ROLE OF TIE STRENGTH IN WORD-OF-MOUTH RECEPTIVENESS AND MOVIE PROMOTION: EVIDENCE FROM INDIAN MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY

ANOOP TOM THOMAS
Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce,
St. Dominic's College, Kanjirapally, Kottayam, Kerala,
anooptomthomas@sdck.in

ANTONY JOSEPH K
Associate Professor, Department of Commerce,
St. Berchmans College, Changanassery, Kottayam, Kerala,
ajksbc@gmail.com

Abstract

Word-of-mouth plays a crucial role in shaping consumer buying behavior. Performance of motion picture industry is highly susceptible to the occurrence of word-of-mouth. One of the main factors that decide the receptiveness of word-of-mouth is the perceived social relationship between the source and the recipient. This study investigates the role of tie strength in the   word-of-mouth receptiveness and movie promotion among the Indian movie-goers. 868   movie-goers were selected using multi-stage random sampling technique from the state of Kerala, India. Findings reveal that young movie-goers are more receptive to word-of mouth than older movie-goers. For frequent movie-goers, monthly income is found to be insignificant with their word-of-mouth receptiveness. Frequent movie-goers exhibited a higher word-of-mouth receptiveness than non frequent movie-goers. Tie strength significantly influence the movie-goer's word-of-mouth receptiveness and it act as a moderating variable between word-of-mouth receptiveness and movie-going intention. When compared to weak-tie, strong-tie exerts a greater influence on word-of-mouth receptiveness.
Keywords: Word-of-mouth, word-of-mouth-receptiveness, motion picture industry, tie strength, strong tie, weak tie

1. Introduction

Indian Motion Picture Industry (MPI) is the biggest in the world in terms of number of films it produces annually and second in terms of annual theatrical admissions just behind China (Jain et al., 2016; Shankar & Ram, 2021). This industry comprises of several sub-set on the basis of numerous linguistic groups in India. According to a report published by Deloitte in 2016, the Indian box office revenue of 138 billion is expected to mark an 11 percent CAGR, crossing 238 billion by 2020 (Jain et al., 2016).The Malayalam MPI commonly known as '*mollywood*' occupies fourth position in the country in terms of revenue generation (Statista Research Department, 2021). The key growth drivers consist of increasing number of multiplexes in rural and semi urban cities, growing number of middle class with more disposable income, digitization and

use of latest technologies in movie production and exhibition (Shankar & Ram, 2021). Moreover, the industry is earmarked as a promising sector in the 'Make in India Campaign' (Jain et al., 2016). Thus, Indian MPI is an evergreen and ever-growing industry.

Movie selection by movie-goers to a great extent depends on words of others (Álvarez-Monzoncillo et al., 2018; Mishra et al., 2016). According to Rosen (2000), 53 percent of the movie-goers decide whether to watch a particular movie based on their conversation with others. According to Godes and Mayzlin (2004), around 50 percent of the youth solely depends on word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations while finalizing their movie-watching choices. WOM thus plays a crucial role in deciding a movie's success by determining its staying power in theatre (Duan et al., 2008).Word-of-mouth receptiveness (WOMR) is the willingness of the recipient to rely on WOM references in matters relating to decision making (Lee & Workman, 2021; Pillay 2021). In the context of MPI, WOMR is the favoritism or preference shown by the movie-goers for others opinion over the business initiated sources of communication while arriving at a purchase decision (Kim et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2019). One of the most important factors that decide the WOMR is the tie strength (TS) (Hu et al., 2019; Mladenovićet al., 2021; Sun et al., 2019). According to Kang et al., (2021), TS or social relationship is the measure of closeness of association between the social members. It is thus the degree of intimacy between the source of WOM and the recipient. The rationale for excluding other source characteristics such as trustworthiness, credibility, homophily… etc in the WOMR, is that TS encloses these characteristics in the Indian social context (Kapoor et al., 2003). Also, 'source expertise' in the acceptance of WOM is ignored as movie being an artistic product, purely consumed for entertainment purpose, doesn't calls for much expertise to evaluate Liu (2006).

While numerous studies relating to TS and WOM are conducted, study relating to TS and WOMR in movie promotion is vacant in Indian literature. Moreover, easy affordability and accessibility makes MPs, the most sort-out entertainment activity for the average Indians and their movie selection to a great extent depends on WOM. Hence this study titled '**Role of TS in WOMR and movie promotion: Evidence from Indian MPI** is timely and relevant. The purpose of this study is to examine a) WOMR among Indian movie-goers' based on their demographic variables and movie-going frequency b) Role of tie strength in the WOMR and their effect on movie-goers intension to watch a new release.

This study is unique in many aspects. First, most of the earlier studies were conducted in developed countries (Álvarez-Monzoncillo et al., 2018; Duan et al., 2008; Liu, 2006) and not in the case of emerging countries like India even though are few exceptions (Feng et al., 2020; Ru et al.,2018). Second, majority of the previous studies conducted in this domain were based on the WOM expressed by movie-goers in social media or movie website, i.e., e-WOM (risk on account of fake or biased WOM were totally

ignored) and not based on the actual response of the movie-goers to a well structured questionnaire (*Table-1*). Third, all the previous studies in the domain of WOM and MPI were revolving around external factors such as volume or valance of WOM and failed to consider human factor in WOMR (Ding et al., 2017; Duan et al., 2008; Feng et al., 2020; Karniouchina, 2011; Liu,2006; Ru et al., 2018). Understanding the relevance of TS and the influence of demographic variables on the movie-goers WOMR, will help the Indian movie promoters to formulate effective marketing strategies.

Remaining part of the paper include a thorough review of the existing literature explaining the importance of WOM in MPI and the role of TS in WOMR and movie promotion. It is followed by a detailed description of the research methodology followed in the study. The results of the study along with managerial implications are reported next. The study concludes by stating the limitations and future prospects of the study.

Table 1

Leading Studies on WOM and Movie Sales

Study	Data source	Study	Data source
Liu(2006)	Yahoo! movies	Hennig-Thurau (2015)	Twitter
Dellarocas et al.(2007)	Yahoo! movies	Moore (2015)	Twitter
Duan et al.(2008)	Yahoo! movies	Baek et al. 2017	Twitter, Yahoo! Movies, YouTube, and blogs
Karniouchia (2010)	Yahoo! movies & IMDb	Ding et al.(2017)	IMDb, Facebook
Moon et al.(2010)	Yahoo! movies & Rotten Tomatoes	Ma et al.(2019)	movie.naver.com
Rui et al (2011)	Twitter	Fen etal.(2020)	Google, Twitter and Facebook
Qin (2011)	Blog- Plus	Liu et al.(2020)	IMDb
Kim et al.(2013)	IMDb	Chen et al.(2021)	Maoyan Entertainment
This Study	Survey method		

Source: Authors

2. Review of Literature and Hypotheses Formulation

2.1 Movie-goers and Word-of-mouth Receptivity in Motion picture industry

Movies propelled by consumer to consumer conversation (C2C) exhibits a better performance in Box office (Duan et al., 2008). Even numerous so called 'sleeper films'

turned into blockbuster through the popularity these films could acquire through WOM (Karniouchina, 2011).Unlike any other industry, the MPI is most exposed to the influence of WOM. This is because the MPI deals with an experience product and the promotion of experience product greatly depends on words of others (Álvarez-Monzoncillo et al., 2018; Liu, 2006). Second, each release being a new product the movie details should be made available to movie-lovers to make a favorable purchase decision. Movie-goers prefer other's opinion over industry promoted information sources as WOM are perceived to be more reliable(Kim et al., 2013). Third, life of MPs in theatre is very short, mostly 2-12 months(Duan et al., 2008; Ma et al., 2019). Hence, movie particulars should be made available to movie-goers as early as possible. The reach and spread of WOM is unparalleled over paid channels of movie-promotion. Fourth, MPI is a risky industry due to the huge production cost of movies, of which 50 percent is attributed to their promotion activities (Álvarez-Monzoncillo et al., 2018; Vogel, 2001). However, word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) can reduce promotion expenditure considerably as they are non cost or low cost source of promotion. Hence, it can be concluded that performance of MPI to a great extent is vulnerable to the occurrence of WOM. However, it should be noted that WOM is not a substitute for paid information source but it is as a powerful and cost-effective compliment capable ofenhancing the effectiveness of paid information sources (Liu, 2006).

There are also evidences in the literature to claim that WOM occurs among movie-lovers. First, movie is an artistic product consumed purely for entertainment purpose. Being a cultural product, movies attract enormous public attention and interest and there by calls for interpersonal communication (Yeap et al., 2014). Second, movie is an intangible and experiential product and hence the only alternative available to assess the quality of movie is to engage in WOM with others (Liu, 2006). Third, people get greater social acceptance when they talk about a popular subject like cinema (Brown&Reingen, 1987). Fourth, movie being an interested topic of conversation,the matter discussed will last longer in the minds (carry over) of the movie-lovers. So there is every possibility that they will further engage in WOM with others (Brown and Reingen, 1987). Lastly, when movies are released simultaneous or over a short span of time, movie-goers engage in WOM to finalize the movie to be watched (Yeap et al., 2014). From the above discussions it can be concluded that movie-lovers prefer WOM as the most favored source of information. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated

Ha$_1$: Movie-goers don't differ significantly with regard to their WOM receptiveness

2.2Word-of-Mouth Receptiveness and Tie Strength

According to the information adoption theory, receptiveness of WOM refers to recipient's readiness to internalize the WOM received and to use it subsequently for decision making (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Even though there are numerous source

characteristics that decide the receptiveness of WOM, it is the interpersonal closeness that plays the most significant and salient role (Zhang et al., 2021).As WOM occurs in social circles, either online or offline, the social relationship can be categorized based on the immediacy and the strength of relationships between the source and the recipient (Mladenovićet al., 2021).The construct of 'tie strength' was used by the previous researchers to measure the interpersonal closeness in WOM communications (Sun et al., 2019). According to the Social network theory proposed by Granovetter(1983), based on the proximity of relationship, ties can be classified into strong and weak. According to Duhan et al., (1997) and Wang et al., (2018), if the source is known and the relationship with the source is close, it is considered to be strong tie (e.g., family, close friends) and else it is considered to be weak tie (e.g., acquaintance, stranger) .

Role of social tie in WOMR is well established in the literature (Voyer&Ranaweera, 2015; Zhang et al., 2014). However, the research findings reveal that WOM from strong tie is more receptive than weak tie (Rogers, 1983).This finding is in accordance with the social support theory (Wills & Ainette, 2012). Individuals tend to interact and share more information with strong tie than weak tie (Berger, 2014).Both strong tie and weak tie are important, as strong tie increases the chance of acceptance of WOM by the recipient, the weak tie leads to the spread of WOM between communities. With the emergence of e-WOM, the consumers can easilyaccess communications from weak tie (Wang, 2018).From the above discussion, it is clear that tie strength influence WOMR and that too strong tie exert a greater influence. Followinghypotheses are hence formulated

Ha_2: Tie strength has a significant influence on the WOMR of the movie-goer

Ha_3: Strong tie exerts a greater influence on the WOMR of the movie-goer than weak tie

2.3 Tie Strength, WOM Receptiveness and Movie-going intention
Purchase intention (in this case movie-going intention), refers to the mental state of the potential consumer regarding the extent of his conscious plan to purchase a particular product or to avail a particular service (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).It is the strong desire for a particular product or to avail a particular service. According to Hwang et al., (2011), the success or failure any business promotion strategy, either formal or informal, is decided by the extent to which such promotion strategies leads to purchase intention. This is because it is the intention that leads to final action (Fishbein, 1963). Thus, future action of an individual is the outcome of his intention to perform a particular task.
 In MPI, TS play a twin role in the formation of a favorable purchase decision. First, motion picture being a new product, awareness about the whereabouts of the new release is a prerequisite for favorable purchase decision (Liu, 2006). But movie-goers prefer WOM over business initiated promotion activities. WOM platform provides information to consumers not only from known source (strong tie) but also from anonymous/distant source (weak tie) having similar consumption behavior (Cheung et.

al., 2008). Interactivity and feedback option of WOM further enhances its receptiveness by movie-goers. However, received information does not lead to purchase intention in all the cases. It leads to purchase intention, when the received information is able to create a favorable attitude towards the product. As WOM mostly occurs in social circles and there is a greater chance of its receptiveness, the possibility of WOM leading to attitude change and purchase intention is much more than other forms of business communications. This is because information received from reliable and known source exerts more influence in forming favorable attitude by consumers (Izquierdo-Sanchez, 2019; Kautsar et al., 2012). Thus, in MPI, TS not only leads to WOMR but also moderate the effect of WOMR on Movie-going intention. Hence following hypothesis is formulated

Ha$_4$: Tie strength exerts a moderating effect between WOMR and movie-going intention

Figure 1

Role of Tie Strength in Word-of-Mouth Receptiveness and Movie Promotion
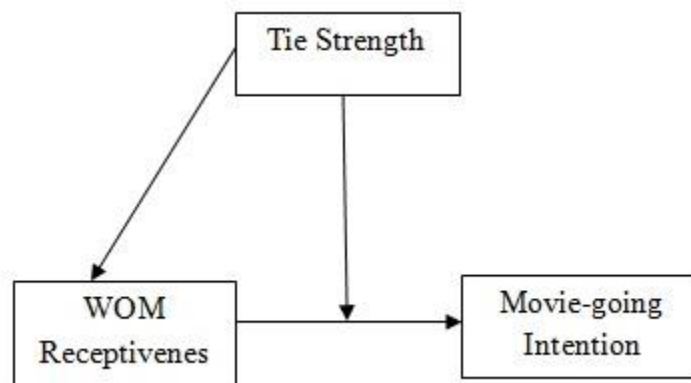
Source: The authors

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Methodology

Since a pre-existing scale was absent to measure WOMR in MPI, it was developed following the study conducted by Churchill (1979).The scale for measuring the TS and purchase intention was adopted (Wang et al., 2018) as it was found most suitable for MPI. The sample size was determined using the method suggested by Israel (1992).

There are 563 theatre screens in Kerala as per the 2019 report of Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity, Government of India. District wise list of theatre screens were obtained from the report published by Bureau of Outreach and Communication, Government of India. From the district wise list 3 theatres were

selected for each district at random. From the first two theatres 21 respondents and from the third theatre 20 respondents were selected using the simple random sampling technique. The theatre occupancy data including the seat numbers of the occupied seats were obtained from the theatre manager. From the occupied seats, the needed respondents were selected using simple random sampling. The selected respondents were informed during the interval time and were asked to report at the entrance for claiming cash back of Rs100.For claiming the cash back offer the respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire. Enumerator read out each question and its options and asked the respondents to mark his or her choice The 868valid responses collected from 42 theatres constituted the sample. Weekend days and holidays were the days selected for the data collection as maximum theatre admissions was reported during these days.

3.2 Results

Table 1
Reliability Statistics of the variables used in the study

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
WOMR	8	.811
TS	10	.833
Strong Tie	5	.789
Weak Tie	5	.829
Movie-going intention	4	.788

All the scales used in the study showed high reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Normality of the data was ensured through one sample K-S test.

3.2.1 Movie-goers and WOMR

According to Álvarez-Monzoncillo et al. (2018), WOM in MPI is considered to be a promotion technique with varied effect based on the demography of the recipient. Hence, in this study, to assess the difference between movie-goers in their WOMR, the factors taken into consideration are gender, age, monthly income and movie-going frequency of movie-goers. An independent sample *t* test is performed to know whether there is gender wise difference between movie-goers in matters relating to WOMR

Table 2

Mean comparison of Gender of movie-goers and WOMR

Variable	Male		Female		t(866)	p	Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
WOMReceptiveness	3.56	.70	3.45	.68	2.23	.026	0.15

Table 2 reveal significant mean difference on WOMR by male and female movie-goers with t (866) = 2.55, p<.05. More over male movie-goers showed higher scores on WOMR (M =3.56, SD = .70) compared to female movie-goers (M =3.45, SD = .68). The value of Cohen's d is 0.15 (< 0.2) indicating small effect size i.e., the difference is negligible even though it is statistically significant.

One way ANOVA is carried out to know whether there exist any significant difference between movie-goers of different age group and WOMR

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviation and One-Way Analysis of Variance in WOMR across Age Groups

Variable	Up to 25		26-40		41-45		Above 55		$F(3,864)$	η^2	Post-Hoc
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Age-Class	3.81	.63	3.41	.46	2.73	.63	2.35	.57	132.78***	.32	1>2>3>4

****p<001

Table 3 shows mean standard deviation and F-value for WOMR across age class. Findings indicate that there exist significant mean differences across age class on WOMR with F (3,864) = 132.78, p<.001. From the findings it can be inferred that movie-goers coming in the age class of up to 25 and 26-40 showed higher level of WOMR when compared to higher age group. This finding matches with the observation of McKenzie (2012). Also WOMR decreases with increase in age with highest WOMR by movie-goers having age up to 25 years. The value of η2=.32 (<.50) which reveal small effect size. The Post-Hoc comparison discloses a significant difference between group mean of each age group with other age groups of movie-goers with regard to WOMR.

Two way ANOVA is carried out to know whether there is any significant difference between movie-goers on the basis of monthly income, movie-going frequency and WOMR.

Table 4

Mean, Standard Deviation and Two-Way ANOVA Statistics for WOMR

Variable	Up to 25000		25001-50000		50001-100000		100001-200000		Above 200000		ANOVA			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	Effect	*F-ratio*	*df*	η^2
Frequency														
OIAW	3.93	.65	3.63	.85	3.51	.89	4.03	.53	3.65	.41				
											IN	5.57***	4,848	.026
											F	30.30***	3,848	.097
ORTIM	3.71	.62	3.72	.52	3.54	.46	3.71	.75	3.30	.63	IN*F	1.96*	12,848	.027
AFTIAY	3.50	.59	3.09	.64	3.07	.66	3.13	.60	3.06	.64				
LOIAY	3.28	.66	2.84	.90	3.20	.39	2.58	1.01	3.44	.62				

Note *N* =868, *ANOVA*= Analysis of Varience, IN = Income, F= movie-going frequency
* *p*<.05, ***p*<.001

OIAW- Once in a week, ORTIM-Once or twice in a month, AFTIAY- A few times in a year, LOIAY-Less than once in a year

Table 4 shows mean, standard deviation and *F* ratio for WOMR result exhibit a significant mean difference in WOMR on monthly income with $F(4,848)= 5.57$, *MSE* = .399, $p =.000$, $\eta^2=.026$, movie-going frequency with $F(3,848)= 30.30$, *MSE* = .399, $p =.000$, $\eta^2=.097$ and monthly income x movie-going frequency with $F(12,848)= 1.96$, *MSE* = .399, $p =.025$, $\eta^2=.027$, having small effect size(<.50). Further the Post-Hoc test relating to movie-going frequency revealed that in the case of frequent movie-goers who watch movies once in a week or once or twice in month there is no significant difference regarding movie-going frequency and WOMR. Same is the case with infrequent movie-goers who watch movies a few times in a year or less than once in a year. All other combination of movie-going frequency exhibited significant difference. The frequent movie-goers exhibited higher WOMR when compared to infrequent movie-goers. This finding contradicted with the findings by Chakravarty et al. (2010)

 Post-Hoc test relating to monthly income revealed that the low income movie-goers (monthly income up to Rs. 25000) differ significantly with all other income groups in the case of WOMR. In the case of middle income and high income movie-goers (monthly income above Rs. 25000), they don't differ significantly in between with regard to

WOMR. Figure 2 illustrates the combined effect of monthly and movie-going frequency and WOMR.

Figure2
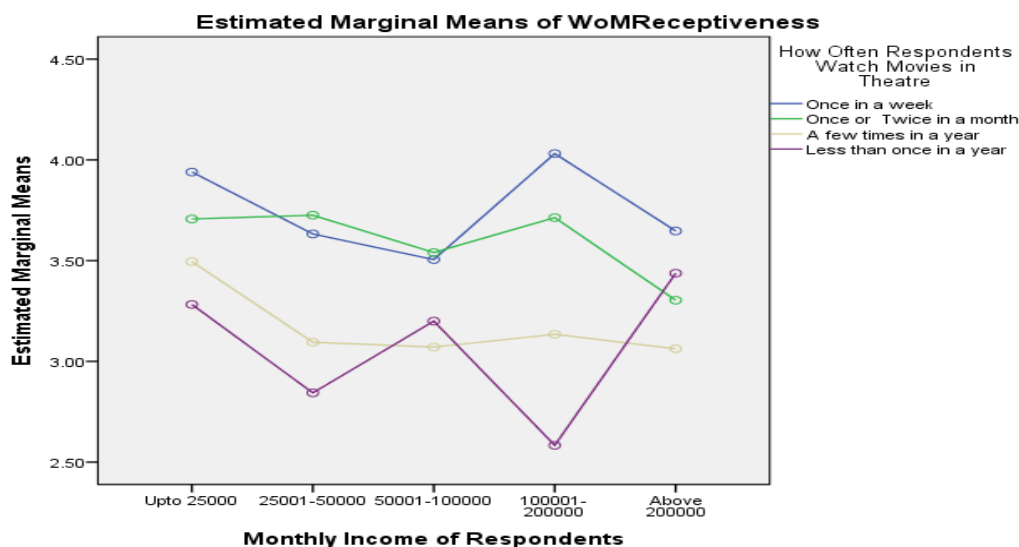
3.2.2 Tie Strength and WOM Receptiveness

According to Ministerio de Cultura de España. (2015), the opinion of family and friends greatly influence the adoption of WOM in MPI and it is the major reason for selecting a movie in Spain. So in this study, it was decided to examine the role TS in WOMR. Moreover which tie is more influential in the Indian MPI needs to be identified so as to examine whether the findings of Rogers (1983) and Wills & Ainette (2012) is acceptable in the Indian context.

Table 5

Regression coefficient of WOMR and Tie Strength

Variable	B	β	S.E
Constant	1.273***		.073
Tie Strength	.732***	.730	.023
R^2	.533		

Note N= 868
***p<.001

A simple regression is performed to examine the general effect of tie strength on WOMR. The R^2 value of .533 indicate that the predictor variable i.e., tie strength explain 53.3% variance in the outcome variable with $F (1, 866) = 986.64, p < .001$. The findings reveal that tie strength positively predict WOMA ($\beta =.730, p < .001$).

Table 6

Regression coefficients of Strong Tie and Weak Tie on WOMR

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95%CI
Constant	.89	.08	11.43	.000	[.73,1.05]
Strong Tie	.65	.03	20.98	.000	[.59,.71]
Weak Tie	.14	.026	5.12	.000	[.08,.19]

Note CI Confidence Interval

So as to undermine the effect of strong tie and weak tie on movie-goers WOMR, a multiple regression test is carried out. Multicollinearity is examined using the collinearity statistics tolerance and VIF. In a regression model so as to overcome the issues relating to multicollinearity, the tolerance value should be greater than 0.2 and the variance inflation factor (VIF) should be less than 5. Here, the observed tolerance value and VIF are 0.518 and 1.930 respectively in both the cases, and hence muticollinearity is not observed. So as to ensure the independence of observation, the Durbin-Watson value observed should be in between 1.5 and 2.5. Here, the value observed is 1.857 ensuring independence of observations. Other requirements such as absence of outliers, linearity and homoscedacity are also verified. Table 6 shows the result of the regression model.

Table 6 shows the influence of strong tie and weak tie on WOMR of movie-goers. The R^2 value of .58 indicate that the predictors explained 58% variance in outcome variable with $F (2,865) = 593.76, p <.001$. The findings also indicated that both the strong tie ($\beta =.64, p<.001$) and weak tie ($\beta =.14, p<.001$) positively predicted WOMR. Among the ties, strong tie observed higher beta coefficient that weak tie, indicating that WOM from strong tie is more receptive than communication from weak tie. Indeed communication from strong tie is found to be four times more receptive than communication from weak tie as indicated by their Beta coefficient. The findings match with the findings of Rogers (1983) and Wills & Ainette (2012)

3.2.3 WOMR and Movie Watching Intention

Table 7

Moderation of Tie Strength between WOMR and Movie-going Intention

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	β	$S.E$	B	β	$S.E$
Constant	3.53***		.02	3.50***		.02
WOMR	.26***	.34***	.03	.26***	.34***	.03
Tie Strength	.28***	.37***	.03	.29***	.38***	.03
WOMR*TS				.04***	.07***	.12
R^2		.43				.44
ΔR^2						.01

Note N=868
***p<.001

Table 7 shows the moderation of TS between WOMR and Movie going intension. In Model 1 the R^2 value of .43 indicate that the predictor explained 43% variance in the outcome with F (2,865) = 326.05, p<.001. The findings disclose that WOMR (β =.34, p<.001) and TS positively predicted movie-going intention (β =.37, p<.001). In Model 2 the R^2 value of .44 indicate that the predictor explained 44% variance in the outcome with F (3,864) = 221.74, p<.001. The findings disclose that WOMR (β =.34, p<.001), TS (β =.38, p<.001) and WOMR x TS positively predicted movie-going intention (β =.07, p<.001). The ΔR^2 value of .01 indicate that 1% change in variance of Model-1 and Model-2 with ΔF (1, 864) = 7.90, p<.001. From the findings it can be concluded that in MPI, TS moderated the relationship between WOMR and movie-going intention. The moderation effect is also represented through a Mod-graph (Figure 3)

Figure 3

Mod-Graph with Moderating Effect of Tie Strength between Word-of-Mouth Receptiveness and Movie-going Intention
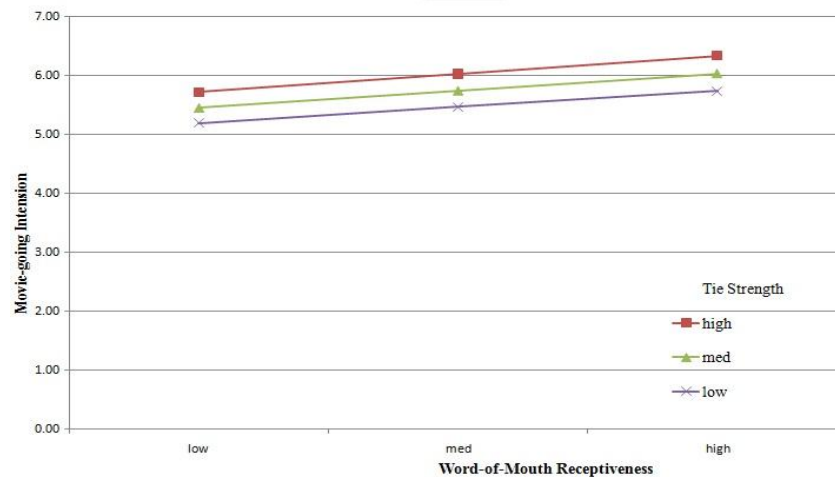
4. Discussions and Managerial Implications

This study is conducted to find out the role of TS and WOMR in the movie-going intention of movie-goers in Kerala. Taking into account the social scenario of the state, a moderation effect of TS in the WOMR and the movie-going intention of '*malayalee'* movie-goer is predicted in addition to the empirical verification of the established theory of 'WOMR lead to movie-going intention' in the Kerala context. In the first part of the study the researcher tried to identify whether there is any difference between the movie-goers' in WOMR taking into account their gender, age, monthly income and movie-going frequency. Even though the male movie-goers are found to be more receptive to WOM than female-movie-goers, the value of Cohen's *d* indicated a small effect size.

With regard to the age factor young movie-goers in the age group of 'up to 25 years' observed greatest receptiveness to WOM. Also an inverse relationship between age and WOMR is recorded. Even though difference in WOMR between different age group is established, the η2 value disclosed as small effect size. The cultural and digital divide is the reason for the inverse relationship between age and WOMR. By opening up online movie-discussion forums this divide can be reduced to a certain extent by facilitating peer discussions.

Interest and purchasing power are the factors that decide the demand for a non basic commodity. Interest for movies can be understood by their movie-going frequency and the purchasing power is represented by their monthly income. Effect of monthly income and movie-going frequency of the movie-goers WOMR is examined. As against the theory, only movie-going frequency is found to influence the WOMR of the movie-goers with more frequent movie goers more receptive to WOMR and vice versa. In the case of monthly income and WOMR, the study failed to establish the predicted theory. This is

because, watching movie in theater is affordable leisure activity for all the classes of people as indicated by Liu (2006).

In the second part, role of TS in WOMR and movie-going intention is examined. A 58 percent variance in WOMR is predicated by TS. A further examination revealed that WOM from strong tie is four times more receptive than WOM from weak tie. The findings match with the findings of Rogers (1983) and Wills & Ainette (2012). Moreover, TS also exhibited a moderating role in the process of WOMR leading to movie-going intension.

The above findings reveal that WOM plays a vital role in the promotion of theatrical motion picture in Kerala, India. WOMM is capable enough to leverage the promotion efforts taken by the movie promoters both in terms of it reach and cost effectiveness. To what extent the movie houses have realized this transition and to what extent they have understood its importance is a serious issue to be dealt with. Lack of adequate literature has further worsened this situation. This research paper and its finding will steer the movie-marketers to harness the possibilities of this under tapped potential.

5. Concluding Remarks

As literature on the role of WOM in Indian MPI was scanty and globally India occupying top positions on parameters like annual release and theatrical admissions, this study was a need of the time. Moreover, the researcher was enthusiastic to know whether the established global theories of WOM in movie promotion match in the Indian milieu, to be specific in Kerala context. As data mining and sentimental analysis of WOM expressed by the movie-goers in online platforms gives only limited understanding and the findings prone to variations on account of fake reviews, unlike the predecessors, the researcher decided to go for a survey method. Moreover, the findings of the study will provide insight to movie promoters to understand the potential of word-of-mouth-marketing (WOMM).

6. Limitations and directions for further research

Being a hot topic of academic research, it is practically not possible to include all the prior studies conducted in this field. However, sincere effort has been taken to include all the relevant (suitability to the study) and pertinent studies (number of citations) in the domain of WOM and WOMM in MPI. This study admits certain limitation that can be addressed in future. First, as promotion of the movie industry was the focus of the study, effects of neutral and negative WOM were not taken into consideration. Second, the acceptance of a movie is also decided by factors such as movie genre, actors, production budget…etc. The effects of these factors were not included in the present study. Third, source characteristics influence WOMR. Tie strength is one among them. In future studies can be conducted examining the WOMR taking into account source characteristics such as trustworthiness, credibility, expertise, homophily…etc

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and /or publication of this article.

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