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## Word of Mouth Communication and its Effect on the Affective Commitment

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### Abstract

*In the Information Age, social networks play an important role in spreading the word of mouth communication among consumers. In Brazil, the internet is growing so fast, and companies must understand customer behavior according to this new situation. In this context, the article aims to evaluate the influence of word of mouth on affective commitment and purchase intention. This is a quantitative and descriptive research and the sample has been any person participating actively in any consumer social networks. The questionnaires were answered by personal and professional contacts of the authors, who accessed the link to the google docs. For data analysis, we use partial least square method. Based on the results, what is noticed now is a spontaneous articulation between clients in the search for justice in consumer relations between companies. Consumers are mobilized on social networking sites in search of assistance and quality products, ready to alert other consumers when companies do not keep their promises or recommend services and products that have met their goal of excellent value in exchange for their money.*

**Key words:** word of mouth, social network, relationship marketing, commitment, information age



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### INTRODUCTION

The multiple interactions made possible by the internet helped to consolidate a cyberculture. "Cyberculture is the expression of the aspiration of building a social bond, which would not be found on links or territorial, or on institutional relations, which are not about power relations, but about gathering around common interests, about sharing knowledge about cooperative learning, collaboration on open spaces" (Levy, 1999, p 130). Also according to the author, this prevailing culture encourages the sharing of information and collaborative content creation and collaboration among multiple users.

To Karsaklian (2001), the technologies available and incorporated into people's routine in the last decade assist in deploying a more interactive marketing. This allows marketing professionals and consumers to personalize their communication. Electronic conversations act to establish relationships between users and innovative new technologies, providing customized information based on the interests of the users.

Bogmann (2000) highlights a significant change in recent years in the way organizations communicate and interact with their customers. The more traditional view of marketing as a process oriented only to the transaction, for the time of sale, is gradually being replaced by a differentiated approach in search of long term relationships with consumers, which focus on building relationships with a consumer at a time. Also according to the author, customer relationships built on solid foundations influence positively the commitment these consumers will show towards specific brands and products. Pereira (2010) highlights the important changes which occur also in the way that consumers communicate with other consumers, incorporating in their daily lives all the new technologies available.

In the Information Age, social networks play an important role in spreading the word of mouth communication among consumers. According to Pereira (2010), word of mouth in the digital age has enormous reach in spreading information and impressive speed of dissemination. Word of mouth is considered a strong recommendation from the one advertising to friends his experience regarding the purchase of a product or usage of a service. This information has a greater receptivity on the part of the people who receive it. "The development of information and communication technologies have accelerated the impact of word of mouth on consumer behavior and their relationship network" (PEREIRA, 2010, p. 2).

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Castells (2008) argues that the Internet favors the expansion and intensity of hundreds of weak ties which generate a fundamental layer of social interaction between individuals. For the author, this type of network communication radically transforms the space, time and the fundamental dimensions of human life. The space of information flow and timeless time are the main bases of this new culture, a connected society that transcends and includes the diversity of representation systems historically transmitted. The author also points out such networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies and that the logic of networks modifies the results of experience, power and culture.

Social networks have millions of followers in Brazil and around the world and have transformed social relations between individuals. The question is whether word of mouth communication in these networks may also interfere with affective commitment of the client in relation to a brand or product, as well as their purchasing choice for products or decision for specific establishments.

Pereira (2010) points out social networks are gaining importance in contemporary society because they allow continuous interaction from information sharing and collaborative creation of contents. Before the popularization of social networking, marketing was restricted to organizations that possessed enough financial resources to invest in traditional means of advertising for prospecting new clients such as television, radio, outdoor etc. All these media require high financial investments. Social networks enable more specific actions and are relatively cheap, allowing companies to use this tool in an assertive way for the marketing of their products, services and market differentials. The positive and spontaneous word of mouth spread by satisfied consumers exerts great influence on the social networks.

According to Gruen, Santos and Acito (2000), the involvement of the client in relation to a product or brand cannot be bought. It's won in the long run, through attitudes that convey trust, respect, care, attention and affection with each other. The commitment and retention of clients is a process, not an end in itself.

Several companies in Brazil and around the world have realized that social networks are a valuable relationship, communication, sales and even after sales service to its customers. According to the company ComScore ([www.comscore.com](http://www.comscore.com)), a global leader in tracking digital world with various researches on the digital marketing intelligence, people in the world already spend close to thirty billion hours a year in social networks, as showed in Figure 1. This demonstrates the importance that these networks have today in the *online* list of favorite pastimes of the world population.

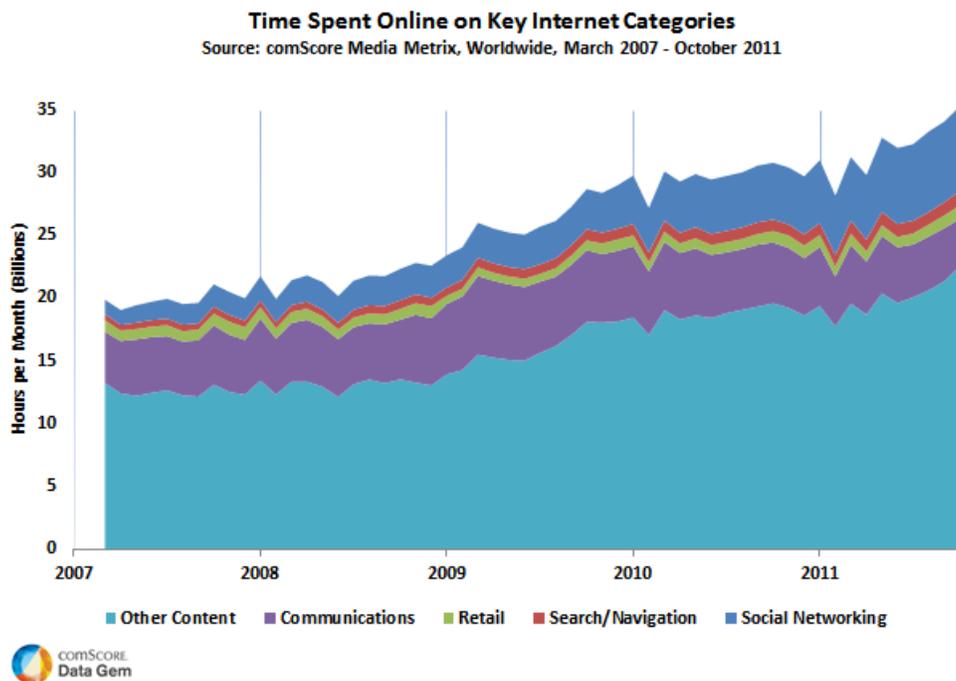


Figure 1. Time Spent Online on Key Internet Categories.  
Source: [www.comscore.com](http://www.comscore.com)

This intense connectivity across networks is a global phenomenon. *Smartphones* help increase this phenomenon, as they ensure unrestricted access to the profiles, posted comments and shared experiences. Also according to ComScore, social networking sites have currently 1.2 billion users worldwide. Activities related to interactions in social networks more than tripled in recent years. Currently, still according to this source, 25% of all time spent *online* is spent by people on social networks and 1 in every 4 minutes spent online is spent on interactions provided by these networks.

Figure 2 clearly demonstrates the significant increase in average hours spent by visitors on Facebook in Brazil. This shows that social networks are a global phenomenon and constantly growing. In Brazil, according to Comscore, the average time spent on Facebook jumped from 37 minutes per visitor in December 2010 to an impressive five hours in December 2011. Brazil is currently the fifth largest market for social networks in the world. Women spend on average 5.3 hours on this network and men approximately 4.1 hours. A significant portion of these visitors, 30.6% are between 25 and 34 years.

Figure 3 shows how the Brazilian advertising market assimilates the constant and growing demand for this type of online interaction among multiple users. Social networks are now an important channel for the placement of advertisements, due to its popularity. Facebook took over in December 2011 to lead this market, surpassing the site globo.com in number of paid listings, representing 17.4% market share, reaching approximately 50.8 million users. The site globo.com represents 14.1% of this market, followed by uol.com, represented by 12.2% market share. The online market has always brought many opportunities for agencies and advertisers. What is observed here is the recognition of the importance of social networks as promising vehicles from the point of view of the market, for advertises of brands and products.



Figure 2: Average Hours per Visitor Spent on Facebook in Brazil  
Source: www.comscore.com

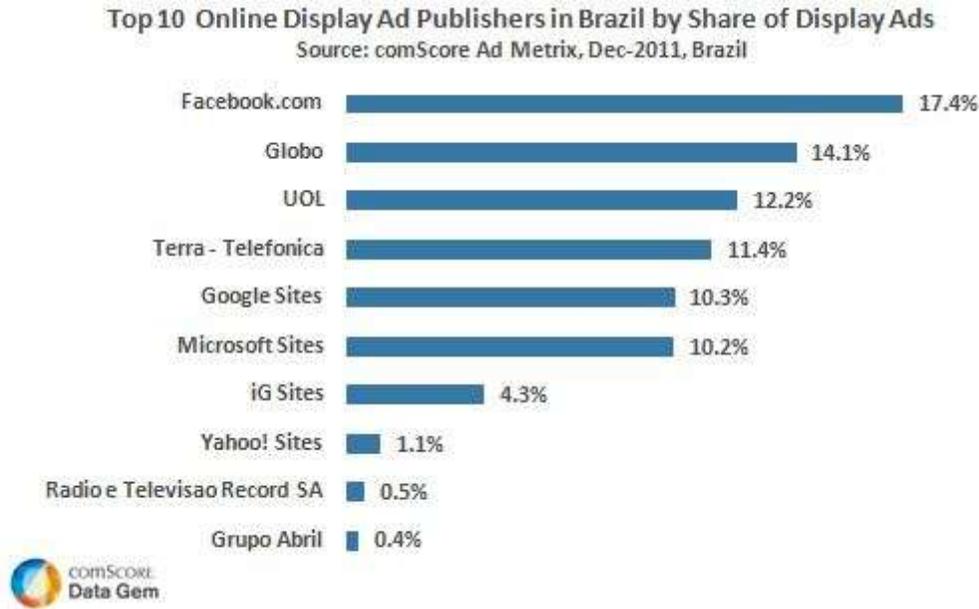


Figure 3: Top 10 Sites for Announcements of Commercials in Brazil  
Source: www.comscore.com

One of the most popular activities are visits to shopping sites, since three out of four users, have a habit of visiting such sites. One in every two users enter sites related to sports and the same percentage is observed visiting newspaper websites. 62% of internet users visit gaming sites and 50% visit sites of television programs. The web is now an important tool for banking, with 38% of visitors. Meteorological sites represent a significant portion in online searches, representing 30% of hits. But the highlight comes to social networks, which now account for 1 in every 4 minutes spent by users on the Internet. This means that 25% of all time spent on the web is currently spent on social networking sites.

The topic to be addressed in this paper is very important, especially from the perspective of interaction that social networks provide, allowing the definition of socialized content and a shared development of products and services. Social networks allow organizations to listen to their customers more frequently and swiftly, causing them to become an active part in the process of establishing a brand, service or product. The understanding of consumer behavior in relation to social networks can significantly contribute to organizations to define its focus and strengthen its market position. Social networks are also a powerful vehicle for the dissemination of information shared by consumers on their perceptions about products, brands and services. The word of mouth through social networks can quickly reach multiple customer bases.

Social networks may be contributing to changing relationships between people and organizations. These networks are a powerful disseminator of word of mouth communication. Within this context it is important that organizations are able to position themselves and maximize the potential of tools like this in the search for markets and the development of customer commitment.

The search for better understanding of this phenomenon and how social networks impact the relationships between organizations and consumers is very important, both from the academic point of view, as under the managerial point of view. From all the facts exposed above, we have the following research question: what is the impact of word of mouth communication in social networks on customers' behavior in a highly competitive environment? Therefore, the aim of the research is to evaluate the influence of communication on social networks in customer purchase and customer commitment.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Lemos (2002), the idea of the global village is getting closer to reality. Technological change of this era transformed the relationships between consumers, suppliers and organizations. With borders

and geographical boundaries becoming less significant in the act of decision for a service or product, globalization was responsible for integrating markets and intensifying the competition among them.

Organizations can and should take advantage of opportunities to connect with their customers, minimizing the role of intermediaries in the relationship. The time is right for organizations to express their values and principles, publicize their achievements and boost the moments of interaction with customers and prospects. "Post-marketing is strengthening customer loyalty by meeting their expectations" (BOGMANN, 2000, p. 105).

The digital age has opened a differentiated approach with regard to relationships established between companies, customers and suppliers. "Marketing is a set of interactive marketing initiatives aimed at creating interaction between the customer and the company, and that the client has an active role, enabling personalization and customization of products and services" (LIMEIRA, 2003, p.10). The customer ceases to be a receiver of information and starts to act more actively in their relationship with the companies. He stops playing a supporting role in these relationships and acts to require, every time, attention and personalized contact. This customer does not want to be simply another one, but a special one.

Giving clients a pleasurable experience and offering a relationship of trust is investing in winning the loyalty of customers. Loyalty is a continuous process of conquest.

*"We went from the era of sales to the era of service. Companies should aim to appreciation of the relationship between the company and its customers because this relationship is in the process of conquest (prospecting), or loyalty. The customer wants to be a partner of the firm and to establish a relationship. Being cold, impersonal and anonymous becomes inadequate".* (KARSAKLIAN, 2001, p. 98).

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social networks are characterized by allowing the individual to build a public or semi - public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and also access posts produced by other people within the network to which he belongs. Yet according to the authors, this format allows the use of platforms on which applications and content can be changed collaboratively by the parties involved. For them 75% of Internet users use some social media - a category of online media, where content is created by its audience, through participation and sharing of user-generated content in the form of network.

Dalmoro et al (2010) consider that interactions with other users, thanks to the formation of virtual communities, cause a growing connection between its members. It's just that the interactivity lies a major attraction for those networks. According to Hagel and Armstrong (1997), virtual communities can help meet the needs of consumers with regard to the sharing of resources, the establishment of relations and trade. Donath & Boyd (2004) argue that online social networks are increasing access to resources, creating new ways to aggregate them. Once organizations start their activities and start paying visits to their clients, they begin a powerful network of relationships that may or may not be used to the advantage of businesses.

The network configuration is peculiar to human beings. People will group with their peers and establish working relationships, friendship and relations of interests that develop and change as its trajectory. These social networks are one of the underlying strategies used by the companies to share information and experiences through the relationships between the actors that integrate it (TOMAÉL; ALCARA; DI CHIARA, 2005).

Moreover, the involvement of the consumer with the brand, product, service or company is an important factor in building loyalty within this relationship. According Prado (2003), the impairment itself can be considered a central element of the relationship. To Slongo and Vieira (2008), a commitment to purchase the product or service is due to a personal commitment to the object, even suffering situational influences and marketing efforts strategic competition. Loyal customers are a competitive asset in the networking of the organization, not only because they represent ongoing opportunities for shopping, but also for their influence in the network of personal relationships that they have established throughout their lives. The commitment is a key factor in building loyalty.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) define commitment as belief in exchange partners in which the relationship is so important that it should be worth every effort to ensure the maintenance of the relationship. The parties believe that the committed relationship is a valuable work that should be provided indefinitely. It is the

desire of the parties that committed relationship is lasting. To the authors commitment exists when the relation is important for both parties.

The literature suggests a number of dimensions to the construct commitment, exposed objectively as follows. The normative commitment, according to Gruen, Summers and Acito (2000), is derived from a sense of moral obligation from the individual to the organization. In this type of commitment it is observed that the individual remains in the relationship because of previously established norms. This type of commitment is very typical in situations of companies that pay specialization courses for its employees and then require an employee's length of stay in the company in order to revert to the business part of the expertise gained through their studies.

The commitment of continuity, also known as calculative, is according to Gruen, Summers and Acito (2000), based on the self interest of the relationship. In this case, the individual is psychologically linked to the company based on the perceived costs (economic and social status) associated with the interruption of the relationship with this organization. Vieira and Batista (2007) go further, stating that this commitment occurs when the individual feels pressured to continue in the relationship due to not identifying other alternatives to purchase or when switching costs are high or even when the benefits offered by competitors do not replace those offered by the current vendor.

The affective commitment is, according to Gruen, Summers and Acito (2000), set when the parties feel psychologically connected with the organization. Regarding loyalty in relationships between customers and companies, the affective component may become an important factor in establishing the longevity of interactions. Hennig - Thurau and Klee (1997) define commitment as a consumer orientation to long-term relationships based on emotions (affection) and the belief that staying in the relationship will bring more benefits than the end of it (cognitive aspects considered) .

The instrumental commitment, according to Brown, Lusch and Nicholson (1995), focuses on aspects related to external stimuli such punishments by interrupting the relationship or awards for the maintenance of it. The behavioral commitment, according to Kim and Frazier (1997), is an extension of the activities in which one of the parties offers special help for the others involved suppressing their needs in times of crisis or need. In this case, one of the parties feels co-responsible for the success of the other parties, considered as a partner. This type of commitment is very characteristic in relations between franchisors and franchisees.

The commitment of resistance, also known as psychological impairment, refers, according to Crosby and Taylor (1983), to situations when parties tend to resist change due to conflicting information or experiences. Pritchard, Havitz and Howard (1999) complement this statement suggesting that psychological commitment is best defined by a tendency to resist change in general.

*" In summary, Normative Commitment is a moral obligation and is based on internalized norms sometimes predetermined; Calculative Commitment is regarded to the psychological expense as well as economic and social status of leaving the relationship, since there are few options for suppliers. Affective commitment is to stay in the relationship because of love. Instrumental Commitment is linked to the aspects associated with the punishments related to leaving the relationship. Behavioral commitment is the help coming from a situation of need, ie behavior aid partner. Finally, Resistance Commitment is a tendency to resist change because of conflicting information or experience." (Vieira & Slongo, 2008, P. 1002)*

The commitment can serve as a basis for differentiating the loyalty of repeated purchase. According to Oliver (1999), loyalty can be considered the existence of a deep commitment to purchase or reuse a product or service consistently in the future. This action sets up a relationship of repeated purchases of the same brand or company, despite all the situational influences and marketing efforts that may have a potential competition to encourage behavior change in consumers. Furthermore, consumers when featuring the commitment to remain in a relationship with the purchasing organization, will have loyalty as a consequence of this commitment. Commitment is an important construct of loyalty between company and consumer.

The affective component is a vital part in building consumer loyalty. The path to loyalty also involves the heart. "Consumers become loyal in a cognitive sense first, then in a connotative way and, finally, in a behavioral one" (Oliver 1999, p. 35th).

The affective loyalty is formed, according to McMullan and Gilmore (2003), in the establishment of the commitment, stimulated in the customer's mind as cognition and affection. For Oliver (1997, 1999) at this

stage the idea is to develop a love of the brand, or to have a positive attitude towards it. Cognition can be argued. Affection cannot be easily dismissed. Harris and Goode (2004) argue that affective loyalty is less susceptible to substitution of brand loyalty than the cognitive one established.

Prado and Santos (2003) argue that the conceptual definitions of commitment and loyalty are very close, pointing out that both converge to the same concept. To the authors commitment and behavioral intention to repurchase are a reflection of loyalty.

The practices of interpersonal influence have been used for decades. But "word of mouth communication as one of its manifestations, began to be the object of attention of social researchers since 1950" (Pereira, p. 1, 2010). According to Harrison-Walker (2001) word of mouth consists of a personal and informal communication between a perceived noncommercial communicator and a given receptor, linked to a brand, a product, an organization, or a service.

*"The enormous ability to spread and influence behavior caused by word of mouth was enhanced, especially with the development and accessibility of new information technologies. It is its potential of quickly reaching multiple customer bases that has caused many companies to begin to manage word of mouth initiatives proactively". (Pereira, p.1, 2010).*

According to Henning-Thurau et al (2004), the Internet has increased the options available to consumers in the search for unbiased information about products. Many consumers seek the opinion of other consumers and they feel comfortable sharing their opinions and insights about products and services through electronic word of mouth.

According Dalmoro et al (2010), an element that emerges when dealing with social networks and consumer is the ability of users to influence the purchasing decisions of others through tweets and posts. These influences are the result of the social network formed because, according to the authors, the user receives better and open minded messages sent from people with whom they have a relationship, whether of friendship or admiration. These messages shared though the web can influence the purchasing decisions of others, especially if the responsible for tweets or posts is a trendsetter or a person with credibility in the network. Yet according to the authors social networks act as communication channel that allow users to distribute information via a two-way road: receiving and sending what they produce.

*" This need is centered on a new concept in consumer culture which outweighs the exchange (in the classical sense of marketing). This new approach is to share, ie a user distributes something over new channels on the internet, and in a snowball effect, a sharing network is built. With the characteristics of a community, it is a result of the creation of mutual value between users. The network is maintained by the desire of consumers to interact with each other and valuing the shared information". (Dalmoro et al, p. 13 -14, 2010).*

According Bruyn and Lilien (2008), electronic communications between friends are an effective way to transform electronic networking in electronic networks of influence. Friends and acquaintances influence each other, with different intensities on social networks. The authors emphasize that this type of communication not only captures the attention of the receiver, as well as triggers interest and eventually results in product adoption and conversion into sales.

The communication by positive and spontaneous word of mouth can be widespread in networks and can become important competitive strategy in an era where customization is valued in relationships and the costs of mass media have become increasingly expensive.

## **METHOD**

With regard to the purposes, this study was descriptive, which, according to Vergara (2007), exhibits characteristics of a given population or specific phenomenon.

The descriptive research, also according to Vergara (2007), also helps to establish correlations between variables and define its nature. Thus, were appointed the reasons why the use of social networks can become a strong ally to arouse the intention of buying of customers inserted in a highly globalized and digital word and how word of mouth can play an important role in establishing the commitment between consumer and company.

As for the means, it was a survey. The survey was used because it is an empirical investigation conducted at the site where the phenomenon occurs or who have any information to explain it.

The sample for the research has been any person participating actively in any consumer social networks. The sample was defined by convenience. The questionnaires were answered by personal and professional contacts of the authors, who accessed the link to the google docs on social networks. In total 422 questionnaires were answered.

The Figure 1 shows the model to be tested in this survey.

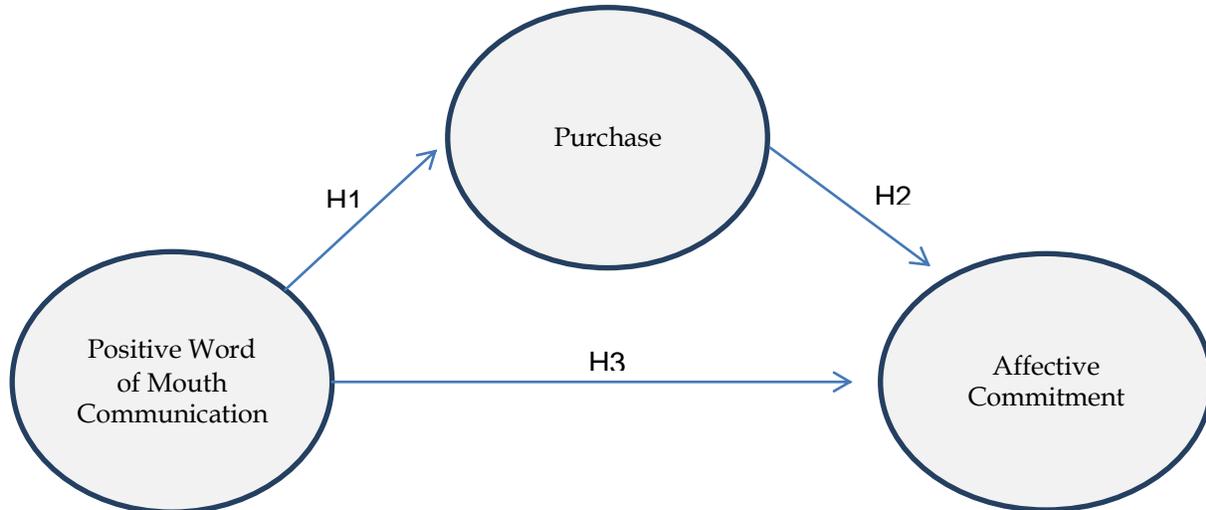


Figure 1: Theoretical model

Given the above, the model will test three hypotheses explained below:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** word of mouth communication in social networks influences positively and significantly the purchase of a product or service;

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** the purchase or repurchase of a product or service influences positively and significantly the consumer affective commitment to the product or service;

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** word of mouth communication in social networks influences positively and significantly the consumer affective commitment to the product or service.

The survey questionnaire used for model validation addressed each of the constructs of the model with six questions, listed below, measured on the Likert scale of 5 points, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questions were based on research cited in the theoretical framework. We chose to review only the affective commitment due to be treated fair, in many cases, in two dimensions, attitudinal and behavioral, the latter being represented by the intention to purchase, construct assumed to be consequent in this research.

Model validation was made through the structural equation modeling. For this purpose the method used was Partial Least Squares (PLS), which does not require multivariate normality of the variables and can work with a smaller sample size, and better fit for exploratory studies than the method used by LISREL (Chin, 1998). Furthermore, according to Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt (2011), the PLS should be used when the main purpose is maximizing the explained variance of the dependent latent construct.

The software used was 2.0 SmartPLS M3. To verify that the coefficients are found significant at the 5% level of significance it was used the *bootstrap* method. T values above 1.96 indicate that the coefficients are significant at the 5% level of significance.

#### Questions

##### Word of mouth communication

- The opinion of my friends posted on social networks about companies, products and services is important to me.
- I consult my friends in social networks before purchasing products or services of a company for the first time.
- I check with my friends the reputation of a company, product or service they shared in social networks, before deciding to purchase.

- I like social networking pages of companies with which I identify.
- I expose my point of view on products, services, or companies for my network of relationships through posts on social networks.
- I consider the opinion posted by my friends on social networks about products, services or companies.

#### **Purchase**

- I always come back to a store well endorsed by my friends on social networks.
- I choose to start relationships with companies well recommended by friends on social networks.
- I prefer to purchase products or services of a company well recommended by my friends in social networks than experiment new companies.
- I prefer to buy products or services well recommended on social networks.
- I avoid buying products or services defamed on social networks.
- I prefer to buy products or services from companies with which my friends had positive experiences have and had shared this perception on social networks.

#### **Affective commitment**

- When I'm satisfied with a product or service, I refer to my friends posting comments on social networks.
- I share the comments posted on social networks about products and services.
- I place in my social networks dissatisfaction with a product or service to my friends network.
- I share with my friends in social networks interesting deals I get from companies.
- I share photos on social networks of the products purchased with my friends.
- I share with my friends links disclosed by companies that I admire in social networks.

#### **RESULTS**

A total of 422 questionnaires were answered. More than half of respondents (71.1%) are female. Regarding age, the highest frequency is observed in relation to the range of 31 to 35 years (34.2%). With regard to educational level, the higher frequency is related to individuals with complete undergraduate (36.5%). The individual monthly income in turn is more frequent in the upper range to \$ 5,000 (32.5%).

Tables 1-3 (appendix) present the full report of the descriptive statistics of the data collected.

The model was inserted in SmartPLS as it was conceived in the theoretical argument. According to data in Figure 4, all indicators had coefficients greater than 0.5 in the estimation of the measurement model. Performing bootstrap method, we can note that all coefficients are significant at 1% level. This result indicates a strong relationship among indicators and it's constructs, confirming the proposed measurement model.

The path linking word of mouth to purchase has a high coefficient (0.809), the path linking word of mouth to affective commitment has a high coefficient too (0.808), and bothy are significant at 1% level, according to bootstrap method. However, it was found that the path linking the purchase to affective commitment had a very low coefficient (0.013) and that proved not significant (t-value = 0.223), as showed in Figure 4.

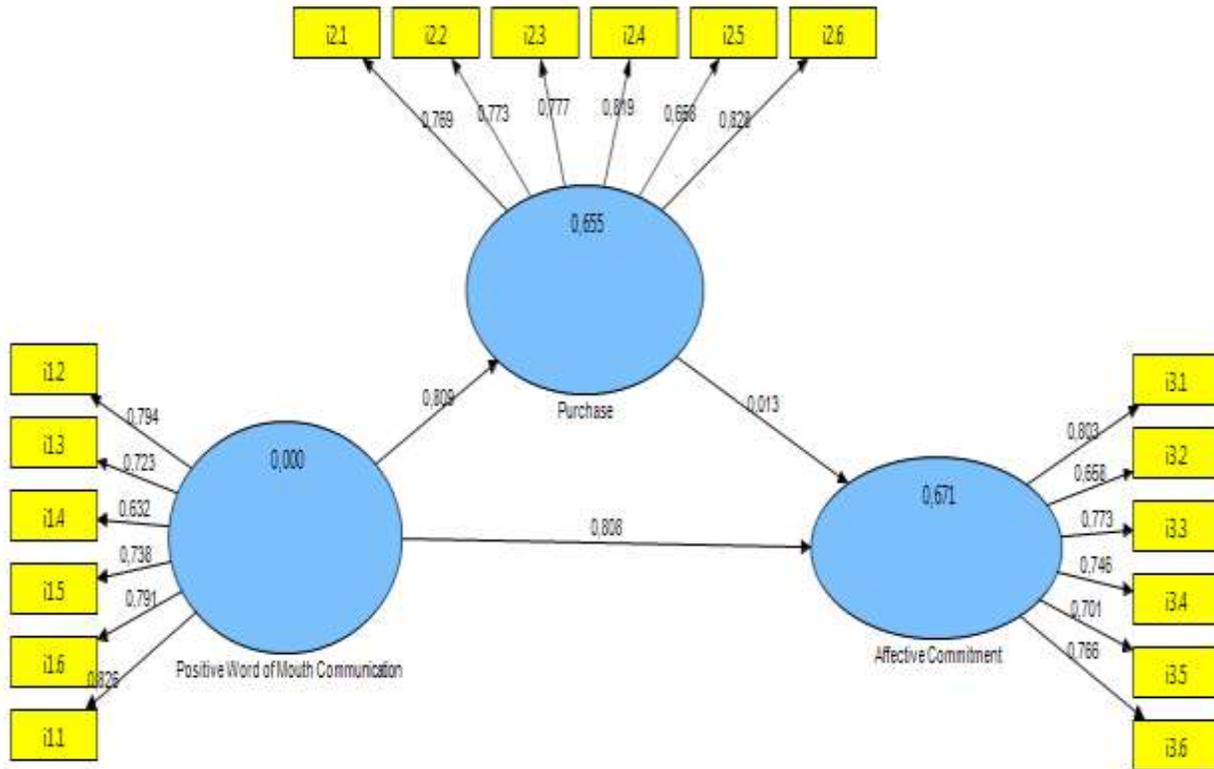


Figure 4. Estimated Model

We then proceeded to review the convergent validity of the model. This evaluation is performed based on Average Variance Extracted – AVE, composite reliability or Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. These values, according to Chin (1998) must have a minimum value of 0.5 (AVE) or 0.7 (composite reliability or Cronbach’s alpha). Table 4 indicates that for all constructs the validity was confirmed.

Table 4: Description of the model adjusted

	AVE	Composite Reliability	R <sup>2</sup>	Cronbach's alpha
Purchase	0.597	0.898	0.653	0.864
Affective commitment	0.552	0.880	0.671	0.836
Positive word of mouth communication	0.568	0.887		0.846

Regarding discriminant validity, cross-loads of items with the constructs were assessed. As can be seen in Table 5, each item has the highest load with its own construct than any other, thus confirming discriminant validity.

Table 5: Cross Loads

	Purchase	Affective commitment	Positive word of mouth communication
i1.1	0.694	0.552	0.826
i1.2	0.619	0.648	0.794
i1.3	0.617	0.579	0.723

i1.4	0.424	0.617	0.632
i1.5	0.589	0.769	0.738
i1.6	0.687	0.521	0.792
i2.1	0.768	0.560	0.665
i2.2	0.768	0.605	0.672
i2.3	0.778	0.440	0.564
i2.4	0.820	0.535	0.661
i2.5	0.662	0.376	0.491
i2.6	0.829	0.533	0.663
i3.1	0.514	0.803	0.630
i3.2	0.549	0.658	0.619
i3.3	0.553	0.773	0.671
i3.4	0.429	0.746	0.583
i3.5	0.448	0.701	0.530
i3.6	0.454	0.766	0.597

In summary, the model results are shown in Table 6. It is observed that the H1 was confirmed, indicating that word of mouth communication positively influences the buying intentions. This result shows a new relationship to some extent, because traditionally the word of mouth communication is valued as an outcome construct of loyalty, and not as a cause of purchase.

Table 6: Relationship between Constructs Assessed

	Relationship Type	Coefficient
H1: Communication word of mouth -> Intention to purchase	Confirmed	0.808
H2: Buy -> Affective Commitment	Not - Confirmed	0.013
H3: Communication word of mouth -> Commitment	Confirmed	0.819

The hypothesis H2 was not confirmed, showing that the purchase does not cause affective commitment. It's a quite surprising result and what could explain this weak relation? The affective commitment is set when the parties feel psychologically connected with the organization, according to Gruen, Summers and Acito (2000), or it's a love relationship, as stated by Vieira & Slongo, 2008, or it's based on emotional link with the organization, according Fullerton (2003).

Some possible explanations for this result can be revealed. Firstly, the affective commitment mostly depends on frequent repurchases, which may not occur, even this aspect did not become investigated. So if there were no repurchases, the consumer may not feel inclined to establish affective commitment. Characteristics of the studied population are another possible explanation. Due to the diversity of views and also the speed with which these opinions circulate in network, the consumer tends not to compromise with a product or service specifically, but with those products and services which receive positive indications in networking. That is, the influence of the people who are part of the group is the main aspect for establishing the affection, as evidenced by Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) and Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (2000) when addressing issues relating to the reference group. In summary, in the information age, the consumer is committed only with highly rated products and services in your social network, and rarely with the product or service itself.

The hypothesis H3, moreover, has been supported, confirming the positive effect of the word of mouth communication on the customers' affective commitment. The results also indicate that 65.5% of purchase intentions are explained by word of mouth communication and that 67.1% of affective commitment is due to word of mouth communication, primarily and secondary terms, the purchase.

## CONCLUSION

The word of mouth communication has always had an effect on how consumers make choices in relation to consumption. We observe today the enhancement of this communication by word of mouth through technologies that enhance its impact and speed of the dissemination of such information.

The spontaneous word of mouth communication within social networks gives consumers a new kind of power: their perceptions may influence other consumers to consume or not a product or service. These insights are disseminated and shared on the network with a quick reach of multiple customer bases and become determining factors for the decision to purchase or for the establishment of an affective commitment to the client relationship with a brand or product.

What is noticed now is a spontaneous articulation between clients in the search for justice in consumer relations between companies. Consumers are mobilized on social networking sites in search of assistance and quality products, ready to alert other consumers when companies do not keep their promises or recommend services and products that have met their goal of excellent value in exchange for their money. There is a power shift in the relationship between consumers and businesses. In the past, a negative perception was seen as just one. How could a single dissatisfied person confront an entire company?

Today, with the rise of social networks in people's everyday lives, a negative perception generates great influence on multiple client bases and can indeed influence other consumers in their purchasing decisions. Likewise, a satisfied consumer, committed towards a company or product by sharing their positive perceptions with others positively and significantly influences other consumers. These multiple customer bases feel safer to choose a product highly recommended by friends on social networks.

Finally we would like to highlight contributions and limitations of this research. As academic contributions, two can be highlighted: the verification of word of mouth communication as an antecedent of purchase intention and commitment and the identification of a scale to assess the word of mouth communication in social networks.

The research limitations are due to the choice of convenience sample, which by itself limits the generalization of results. Moreover, having been sent to networks of contacts of the researchers, there may be some bias of respondents. Therefore, it is suggested for future research, other data collection methodologies that minimize the limitations previously mentioned. Furthermore, one may also suggest other research that addresses related issues such as, for example, the effect of faults and recovery from social networking services as well as other constructs, such as trust, satisfaction and perceived value.

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APPENDIX

*Table 1. Word of mouth communication*

Item		95% confidence interval			Standard deviation
		Lower limit	Average	Upper limit	
i1.1	The opinion of my friends posted on social networks about companies, products and services is important to me.	3.92	4.02	4.12	1.070
i1.2	I consult my friends in social networks before purchasing products or services of a company for the first time.	3.09	3.21	3.34	1.318
i1.3	I check with my friends the reputation of a company, product or service they shared in social networks, before deciding to purchase.	3.32	3.43	3.55	1.236
i1.4	I like social networking pages of companies with which I identify.	3.72	3.84	3.96	1.283
i1.5	I expose my point of view on products, services, or companies for my network of relationships through posts on social networks.	2.99	3.12	3.25	1.353
i1.6	I consider the opinion posted by my friends on social networks about products, services or companies.	3.99	4.09	4.18	1.033

*Table 2. Purchase*

Item		95% confidence interval			Standard deviation
		Lower limit	Average	Upper limit	
i2.1	I always come back to a store well endorsed by my friends on social networks.	3.67	3.78	3.89	1.108
i2.2	I choose to start relationships with companies well recommended by friends on social networks.	3.37	3.49	3.60	1.201
i2.3	I prefer to purchase products or services of a company well recommended by my friends in social networks than experiment new companies.	3.63	3.74	3.85	1.138
i2.4	I prefer to buy products or services well recommended on social networks.	3.69	3.80	3.91	1.150
i2.5	I avoid buying products or services defamed on social networks.	4.17	4.27	4.37	1.049
i2.6	I prefer to buy products or services from companies with which my friends had positive experiences have and had shared this perception on social networks.	3.97	4.08	4.18	1.063

*Table 3. Affective Commitment*

Item		95% confidence interval			Standard deviation
		Lower limit	Average	Upper limit	
i3.1	When I'm satisfied with a product or service, I refer to my friends posting comments on social networks.	3.39	3.51	3.63	1.229

i3.2	I share the comments posted on social networks about products and services.	3.79	3.91	4.02	1.183
i3.3	I place in my social networks dissatisfaction with a product or service to my friends network.	3.56	3.69	3.82	1.360
i3.4	I share with my friends in social networks interesting deals I get from companies.	3.14	3.28	3.41	1.403
i3.5	I share photos on social networks of the products purchased with my friends.	2.39	2.51	2.63	1.276
i3.6	I share with my friends links disclosed by companies that I admire in social networks.	2.93	3.05	3.18	1.340