobile phone choices the majority accepted (71%) while (29%) reported negatively. Figure (5) and table (5) show the results.

Fig.5. Do positive or negative advice affect your mobile phone choices.

Q5	Frequency	Percent
Yes	71	71%
No	29	29%
Total	100	100.0

Table (5) Do positive or negative advice affect your mobile phone choices.

When asked about which factor impact their mobile choices. The highest value was friendly advice (31%) while the lowest was news with (3%). The full results are shown in figure (6) and table (6).
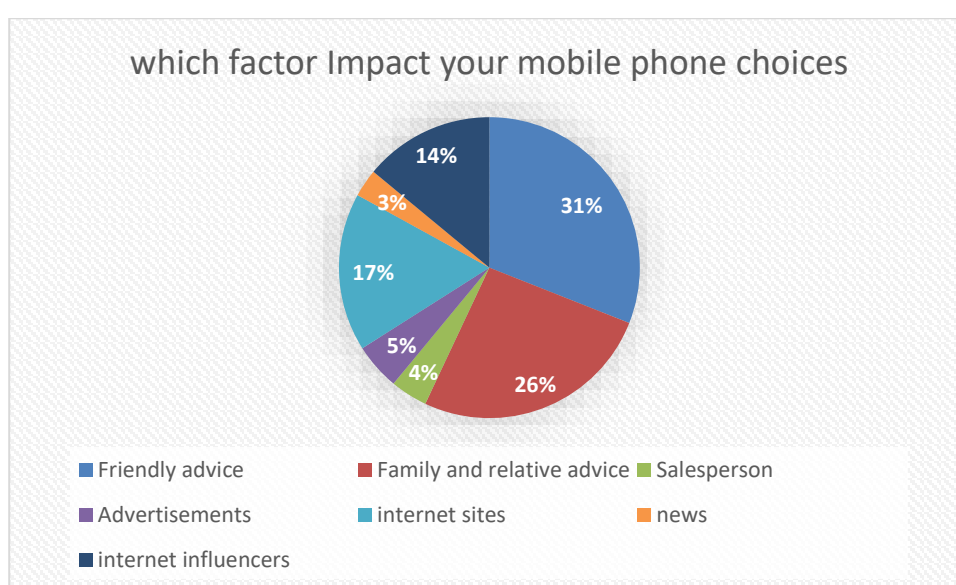
**Fig. (6) which factor Impact your mobile phone choices.**

Q6	Frequency	Percent
Friendly advice	31	31%
Family and relative advice	26	26%
Salesperson	4	4%
Advertisements	5	5%

internet sites	17	17%
News	3	3%
internet influencers	14	14%
Total	100	100.0

Table (6) which factor Impact your mobile phone choices.

When asked about which option brings the best value when choosing a mobile phone, the sample agreed on the previous experience option with (47%) following with brand image with (23%) and the lowest value was for advertisement with (8%). Figure (7) and table (7) shows the full results.
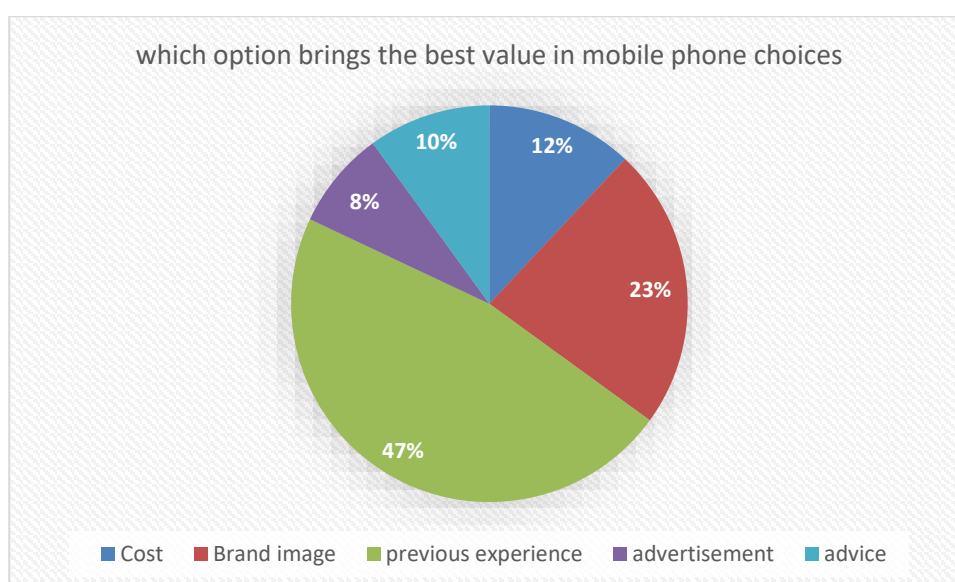
Fig.7. which option brings the best value in mobile phone choices.

Q7	Frequency	Percent
Cost	12	12%
Brand image	23	23%
previous experience	47	47%
advertisement	8	8%
advice	10	10%
Total	100	100.0

Table (7) which option brings the best value in mobile phone choices.

Part 3: Word of mouth

This part consists of 9 questions, the first question aimed to check which marketing medium influence the sample the most. Electronic Ads came first with (47%) while word of mouth communication came second with (44%). The least medium is Printed ads with only 2%. Figure (8) and table (8) shows the detailed results.
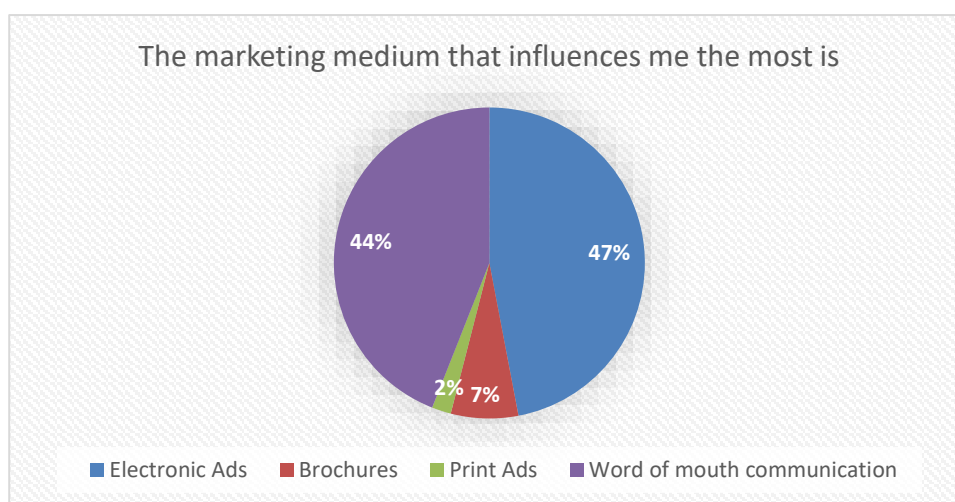
Fig.8. The marketing medium that influences me the most is

Q8	Frequency	Percent
Electronic Ads	47	47%
Brochures	7	7%
Print Ads	2	2%
Word of mouth communication	44	44%
Total	100	100.0

Table.8. The marketing medium that influences me the most is

the rest of the questions related to this part of the survey were Likert scale questions, the consumer supposed to choose an option ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree as a response to the statement in the survey. The table below (table 9) summaries the remaining questions.

	1 (SDA)	2 (DA)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)	Mean	Std
Q9) Word-of-mouth communication is an important factor in my buying decision.							
#	6	7	30	44	13	3.51	1.00
%	6	7	30	44	13		
Q10) I ask for advice from the people around me before choosing a Mobile phone.							
#	5	5	28	46	16	3.63	0.97
%	5	5	28	46	16		
Q11) I believe the information I hear from people close to me more than I believe the ads							
#	3	9	29	40	19	3.63	0.98
%	3	9	29	40	19		
Q12) The advice of consumers, whom have used the same mobile phone, is important for me.							
#	3	5	24	35	33	3.9	1.01
%	3	5	24	35	33		
Q13) For my mobile phone choices, my friends/family advice is important for me.							
#	4	13	30	40	13	3.45	1.00
%	4	13	30	40	13		
Q14) I choose the mobile phone that I get more advice about.							
#	4	13	30	40	13	3.45	1.00
%	4	13	30	40	13		
Q15) I advise the mobile phone whose I get satisfied with to the people around me.							
#	5	3	26	45	26	3.74	0.98
%	5	3	26	45	26		
Q16) If I am not satisfied with my mobile phone, I warn the people around me about choosing that mobile phone.							
#	4	15	20	38	23	3.61	1.11
%	4	15	20	38	23		

Table.9. Likert Scale questions data and analysis

For Q9-10-11-12-15-16 the sample attitude was agreeing with the statements, for Q13-14 the sample showed a neutral attitude based on a five Likert scale.

6. Conclusion:

The purpose of this research paper was to investigate the effect of word of mouth communication on the consumer behavior. A literature was arranged from different sources to introduce the term WOM and EWOM and how it can affect the consumer's decision making. A survey of 16 questions was conducted to measure this effect and a random sample of 100 consumers was selected for the purpose of the study. The results showed that 91% of them take advice before buying a mobile device and 71% get affected by the advice. The selected consumers reported that friendly advice affects them the most (31%) while news affects them the least (3%). For the marketing medium which influences the most, the sample showed that the electronic advertisements (47) affect them more than word of mouth (44%). The main findings related to other question in the survey indicated that the consumers prefer to get advice from people who have used the targeted mobile before and that they acknowledge WOM as an important factor in their buying decision and that they are willing to participate in WOM whether in a positive or negative way. Finally, WOM communication is head to head with electronic marketing efforts by vendors of mobile phones which indicate that it empowered consumers to have his own voice and sources of information.

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