

## *Venus, Mars, and Word-of-Mouth*

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In the course of a generation, most product categories have become less differentiated by gender. This reflects the larger societal equalization of opportunities, most notably in employment. With some obvious exceptions, most marketers need to address both women and men. Marketers can ill afford to tell one gender or the other that they aren't interested in their business, though they may need to employ different tactics.

One of those areas of difference is the respective reliance of men and women on Word-of-Mouth (WOM). Our recent proprietary survey of over 800 U.S. adults reveals that incidence with which buyers talk about products and the influence that WOM plays in subsequent purchases are often gender-related.

We feel that these findings have relevance to actual brand planning, and invite deeper thinking as to why differences exist—and why they may not.

Our survey covered over three dozen assorted categories of consumer products and services. None were explicitly gender-specific. Step one was to find out who had made purchases in the past six months. This information itself is not newsworthy, but served as a basis for asking later questions of actual users.

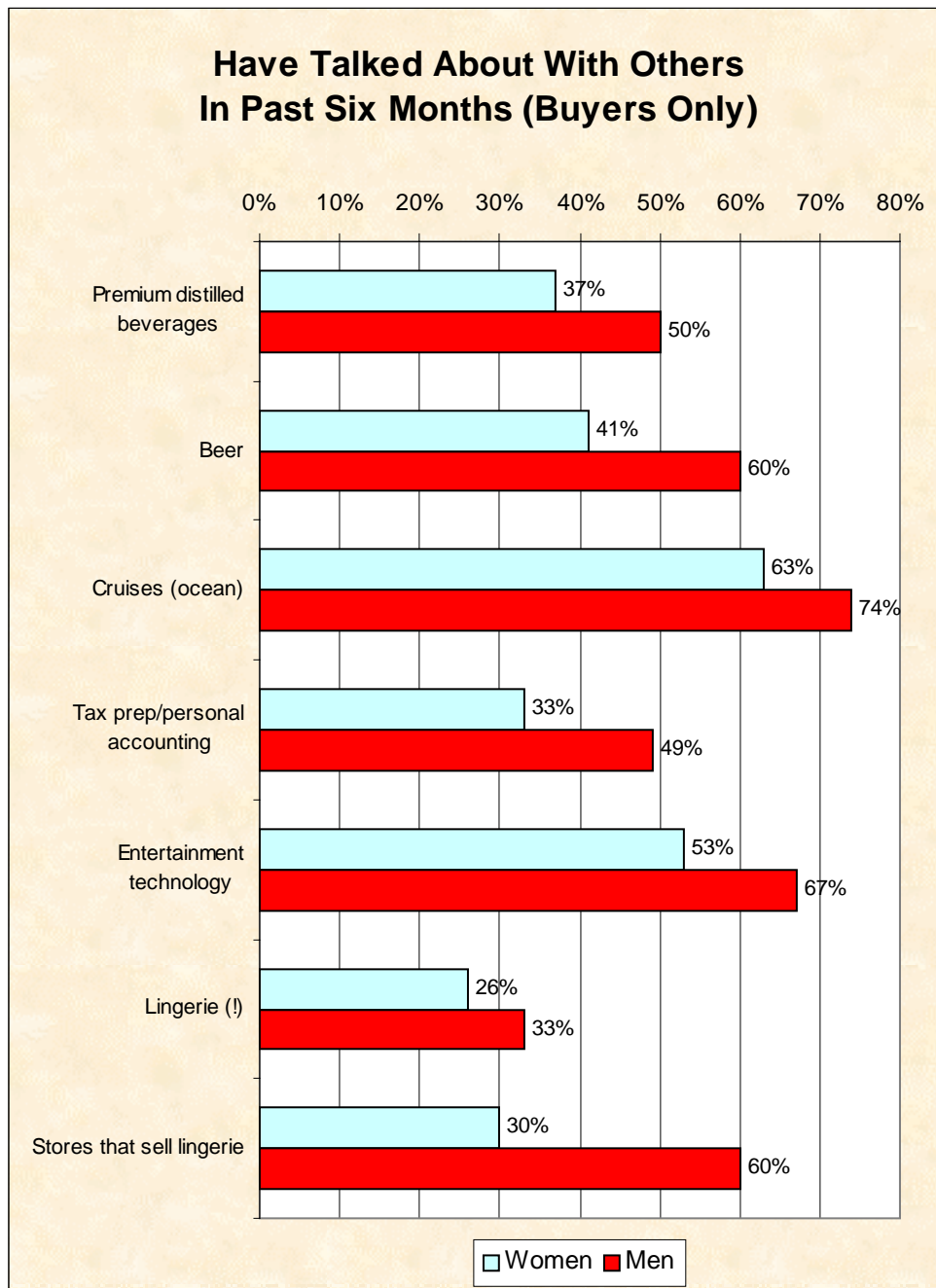
One dimension—and the most intuitive—of WOM is actual conversation about specific brands. Such conversations may indeed be face-to-face, but encouraged consumers to think of Internet-based dialogues such as e-mail, blogs and chat-rooms as well. All are forums through which two or more people can communicate directly with each other.

Such WOM can be small talk: *We tried that new restaurant last night. The quesadillas were awesome.* It can be big talk: *My mother is getting jerked around by that \*&#! mutual fund, and we have to get her out of there. Didn't your parents go through the same thing a year ago?*

Whatever the level of talk, we have identified categories in which the incidence of such WOM is about the same for men and women, and others in which one or the other is chattier.

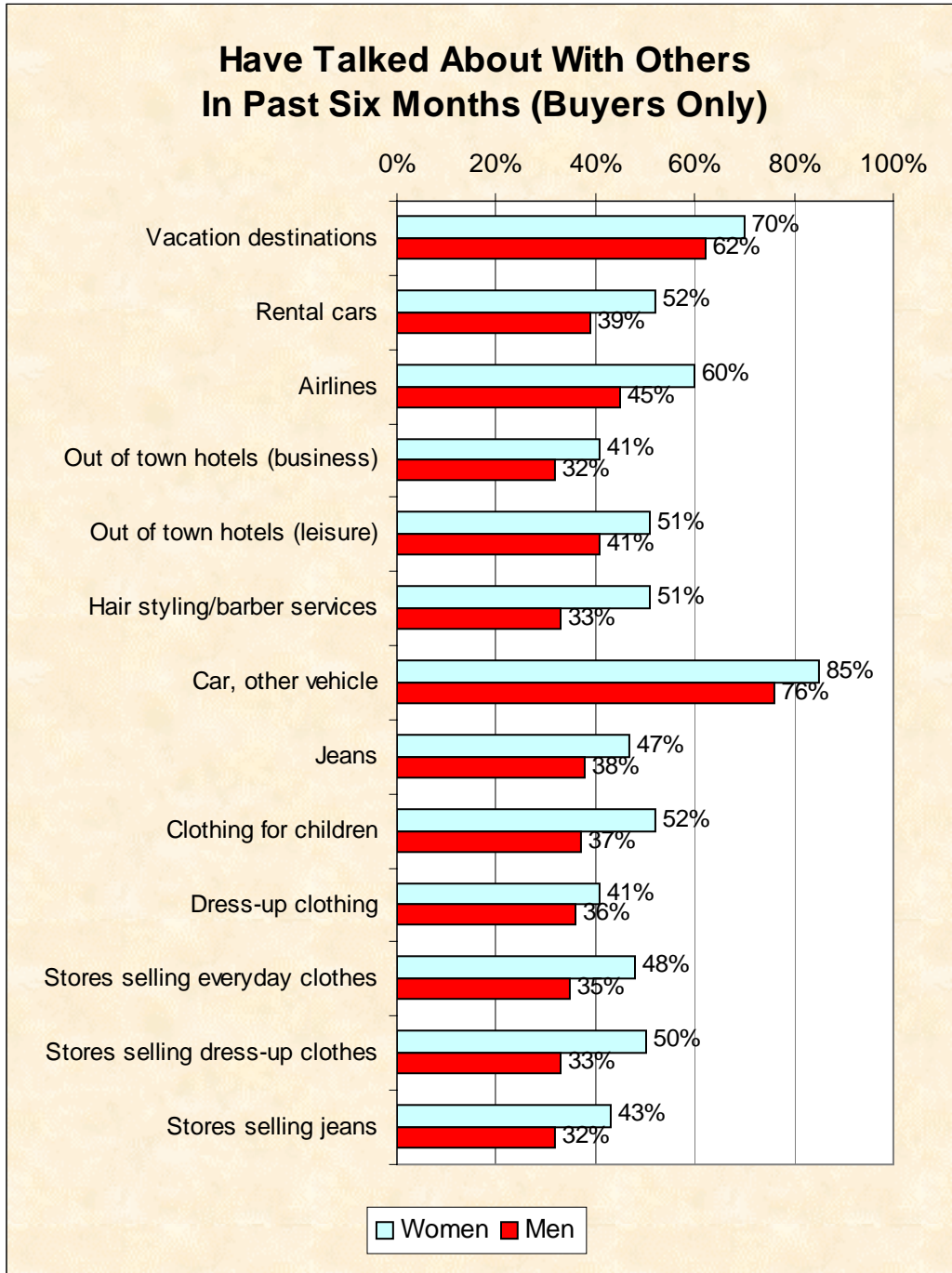


## Male Buyers Talk More Than Female Buyers





## Female Buyers Talk More Than Male Buyers

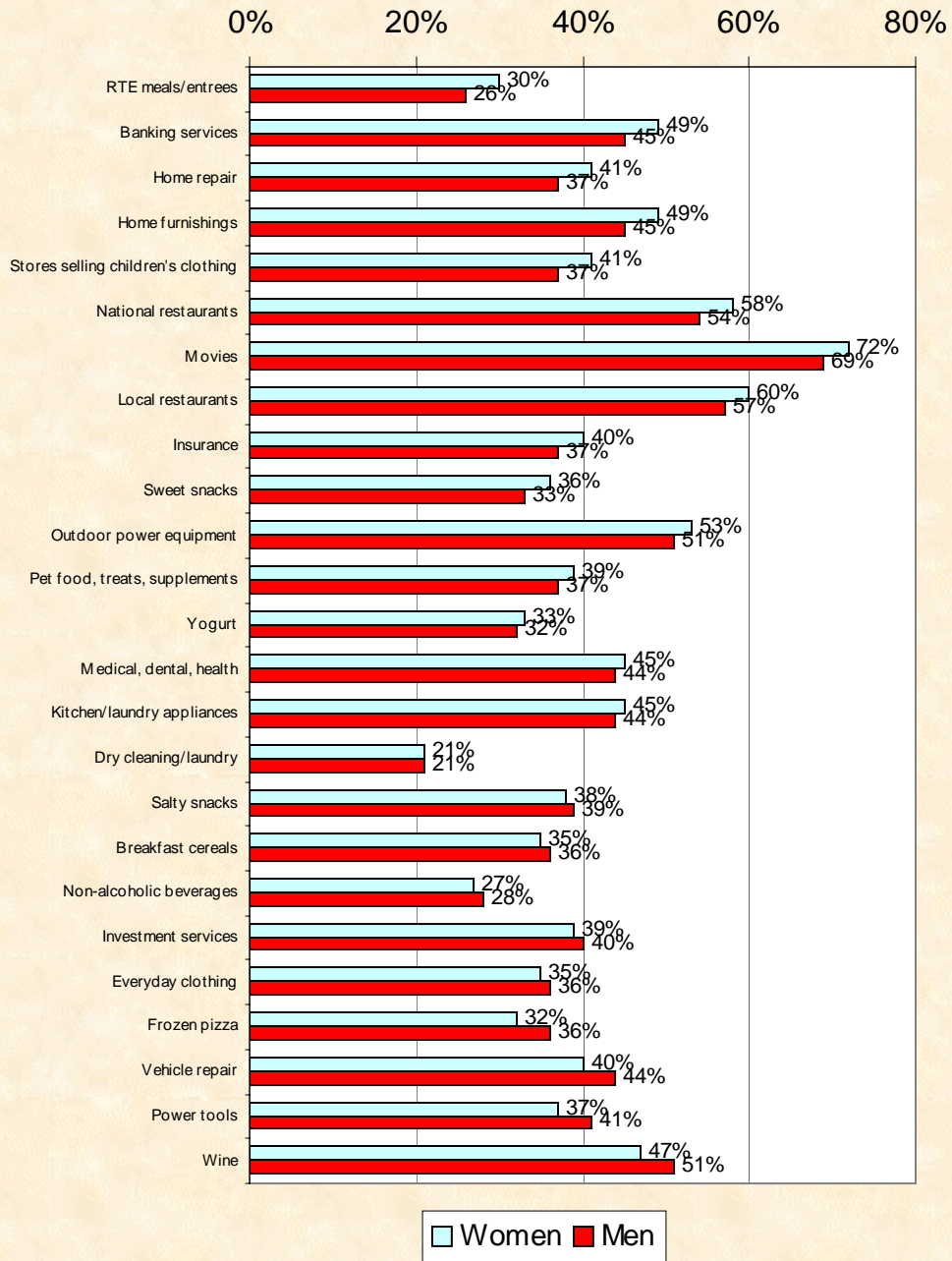




Male and Female Buyers Talk About the Same



## Have Talked About With Others In Past Six Months (Buyers Only)



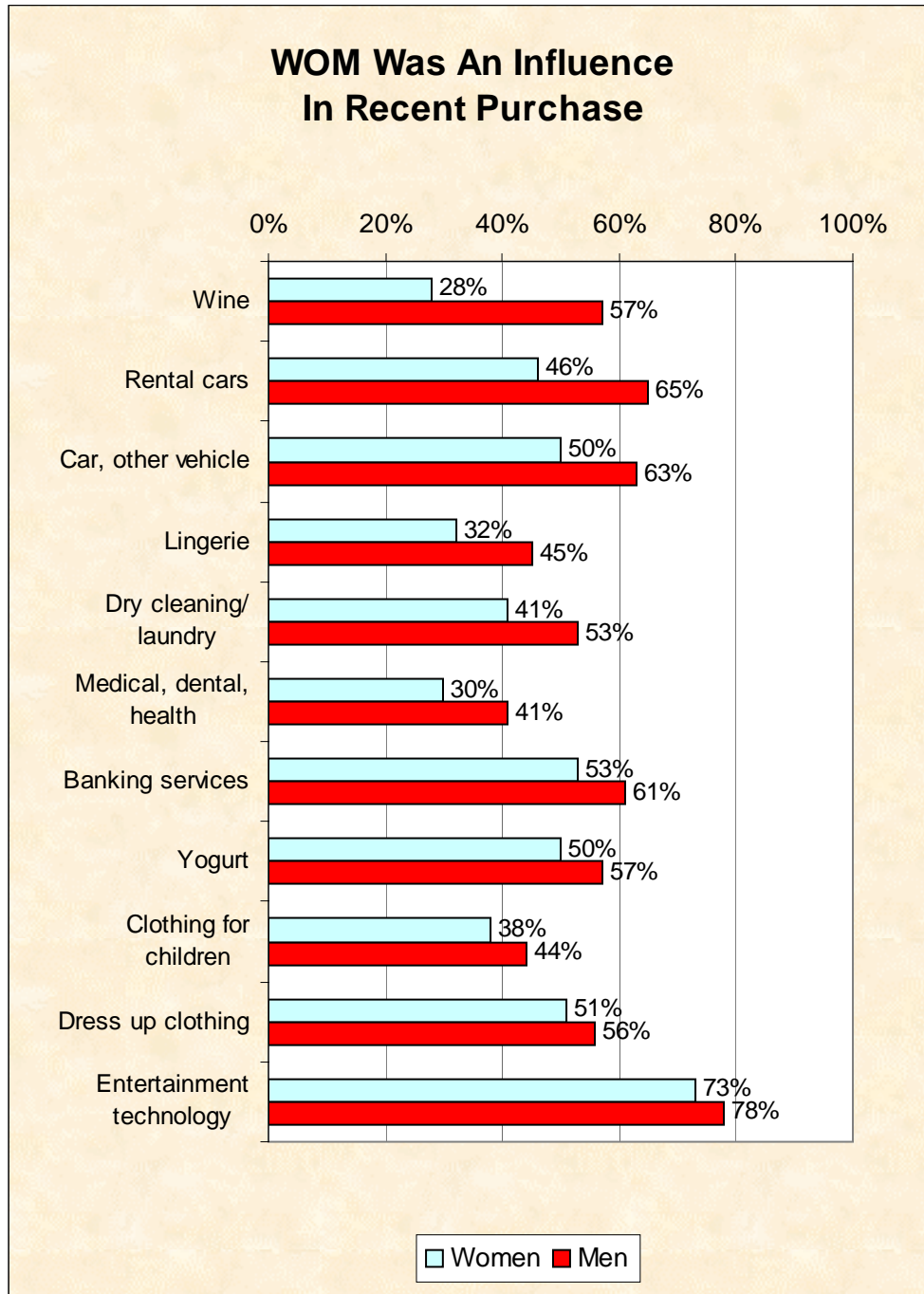
A more subtle matter is whether WOM actually influences later purchase decisions. For randomly selected products that they now use, participants in the survey were asked to think about a recent purchase. Which of these, they were asked, were influential in terms of what they bought or seriously considered?

- ❖ Things they heard from other people including conversations, but also what they read in e-mail, blogs, etc.
- ❖ Seeing other people using, considering, or interacting with the product
- ❖ Things they read in magazines, newspapers, or websites that were not advertisements.
- ❖ (None of these)

A rough measure of the influence of WOM is simply the percentage who selected any of the first three options.

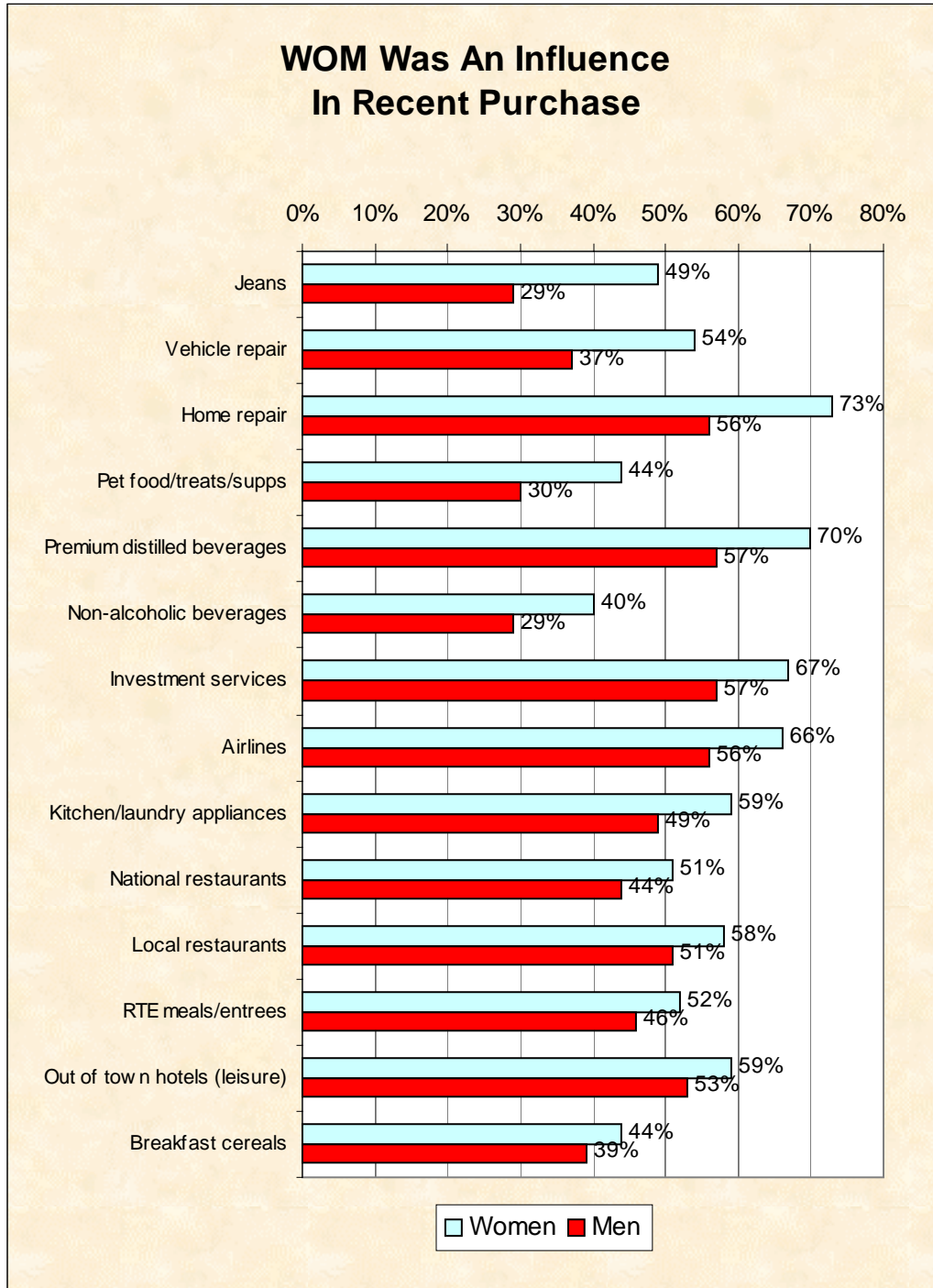


## Men Are More Influenced by WOM Than Women



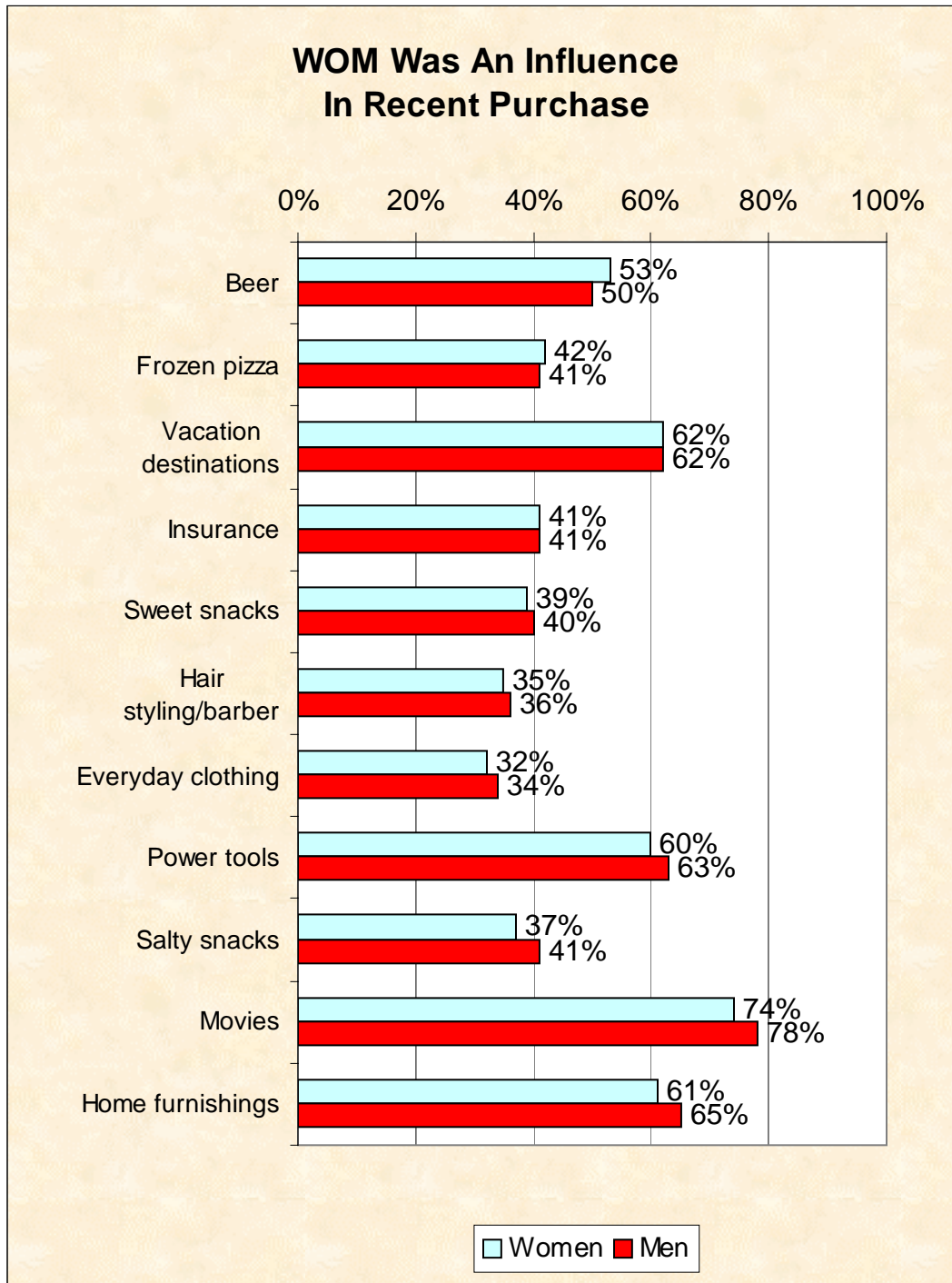


## Women Are More Influenced by WOM Than Men





## Influence of WOM Is About The Same



## Conclusions

One *a priori* hypothesis might be that consumers will seek WOM support more often for categories that lie outside their traditional gender domain. This is not the case.

- ❖ While men are more likely to be influenced by WOM when buying dry cleaning services or children's clothing, this is also true for rental cars and wine.
- ❖ While women are more likely to be influenced by WOM when buying vehicle repair services or home repair services, this is also true for kitchen/laundry appliances and pet products.

Furthermore, the importance of WOM is about the same for both genders with respect to power tools and home furnishings.

In the absence of a clear explanatory factor, marketers will need to research the role of WOM by gender in their own categories. While the levels of influence tend to be of similar magnitude, it is not always the case.

- ❖ In purchasing jeans or vehicle repair services, women are influenced much more strongly by WOM than are men.
- ❖ In purchasing wine or renting cars, men are much more influenced much more strongly by WOM than are women.

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## About the Study

These data come from an online survey conducted in September 2005 with 814 members of a national research panel of adults. There were no restrictions on eligibility.

Of the sample, 49% were female and 51% were male. The median age was 44 and the median household income was \$55,100.

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