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EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF WORDS OF MOUTH ON CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR OF JORDANIAN CUSTOMERS

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Abstract
Word of mouth (WOM) is a vital source of marketplace information for consumers, but a few studies about the underlying drivers of word-of-mouth behavior from the perspective of the potential communicator. The objective of this study is to explore the relationship between word of mouth through (family, friends, and experts), subjective norm, and consumer purchasing behavior in Jordan. The data was collected from consumers in Jordan. Of the 500 consumer participating in the 20-questions, face-to-face intercept survey, 400 or about 85% responded. After dropping incomplete questionnaires, 400 usable responses were analyzed using SPSS. Multiple regression analysis was performed to investigate the relationship between word of mouth through (family, friends, and experts), subjective norm, and consumer purchasing behavior. Results showed significant, positive relationships between word of mouth through (family, friends, and experts), subjective norm, and consumer purchasing behavior. Finally, age, and gender was found to Moderator the relationship between word of mouth through (family, friends, and experts), and consumer purchasing behavior. Also, Implications of this work and directions for future research are discussed.
Keywords: Word of mouth, Subjective norm, Consumer behavior, Jordan.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, the significance and contribution of the words of mouth to the marketing strategies has been widely acknowledged and discussed. Furthermore, word-of-mouth (WOM) communications between consumers is a topic of interest in both the pre-purchase and post-purchase decision-making literatures. However, Word of mouth has defined in numerous different but similar ways by different researchers. Chen et al (2008) defined word-of-mouth as “face-to-face communication about a brand, product, or service between people who are perceived as not having connections to a commercial entity”. Similarly, Godes, Mayzlin, Chen, Das, Dellarocas, Pfeiffer, Libai, Sen, Shi, and Verlegh (2005) identified word-of-mouth as

"the one-to-one and face-to-face exchange of information about a product or service." Also, WOM is defined as an "oral person to person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, a product or a service" (Hodza, 2012). In this interaction; the beliefs, attitudes and experiences about a product or service are shared by the person who has an opinion or is knowledgeable about that specific product or service to others. Following Godes et al (2009) definition, word-of-mouth is "an exchange of comments, thoughts, and ideas among two or more individuals in which none of the individuals represent a marketing source". In particular, several studies (e.g. Chen et al, 2006; Kaikati, 2010; Buttle, 1998 Al-Shiekh and 2010) have concluded that WOM has a stronger positive influence on purchasing behavior than traditional marketing as it is considered more credible by the receiver. More specifically, word-of-mouth (WOM) plays an important role in consumer pre-purchase and post-purchase decision-making, research in to the phenomenon has been fragmented. Additionally, despite the general consensus that WOM communication among consumers is an everyday phenomenon and that it is of vital importance to the success o f numerous products and services, the topic o f WOM behavior has not received a great deal o f attention among marketing and consumer researchers in recent years. Importantly, relatively little of empirical research has been directed at understanding key issues with respect to word of mouth measurement and the nature and conditions under which word of mouth exerts influence in consumer decision-making. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between word of mouth sources of information such as family, friends, experts, and subjective norm, on consumer purchasing decision.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The objective of reviewing significant related literature is to summarize what is already known about this issue, and then to place it within theoretical framework for this proposed study. Word of mouth is the backbone of this research. This researcher has reviewed findings from prior studies regarding the role of word of mouth in consumer decision-making. This study provides different perspectives of the effects of WOM through (family, friends, and experts) and consumer purchasing behavior.

Consumer behavior

According to Kotler at al. (2008), the first step of marketing management has to be understanding consumers. There are many factors that might influence the consumer behavior, such as Word of mouth, subjective norm, age, gender, and so on. When Kotler et al. (2008) elaborated the model of consumer behavior; they were referring to how behave the entire consumer market; so consumers are also included in that. In order to analyze and understand which factors can influence the consumer behavior, the theoretical framework of consumer

behavior has been taken into account due to the affecting factors are the same and the consumer behavior models are more developed that the models of consumers. Before explaining the factors that influence consumer behavior, it is important to know the meaning of consumer behavior. Solomon et al. (2006) defined consumer behavior as the approach of the factors that influence individuals when they choose, buy, use or dispose goods or services to satisfy their needs and desires. Less Galoway (1999) affirmed that several theoretical models of consumer behavior have appeared in the last years sharing all of them many features. All of them try to identify variables in the product, service or consumer's attitude that have an influence on the consumers in order to build a competitive advantage of it. These variables can be internal or external.

Word of mouth

Previous to purchasing decisions, consumers collect product information to reduce the perceived risk of the unknown (Kaikati, 2004). Furthermore, purchasing behavior is determined by product involvement, which is how important a product is to an individual; the higher the product importance is, the higher the perceived risk for the potential consumer. However, WOM has been recognized as a vital force in the marketplace, affecting on consumer behavior (Cheema et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2008; Dellarocas et al., 2006), preferences and purchase decision (File et al., 1994; Kaikati et al., 2004), and decision making (Bansal, & Royer, 2000; Bristor, 1990; Chip, 1995). Furthermore, word of mouth was explored to be seven times as effective as newspapers and magazines, four times as effective as personal selling and twice as effective as radio advertising in influencing consumers to switch brands (Gremler et al., 2001). Additionally, the effectiveness of WOM has been widely discussed for a long period of time. Some Studies such as, Liu (2006) highlighted WOM as of great importance to marketing products and maximizing their sales. Other researchers also emphasized that WOM had the strongest influence on consumers' evaluation on high risk-perceived products and that it has the ability to shape consumers' opinions (Lau et al., 2001; Steenkamp et al., 2003). Based on prior literature, there are certain determinants in seeking WOM information which include: family (Cheung et al., 2012; Chu et al., 2011), friend (Cheung et al., 2009; Fergnsson, 2008), and product knowledge/experience (Doh, & Hwang, 2009; Cheung et al., 2012). Despite these studies, however, within the world of academia the issue of WOM still receives little attention in the literature.

Subjective norm

Subjective norm is the two construct that we extended into the proposed research model. It was derived from Theory of planned behavior. In addition, Subjective norm refers to "the person's

perception that most people who are important to him think he should or should not perform the behavior in question" (Taylor, & Todd, 1995). It is related to intention to do the behavior because people often behave based on their perception of what others think they should do. According to Venkatesh and Morris (2000), subjective norm or social influence is the degree of a person's perception that people who are important to him or her think he or she should or should not perform the behavior in question. Furthermore, subjective norm (SN) is described as a person's normative belief that his/her behavior is accepted, encouraged, and promoted by his/her social circle of influence. Hartwick and Barki (1994), and Taylor and Todd (1995), found that subjective norm is more important prior to, or in the early stages of technology adoption when adopters have limited direct experience from which to develop attitudes. Therefore, Hartwick and Barki (1994), and Taylor and Todd (1995), found that subjective norm is more important prior to, or in the early stages of technology adoption when adopters have limited direct experience from which to develop attitudes. In contrast, previous studies suggest that there is a positive relationship between subjective norm and purchase behavior (Chen, 2009). According to social psychology theories, an individual's behavior is not just driven by evaluative beliefs and attitudes, but also by subjective norm, (Burton, & Hubona, 2006).

HYPOTHESIS SETTING

Based on the discussion made in the preceding sub-section, two main hypotheses were formulated. The research hypotheses of this study are presented as follows:

H1. WOM through (family, friends, experts), has a direct positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior

H1 a. family has a direct positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior

H1 b. friends has a direct positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior

H1 c. experts has a direct positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior

H2. Subjective norm through words of mouth has a direct positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior

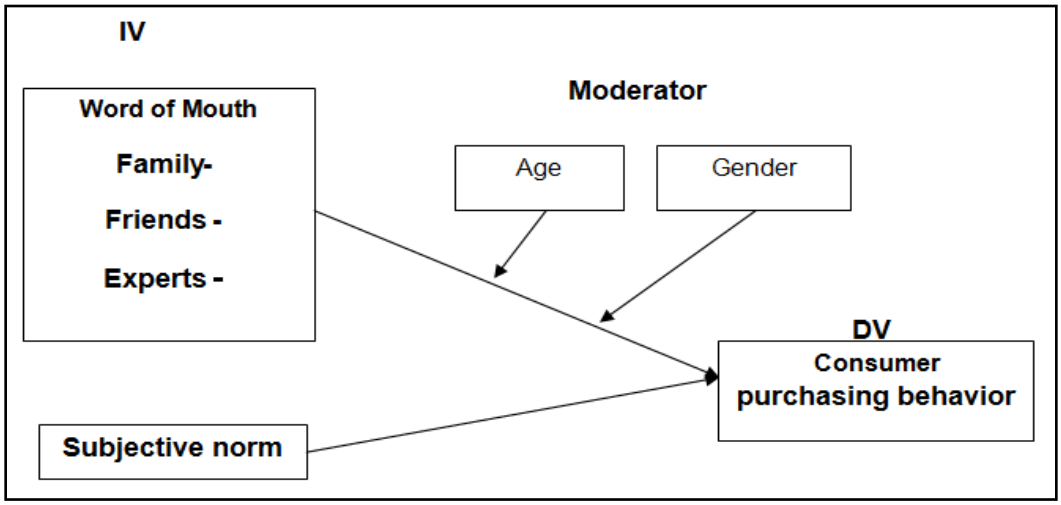
H3. Age has a moderating effect on the relation between WOM through (family, friends, and experts) and consumer purchasing behavior

H4. Gender has a moderating effect on the relation between WOM through (family, friends, and experts) and consumer purchasing behavior

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This framework addresses the multidimensionality of WOM behavior by distinguishing between different content and style dimensions. It also stresses the purposeful nature o f WOM communication and the joint influence of multiple factors in the WOM context. In particular, it suggests that WOM communicators (through family, friends, and experts) have a direct positive effect on consumers' purchasing behavior. The objective of this research is to find out that what kind of factors influence purchase behavior, and out of these factors, which one is the most important, a research model was formed (Figure 1). The left side of the model presents the independent variable WOM through (family, friends, and experience), subjective norm and the right side shows the dependent variables consumer purchasing behavior. In between this relation, we find the moderators age and gender. Finally, based on our literature review and research problems, we develop an integrative framework that is presented in figure: 1

Figure: 1 Conceptual framework



METHODOLOGY

The history and growth of word-of-mouth, measurement issues, word-of-mouth studies in the hospitality discipline, and new approaches have been studied. As a result, the framework o f this research has been constructed, and these paths lead to the proposal for a word-of-mouth model. Also, this part consists of descriptions about research design, target population, research instrument, and data analysis.

Research Design

According to Bryman and Bell (2011), after choosing either a quantitative or a qualitative research, a choice regarding research design has to be taken. A research design is a plan that connects the empirical findings to the research questions and to the conclusions of the research

(Yin, 2009). Furthermore, the objective of this study is to achieve a quantitative measure and evaluate the relation between word of mouth through family, friend, experts, subjective norm , age, gender, and consumers' purchase decision as well as product perceptions. Thus, survey research is chosen as a method for gathering information for the quantitative analysis. With the appropriate analyzed significance of each variable association will be provided. Furthermore, this research was conducted in order to investigate the variables that influence purchasing behavior in Jordan. Research methodology is more simply defined as qualitative or quantitative, but of most importance is that the methodology selected must complement the research questions and objectives being examined. The collection of primary data was accomplished using a survey method instrument to answer the study's research questions.

Population and Sample

The sample technique applied in this study was a probability sample which is selected randomly and everyone in the population has the possibility of being selected in Jordan. The survey was performed from December 10 to 30, 2013. A total of 500 samples of Jordanian consumers were collected. The survey participants were general consumers. A self-administered questionnaire was used to obtain primary data from respondents by asking them to recall their most recent word-of-mouth experience within the product purchase context. Self-administered survey effective and easy to obtain representative samples (Zikmund, 2003). This method is simple compare to other methods because it requires only one stage of sample choice. The survey is conducted in Jordan. However, after distributing 500 sets of questionnaires to the respondents, only 400 sets are returned.

Data Collection Procedure

There are two methods to collect data, when collecting data to approach the objective of a study. Data collected from any sources that has been published already in any form is known as secondary data published research. Secondary Data already exists; it was gathered for prior objective. It is not gathered for particular basis research; on the other hand, primary data is collected for a particular research (Gilbert & Churchill, 2009). Primary data can be gathered through questionnaire. In this study, Self-administered questionnaires were used for data collection from consumers in Jordan. After identifying all the respondents, this study involved to distribute the questionnaires. The researcher intercepted personally the respondents in the selected Jordanian consumer and it took one month to complete the collection process. The structure of the questionnaire is clear, easy to understand, and straightforward to ensure that the students could answer the questions with ease.

Research Instrument

A Self-administered questionnaire in English was translated into the Arabic language, and divide into five sections: consumer purchasing behavior, word of mouth (through family, friend, and experts), and subjective norm, included items on demographic details of respondents. Therefore, this study used a Likert scale to measure responses since this scale is widely used in both marketing and social science (Burns & Bush, 2002, Hair et al., 2007). However, many researchers argued that using a five-point scale is just as good as any other (Churchill & Lacobucci, 2004; Hair et al, 2006) for the reason that it reduces confusion to the respondents.

Data Screening & Analysis

Data analysis included steps such as coding the responses, screening the data and selecting the appropriate data analysis strategy (Churchill & Lacobucci, 2004; Sekaran, 2003). Data screening was conducted to identify data entry errors and evaluate how appropriately data meets the statistical assumptions which involve descriptive statistics of variables, missing data, factor analysis and treatment of outlier, response bias, normality, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and reliability. For the purpose of data analysis and hypotheses testing, several statistical tools and methods were employed from SPSS software version 15. In the third stage, analyzing of data through validating instruments (instrument validity, instrument reliability) was conducted. To describe the relation between the variables, correlation analysis was used to test the WOM (through family, friends, and experience), subjective norm on consumer purchasing behavior regression analysis was utilized.

FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS

Profile of Respondents

To be able to analyze the findings, the 500 responses to the eighteen questions were entered into the SPSS program. In order to gain a complete understanding of the data gathered, it was important first of all to present the descriptive findings. Based on this, we drew several conclusions which are presented hereafter. Furthermore, sample characteristics include four major items in this study: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) marital status, (4) income. The results were obtained after analyzing the demographic variables. Also, in the final sample, (60 %) of the respondents were female and (40%) were males. It is realized that the majority of sample recoded 60% were female, and the majority of the respondent's age varied between 20 - 25 years old (23.1 %). This may be a common criterion observed in many studies performed by scholars such as Kim (2004), and Hodza et al. (2012). Of marital status, 60.4% of the respondents were married, whilst, unmarried people showed 30.7% and divorced people

recorded only 6.5 %. However, widowed reported 2.4%. However, the income level for respondents per month showed 65.3% for those who earned less than 1000 JD per month.

Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis EFA is employed to reduce the measurement of instrument error but SPSS techniques are deployed to perform the EFA. To be clear, SPSS employs a set of measures to achieve the model fit. Also, factor analysis was employed in order to identify underlying factors that explain correlations within a set of independent variables. This study used exploratory factor analyses were conducted separately for each variable, using principal component factoring and the Oblimin rotation method. In interpreting the factors, we used the guideline provided by Hair et al (2006) where a loading of 0.50 or greater on one factor are considered. The appropriateness of exploratory factor analysis was determined by examining the correlation matrix of the variables. The Kaiser- Meyer- Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was over .760 in all investigations. The Bartlett test of sphericity (over 959.468 in all variable) showed that the correlation matrix has significant correlations (p = 0.000 for all variables), which indicated very good overall sampling adequacy (Hair et al 1998).

Reliability & Internal Consistency

For the reliability test, Cronbach's Alphas were calculated for each construct. All
Alphas were over .80 (Table 1) representative high internal consistency. All the variables show a high degree of reliability.

Table: 1. Reliability Analysis of Factor of Consumer Purchasing behavior

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Consumer purchasing behavior	4	.83
Family through Word of mouth	4	.85
Friends through word of mouth	4	.86
experts through word of mouth	4	.80
Subjective norms	4	.84

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics indicating the means and the standard deviations for each variable used in the models as well as the initials used for the variables throughout this study. Furthermore, descriptive analysis refers to the transformation of raw data into a form that would provide information to describe a set of factors in a situation that will make them easy to understand and interpret (Kassim, 2001; Sekaran, 2000). Also, this analysis gives a clear meaning of data through frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation, which are useful

to identify differences among groups, for all the variables of interest. Finally, Responses to all items of the study variables were measured on a 5-point likert scale (on a scale of 1 to 5).

Table: 2. Means and standard deviations

Component	Mean	Std. Deviation
Consumer Purchasing behavior	4.75	1.3661
family	3.74	1.7489
friends	4.77	1.3923
experts	4.53	1.4282
Subjective norm	3.81	1.7195
age	4.16	0.5712
gender	3.87	1.7195

Based on Table 1 above, 500 valid data were analyzed. Mean value for each variable was calculated. According to Hair et al.(2006), the mean scores of less than 2.5 are considered low; mean scores of 2.5 to 3.5 are considered moderate, and mean scores more than 3.5 are considered high. As mentioned previously, friends are represented by four items. As shown in Table 1, the mean score of this variable is considered very high (4.77), whereas the other variables had a high mean score (3.5 and above). For instance, the mean score of consumer Purchasing behavior is 4.75, family 3.74, experience, 4.53, subjective norm 3.81, Trust 3.77, age, 4.16 and gender 3.87. Finally, this result confirms respondents' viewpoint to Purchase behavior in the future.

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis is techniques that can be used to explore relationships between a continuous dependent variable and any number of independent variables (Pallant 2010). Before we run the regression, we check for multicollinearity, which refers to the relationships among the independent variables. Multicollinearity exists when the independent variables have a correlation rating of r=0.9 or above, and represents a problem when trying to draw conclusions about the relative contribution of each predictor variable.

Table: 3. Results of Multiple Regressions between WOM (through family, friends, and experience), subjective and purchasing behavior

Model	Dependent variable: purchasing behavior		
Independent variable	B	Beta	Sig
family	.416	.343	.000
friends	.230	.262	.000
experts	.184	.373	.000
Subjective norm	.309	.401	.000
F statistics=826.464	R Square= .861	Adjusted R Square= .860	

Hypothesis Testing

The theories of the scientific articles applied in this study, are mostly empirically validated and generally approved, except for the literature regarding word of mouth and its effect, which is an emerging theory. More specifically, the study about WOM such as family, friends, experience, and its effect is a proposal theory, and is about to be evaluated in this research. The literature that was employed was suitable for this study, because it gave a general overview around the topic, showing how the different concepts are connected. Furthermore, we noticed limited studies regarding how word of mouth such affects consumers' purchasing behavior. In addition to this, we think that the concepts of purchase decision are of great importance in consumer behavior, and that it would be interesting to analyze, because these are two significant steps that can lead to a future purchase. Based on the literature, the relation between word of mouth (through family, friends, and experience) and consumer purchasing behavior could also be beneficial knowledge for companies and managers. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that WOM (through family, friends, and experts) could significantly influence consumer purchasing behavior because some previous studies found significant results in this regard. Hence based on the arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 1: WOM (through family, friends, and experts) has a direct positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior.

The result in Table 3 shows a significant positive effect of WOM (through family, friends, and experts) on consumers' purchasing behavior. The opinions of friends, family, and experts have a strong influence on consumers' purchase behavior (Hodza et al., 2012). More specifically, we also found it important to contribute to the limited research in this specific area and investigate if WOM (through family, friends, and experts) has an impact on consumers in a way that affects their purchase decision.

Hypothesis 2: Subjective norm has a direct positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior.

The result in Table 3 shows a significant positive effect of Subjective norms on consumers' purchasing behavior.

Moderators

Moderation is a theory that helps achieve a better understanding of a causal relationship (Wu & Zumbo, 2008). Moderators are a researchers' hypotheses to evaluate whether a cause will lead to an effect and works like a third variable that will modify that effect. Thus, the effect of a moderator is an interaction in the relation between a dependent variable and an independent one (Frazier, et al., 2004). As mentioned, there has been minor research evaluating if age and gender have a moderating effect on the relation between WOM (through family, friends, and

experience) and their purchasing behavior. Therefore, we saw the need to further investigate this affection. We assume that age and gender do have an effect on the relation and therefore formulate two sub-hypotheses as presented below.

Hypothesis 3: Age has a moderating effect on the relation between WOM (through family, friends, and experts) and consumer purchasing behavior.

Based on the analyses below and as presented in the Table 4 below, we conclude that age does have a moderating effect on the relation between WOM through (family, friends, and experts), and purchasing behavior. The hypothesis 3 is supported.

Table 4. Summary of Beta Value on The Relationship of Age between WOM and purchasing behavior

	Criterion variable: Destination brand loyalty		
Variable	**Without**	**With**	**Result**
WOM	.416**	.342**	moderating

Note: **p < .01

Hypothesis 4: Gender has a moderating effect on the relation between WOM (through family, friends, and experience) and consumer purchasing behavior.

Table 5 below shows that Gender moderating between WOM through (family, friends, and experience), and purchasing behavior. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is supported.

Table 5. Summary of Beta Value on The Relationship of Gender between WOM and purchasing behavior

	Criterion variable: Destination brand loyalty		
Variable	**Without**	**With**	**Result**
WOM	.302**	.226**	moderating

Note: **p < .01

Finally, as mentioned above, Based on the theoretical model (Figure 1), multiple regressions was performed using consumer purchasing behavior as the dependent variable and WOM (through family, friends, and experts), and subjective norm as the independent variables. The result for each hypothesis is described above. Hypotheses one, which states that WOM (through family, friends, and experience), has positive influence on purchasing behavior, is accepted. As shown in table 3, the significant value is less than 0.05, therefore, there is a significant relationship between WOM and purchasing behavior. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by (Jang, 2004; Brown et al., 2005). Hypotheses two, which states that

subjective norm has positive influence on purchasing behavior, is accepted. As shown in table 3, the significant value is less than 0.05, hence, there is a statistically a significant relationship between subjective norm and purchasing behavior. This result is consistent with studies (Cheng et al., 2006, Doble, 2003). Hypotheses three, which states that Age has positive influence on purchasing behavior to purchase decision, is accepted. As shown in table 4, the significant value is less than 0.05, hence, there is a statistically a positive relationship between Age and purchasing behavior to purchase decision. This result is consistent with studies (Kaikati, 2010; Brown et al., 2005). Finally, the findings of Hypotheses 4, the data indicate that gender is significantly related to purchasing behavior. This result is consistent with studies (Chen et al., 2008; Chevalier et al.,2006; Godes et al., 2009). Therefore, the results support Hypothesis 4.

Correlation Analysis

Table 6 explains the correlation coefficients of the constructs that were used in this study; we can conclude that the correlation coefficient for all latent variables were under the threshold of 0.80 (Hair et al., 2006). For example, it is clear that the both the consumer purchasing behavior and family are considered as the lowest correlation coefficient of 0.10. (P= 0.000 and a significance level of 0.01), whereas the higher correlation coefficient are between subjective norm and experience, which showed a correlation coefficient of 0.77 (P= 0.000 with a significance level of 0.01).

Table 6. Correlations for Independent Variables and Dependent Variables

	CPB	F	FR	EP	SN
CPB	1				
F	.51**	1			
FR	.53**	.53**	1		
EP	.50**	.59**	.58**	1	
SN	.41**	.41**	.48**	.77**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note. CPB: consumer purchasing behavior, F: family, FR: friends, EP: experts, SN: subjective norm.

CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

The ultimate objective of this research was to analyze how consumer purchasing behavior are affected by WOM (through family, friend, experts), and subjective norm. After developing a literature review about the significance and the reasons behind interacting in WOM (through family, friend, experts), the effect of this interaction was reviewed, and specifically on

purchasing behavior. We also found the need to examine if age and gender had a moderating effect on the relation between WOM (through family, friend, and experts) and consumer purchasing behavior. Hypothesis 1 stated that WOM (through family, friend, and experts) has a direct positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior, and hypothesis 2 stated that subjective norm through word of mouth has a direct positive effect on consumer purchasing behavior. Hypothesis 3 stated that age has a moderating effect on the relation between WOM (through family, friend, and experts) and consumer purchasing behavior and hypothesis 4 stated that gender has a moderating effect on the relation between WOM (through family, friend, and experts) and consumer purchasing behavior. It was explored that age and gender has a moderating effect on the relation between WOM (through family, friend, and experts) and consumer purchasing behavior. Hence, H1, H2, H3, H4 and are supported.

Finally, these findings provide interesting insights into purchase behavior for Jordan consumers that have implications for both domestic companies and global companies seeking geographical expansion of their commerce activities.

The researcher proposes that future researchers should investigate in the reasons that drive consumers to engage in words of mouth through social networking sites and its effect on the final purchasing decision.

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