The Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth in Social Media on Consumers' Purchase Intentions

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The influence of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on consumers' purchase intentions has long been known. However, the emergence of social media has brought a new perspective to eWOM through enabling users to communicate with their existing networks on the Internet. On social media, conversely to the other online platforms, users are able to exchange their opinions and experiences about products or services with familiar people, which refers to people who they already know such as friends and acquaintances. This new way of eWOM has the potential for greater impact on consumers. Therefore, the aim of this research is to examine the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions. To do so, the research in this thesis involved two major phases. In the first phase, in order to explore the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions, a theoretical model was developed based on the integration of Information Adoption Model (IAM) and related components of Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The new model, which is named as Information Acceptance Model (IACM), was validated through structural equation modelling (SEM) based on surveys of 384 social media users in the UK. The results have highlighted that quality, credibility, usefulness and adoption of information, needs of information and attitude towards information are the key factors for eWOM in social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions. Furthermore, to provide better understanding of the influence of eWOM on social media, the second phase of this research was designed as a comparative study. To explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions, the data collected through survey was reanalysed with a different perspective; and a comparison was conducted based on multiple regression analysis. The results have revealed significant differences and found anonymous reviews to be more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than friends' recommendations on social media. However, since these results were contrary to expectations, 10 in-depth interviews were also administered to enlighten the insightful results found through the survey. The interview findings uncovered the survey results. Information quantity, information readiness, detailed information, and dedicated information were discovered as the factors which make online reviews superior than friends'

recommendations in terms of the influence of eWOM. This research contributes to theoretical implications through its validated model and found key dimensions. The research model, IACM, brings a new approach to information adoption by extending IAM and provides new insights to researchers who study Information Systems (IS). In addition, the model highlights the information adoption process as an antecedent of behavioural intention, which is a very important finding for the related literature. Future studies can build new models through considering this relationship between information adoption process and behavioural intention. Moreover, the second phase of this research provides new constructs for future studies through its qualitative findings. The findings reached through in-depth interviews, which explain why consumers prefer anonymous online reviews, can either be tested as components of new theories and models or they can be tested as inclusion of existing theories and models. Both types have potential to provide valuable results for the literature. On the other hand, in terms of practicality, this research provides marketers with a frame of reference to understand the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions. Both the contextual and the comparative studies in this research offer valuable insights for marketers; marketers thus can develop better strategies for marketing on social media.

Keywords: electronic word of mouth (eWOM), social media, purchase intention

Dedication

To my mother Vildan Erkan and my family for their enduring love, support and encouragement during my journey to complete this thesis.

Acknowledgement

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is solely based on my own work and has never been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

I also declare that all information in this thesis has been acquired and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct.

Ismail Erkan

Publications

Some of the material displayed herein has already been published in the form of the following publications:

- The first phase of the research in this thesis:

  Erkan, I. and Evans, C. (2016), "The influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions: An extended approach to information adoption", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 61, pp. 47–55. (3* ABS List)

- The second phase of the research in this thesis:

  Erkan, I. and Evans, C. (2016), "Social Media or Shopping Websites? The influence of eWOM on consumers' online purchase intentions", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, pp. 1–17. (1* ABS List)

Other Journal Papers

- Alboqami, H., Al-Karaghouli, W., Baeshen, Y., Erkan, I., Evans, C. and Ghoneim, A. (2015), "Electronic word of mouth in social media: the common characteristics of retweeted and favourited marketer-generated content posted on Twitter", *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 338–358. (1* ABS List)

- Erkan, I. (2015), "Electronic Word of Mouth on Instagram: Customers' Engagements with Brands in Different Sectors", *International Journal of Management, Accounting and Economics*, Vol. 2 No. 12, pp. 1435–1444.

- Erkan, I. (2014), "'Vine': Do You Miss It? Electronic Word of Mouth on The Social Networking Site, Vine", *International Journal of Business and Information*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 461–473.

Conference Paper

- Erkan, I. and Evans, C. (2014), "The Impacts of Electronic Word of Mouth in Social Media on Consumers' Purchase Intentions", *Proceedings of the International Conference on Digital Marketing (ICODM2014)*, Colombo, Sri Lanka, pp. 9–14.

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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Consumers started to be exposed to an excessive amount of advertisements through the advent of mass media. On the one hand, this was a great opportunity for consumers to acquire information about products and services of companies. However, conversely, as a result of this increasing amount of information, making a decision was becoming more and more difficult. This led consumers to exchange their opinions and experiences between each other which is called word of mouth (WOM) (Arndt, 1967). WOM was also considered worthy of study by researchers; and it was found influential on consumers' product judgements (Bone, 1995; Engel et al., 1969; Feldman and Lynch, 1988) and purchase intentions (Brown and Reingen, 1987; Herr et al., 1991). Consumers often rely on WOM when approaching the purchase of a new product and service (Arndt, 1967; Richins, 1983), because WOM conversations usually do not have a selling intent as it is in advertisements (Schlosser, 2011; Sen and Lerman, 2007). In fact, both early and recent studies have found that WOM conversations are more influential on consumers than traditional forms of advertisements (Engel et al., 1969; Trusov et al., 2009).

Although WOM has existed for a long time, it has gained a new perspective with the advent of the Internet. Previously, WOM occurred during personal conversations between consumers, but the Internet has provided a platform for consumers to exchange their opinions and experiences with a larger audience. These online conversations regarding brands or their products and services have been called electric word of mouth (eWOM) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). The Internet has facilitated WOM conversations; information can spread among a huge number of users even in a very short period of time through eWOM (Brown et al., 2007). Consumers search for information posted by former customers in order to make themselves comfortable before purchasing products or services (Pitta and Fowler, 2005). Due to these advantageous sides of eWOM, researchers also show interest in eWOM as well as consumers; and conduct a considerable amount of research relating to eWOM (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; King et al., 2014).

EWOM has been found to be an effective marketing instrument by researchers (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Kumar and Benbasat, 2006; Zhang et al., 2010). The Internet provides several appropriate platforms for eWOM such as blogs, consumer

review websites, discussion forums, shopping websites and recently social media websites (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Previously, the effects of eWOM on blogs (Chu and Kamal, 2008; Lin et al., 2012), consumer review websites (Cheung et al., 2008; Gauri et al., 2008), discussion forums (Chiou and Cheng, 2003; Huang and Chen, 2006), shopping websites (Li and Zhan, 2011; Park et al., 2007) have been studied by researchers. Also, these platforms have been compared in terms of their impacts on consumers' purchase intentions (Lee and Youn, 2009). However, due to being relatively new, far less attention was paid to eWOM on social media (Cheung and Thadani, 2012) even though there are a few existing studies (See-To and Ho, 2014; Wang et al., 2012).

Social media has been defined as group of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Users can create content through using variety of facilities provided by social media websites such as pictures and videos. This visually enriched content generated by users can be about anything personal; however, it can also be about brands or their products and services. In fact, this socially extensive environment is considered as a great opportunity to share product-related opinions (Canhoto and Clark, 2013; Chu and Kim, 2011; Dessart et al., 2015; Dimitriadis, 2014); and recent studies show that consumers increasingly apply social media to obtain information about unfamiliar brands (Baird and Parasnis, 2011; Goodrich and de Mooij, 2014; Naylor et al., 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014). Social media websites, thus, considered as valuable platforms in terms of eWOM.

The emergence of social media has brought a new aspect to eWOM through enabling users to communicate with their existing networks. On social media, contrary to other platforms, users are able to exchange their opinions and experiences about products or services with familiar people, which refers to people who they already know such as friends and acquaintances (Chu and Kim, 2011; Kozinets et al., 2010). In fact, recent studies show that social media has increased the number of online reviews written by consumers (Trusov et al., 2010). As a consequence of this increasing interest by consumers, marketers have also started to engage with social media through their official accounts; they consider these websites as an opportunity to interact with their current and potential customers (Michaelidou et al., 2011). For these reasons, this online social environment is considered as appropriate for eWOM

(Canhoto and Clark, 2013; Erkan and Evans, 2014; Knoll and Proksch, 2015; Toder-Alon et al., 2014).

1.2 Motivation and Research Gap

Conversations among users on social media often refer to brands (Wolny and Mueller, 2013); therefore, they are naturally expected to be powerful on consumers' purchase intentions (Wang et al., 2012). However, it is difficult to anticipate all eWOM information as being influential. Owing to the vast amount of information which consumers are exposed to, they need to critique and screen the information before using it. The determinants of this mechanism between eWOM on social media and consumers' purchase intentions has not yet been explained even though some previous studies discovered the impact of eWOM on social media (See-To and Ho, 2014; Wang et al., 2012). Therefore, the following question was addressed as a first research question of this study:

RQ1. What are the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions?

Previous studies regarding the influence of eWOM mostly focused on either characteristics of eWOM information (Cheung et al., 2008, 2009; Shu and Scott, 2014) or consumers' behaviour towards eWOM information (Prendergast et al., 2010; Reichelt et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2012). However, according to Knoll's latest research (2015), which reviews the recent eWOM studies undertaken in the social media context, the influence of eWOM depends on both the information and the consumer. Although this is only an argument based on recent studies and has not yet been empirically tested, this study also agreed with the idea that characteristics of eWOM information and consumers' behaviour towards eWOM information should be evaluated together in order to find the determinants of eWOM influencing consumers' purchase intentions. Therefore, this study considered both aspects whilst developing its research model. To do so, the information adoption model (IAM) (Sussman and Siegal, 2003) was integrated with related components of theory of

reasoned action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) for the first research question of this study.

Furthermore, this study has another research question. The above mentioned online platforms, with the exception of social media, allow eWOM to occur between anonymous users (Dellarocas, 2003; Sen and Lerman, 2007). However, contrary to other platforms, social media allow eWOM to occur between familiar people. In the current literature, some researchers consider the anonymity as an advantage for consumers to share their opinions more comfortably (Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006) and thus as a reason for the higher volume of eWOM (Chatterjee, 2001); while others argue that the familiarity, as in social media, can make eWOM information more trustworthy and reliable (Chu and Choi, 2011; Wallace et al., 2009). This discussion still has not been elucidated yet. Therefore, this study empirically tests and compares the influence of eWOM between familiar people on social media and eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms in the context of purchase intention. The following question was addressed as a second research question of this study:

RQ2. Is eWOM between familiar people on social media or eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms more influential on consumers' purchase intentions?

Although separate studies have been conducted to understand the impact of eWOM between familiar people on social media (Iyengar et al., 2009; See-To and Ho, 2014; Wallace et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012), and the impact of eWOM between anonymous people on other platforms (Gauri et al., 2008; Hsu and Tsou, 2011; Huang and Chen, 2006; Park et al., 2007); the influences of eWOM on these platforms have not yet been compared. This study hence has considered this question important because of two reasons: a) the lack of research, and b) the abovementioned uncertainty existing in the literature.

With this premise, the following aim and objectives are introduced for this study.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to examine the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions; and to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions. To do so, the research was conducted in two phases; and eWOM on social media was examined through (1) a contextual and (2) a comparative study.

The objectives of this research are outlined as follows:

1) To review literature based upon eWOM behaviour on social media, eWOM behaviour on other platforms, and the influence of eWOM on purchase intention, including the antecedents of purchase intention.

2) To develop theoretical models to explain the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions; and to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions.

3) To empirically assess the relationships hypothesised in the theoretical models in order to answer research questions.

4) To discuss the results and findings and position them within the existing eWOM literature.

5) To draw theoretical contributions and managerial implications for academics and practitioners in regard to the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions.

1.4 Research Methodology

To achieve the abovementioned aim and objectives, this research was conducted in two major phases. In order to find the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions, (the first question of this research), this study has developed a theoretical model along with seven measurable hypotheses based on previous literature. This phase of the research, thus, was carried out by using quantitative methods. Survey method was selected as it provides

numerical data through a cost effective, fast and easy way of data collection from a large number of participants (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Collis and Hussey, 2003). The data collected was analysed through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in AMOS 20 software to validate the hypotheses and the theoretical model (Hair et al., 2010).

Furthermore, to provide a better understanding of the influence of eWOM on social media, in the second phase, a comparative study was conducted in this research. In order to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions, (the second question of this research), six more hypotheses have been developed. The hypotheses were tested through the data collected by survey. However, since the results were contrary to expectations, additional in-depth interviews were also conducted to enlighten the insightful results found through the survey. The second phase of this research consists of two parts which are sequentially quantitative and qualitative. Therefore, the adopted philosophy in this research is considered as pragmatism. The data collected by the survey was reanalysed through Multiple Regression Analysis in SPSS 20 software to test the hypotheses. The data collected by interviews was examined through thematic analysis to identify key themes within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Figure 1.1 summarises the methods and analysis which were used for this research.
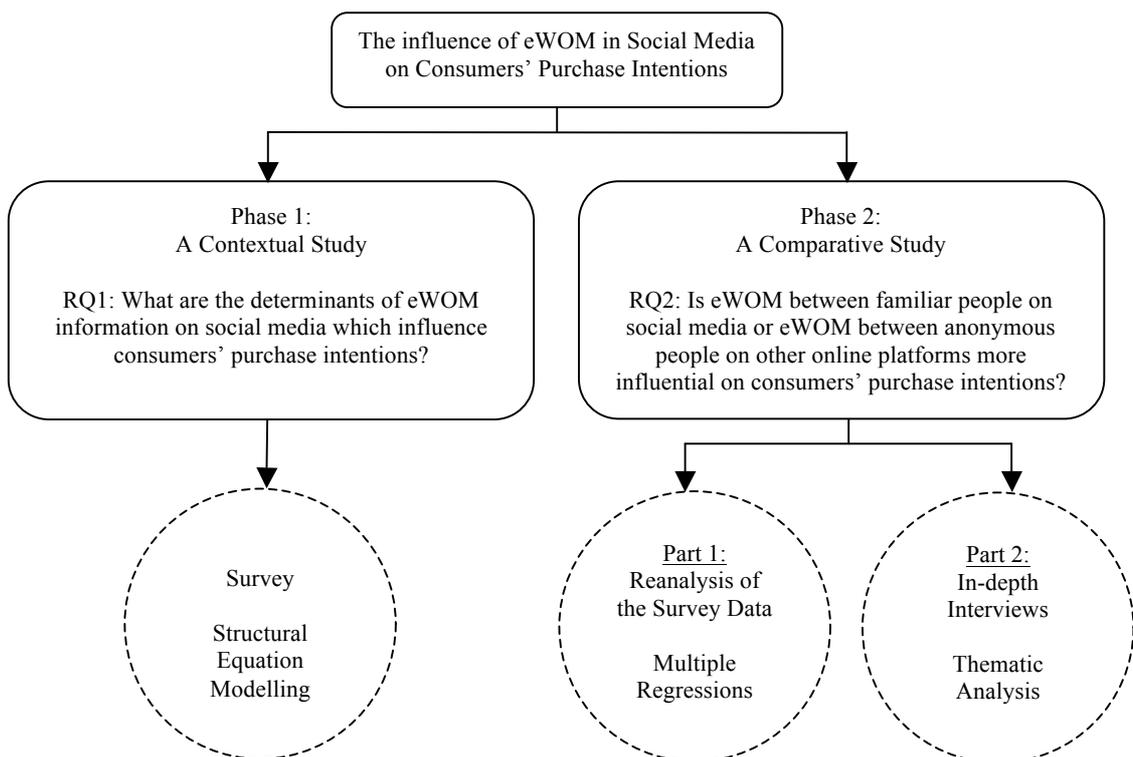
Figure 1.1: Methods and Analyses of the Research

As mentioned above and summarised with Figure 1.1, this research examines the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions; and the data collected with survey and interview methods. The survey was conducted through 384 university students in the UK, while the additional interviews were carried out with 10 university students. University students were deemed appropriate for this research due to latest statistics which present people between the ages of 18-29 as being the majority of social media users; 89% of this age group use these websites, as of January 2014 (PRC, 2014). Younger age groups are also more familiar with online reviews. According to latest reports, 83% of 16 to 24 year olds and 90% of 25 to 34 year olds who live in the UK use online shopping websites (National Statistics, 2014).

1.5 Research Design

As introduced earlier, this study was carried out with pragmatist paradigm. The first phase of the study was carried out by using survey method. However, in the second phase, since the results found through survey were contrary to expectations, interviews were also conducted in order to enlighten the results and ultimately provide better understanding for the study. Figure 1.2 shows the research design; each step conducted during the research process is demonstrated in the figure.
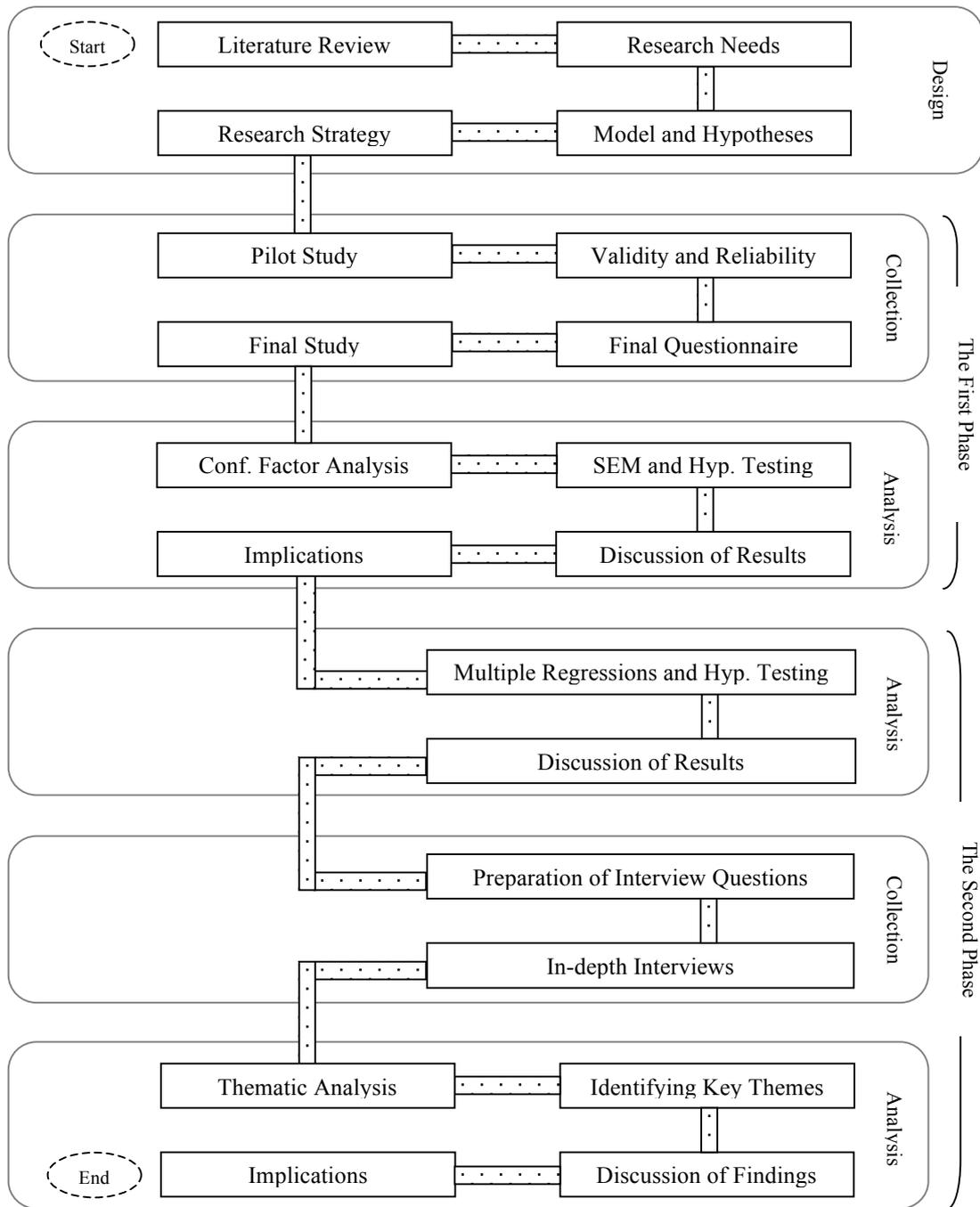
Figure 1.2: Research Design

The figure displays three main stages: preparing the research design, conducting the first phase of the research, and conducting the second phase of the research. In the first stage, a detailed literature review was conducted and research needs were identified. The theoretical model and hypotheses were then developed and research strategy was chosen. In the second stage, the first phase of this research was performed in two steps, which are data collection through survey and SEM analysis.

Finally, in the last stage, the second phase of this research was conducted in three steps, which are multiple regression analyses, data collection through interviews, and thematic analysis.

1.6 Research Contribution

This research provides a significant contribution to knowledge by examining eWOM in social media through its contextual and comparative phases. The major contribution of the first phase is to develop a comprehensive theoretical model which examines the determinants of eWOM information on social media influencing consumers' purchase intentions. The model was developed based on the integration of IAM and related components of TRA. The IAM explains the characteristics of the eWOM information (Sussman and Siegal, 2003), while the related components of TRA expresses the behaviour of consumers towards eWOM information (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). However, the offered model in this research, named Information Acceptance Model (IACM) (Erkan and Evans, 2016a), offers a more comprehensive approach through considering the behaviour of consumers together with the characteristics of information within the same model. The IACM, thus, brings a new approach to information adoption by extending IAM and provides new insights to researchers who study Information Systems (IS). In addition, the model highlights the information adoption process as an antecedent of behavioural intention, which is a very important finding for the related literature. Future studies can build new models through considering this relationship between information adoption process and behavioural intention.

On the other hand, the second phase of this research contributes to the eWOM literature through elucidating an uncertainty. Some previous researchers consider the anonymity issue as an advantage for eWOM (Chatterjee, 2001; Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006) while many others do not agree with this opinion and expect the opposite. The second group of researchers anticipate the eWOM on social media to be more influential since it occurs between people who already know each other (Chu and Choi, 2011; Moran and Muzellec, 2014; Park et al., 2007). This issue had not yet been empirically tested since the social media websites are relatively new eWOM platforms. However, this study enlightens the mentioned discussion with its

empirical approach (Erkan and Evans, 2016b). In addition, this study provides new constructs for future research through its qualitative findings. The findings reached through in-depth interviews, which explain why consumers prefer anonymous online reviews, can either be tested as components of new theories and models or they can be tested as inclusion of existing theories and models. Both types have potential to provide valuable results for the literature.

Ultimately, both phases of this research contribute to the related literature since there are limited studies focusing on eWOM on social media (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Furthermore, in terms of practicality, this research provides marketers with a frame of reference to understand the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions. Both the contextual and the comparative studies in this research offer valuable insights for marketers. The determinants provided by the first phase of this research allow marketers to understand the dynamics of eWOM on social media; marketers thus can develop better marketing strategies. Additionally, the second phase of this research highlights the aspects of eWOM information considered by consumers; marketers, who pay regard to consumers' such expectations, can develop better eWOM marketing strategies.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

This chapter has provided a brief background of the research along with the followings: motivation and research gap, aim and objectives, research methodology, and research contribution. The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 presents a review of existing literature regarding this research and highlights the research gaps. More specifically, this chapter initially discusses the evolution of eWOM by beginning with WOM. The advantages and disadvantages of eWOM are presented together with its influence on purchase intention. The chapter then continues with examining eWOM on social media and other online platforms. Finally, the identified research gaps are summarised in the final section of the chapter.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical background and hypotheses development of both contextual and comparative studies conducted in this research. The developed

theoretical model, IACM, is introduced here; and the used constructs and theories are explained. Also, the framework employed in the comparative study is presented along with the related hypotheses.

Chapter 4 outlines the research design of the study, and discusses the adopted research methodology in detail. Differences of research philosophies, approaches, strategies, and data collection methods are introduced in this chapter; and then the methodological choices of the study are discussed with relevant rationales. In addition, the research context, and ethical considerations are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5 presents the analysis, results, and findings of both contextual and comparative studies conducted in this research. Initially, demographic profile of the respondents and descriptive statistics are outlined. Next, SEM results and hypothesized relationships were assessed. Thereafter, multiple regression analysis results are demonstrated. Finally, findings through thematic analysis are presented.

Chapter 6 provides a detailed discussion of results and findings of both contextual and comparative studies conducted in this research. The results of theoretical model and each hypothesis are examined in the light of previous literature. The findings through in-depth interviews are also interpreted by considering existing literature.

Chapter 7 provides the conclusion of this research. The chapter discusses the achievement of each research objective; and outlines the main research results and findings based on the two research questions. Also, the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and future research directions are presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter outlined the research needs of this study, this chapter will provide further discussion regarding the research needs in light of the previous literature. This chapter is divided into eight sections. The next section, which constitutes the largest part of this chapter, discusses the evolution of eWOM as starting from WOM. Moreover, the advantages and disadvantages of WOM and eWOM are examined; then WOM and eWOM are contrasted in this section. Thereafter, section three introduces the relationships between WOM, eWOM, and purchase intention. The fourth section is devoted to providing a definition for, as well as some examples of, social media. EWOM sent by means of social media is reviewed in section five, whereas section six examines how eWOM is used on other online platforms. Finally, the last two sections of this chapter concludes by identifying the research gaps and summarising the chapter.

2.2 From Word of Mouth to Electronic Word of Mouth

Consumers are exposed to great number of advertisements through many different media. Besides, the printed media, such as newspapers and magazines, other media platforms, including television, radio and Internet, have also provided a huge amount of information for consumers. In fact, consumers can obtain information regarding brands, products, and services even by using their mobile phones. As information has increased through the high number of advertisements, making a decision has become more and more difficult for consumers. This is why WOM is considered as being one of the most useful information sources for consumers since it consists of former consumers' opinions and experiences about brands and their products or services (Arndt, 1967).

Sen and Lerman (2007) found that consumers trust former consumers' opinions and experiences more than marketers' advertisements. Also, as Trusov et al. (2009) make clear, advertisements start to lose their power on consumers due to reliability problems. Reliability, however, usually is not a serious issue for WOM seeing as it occurs between people who do not have selling intentions (Schlosser, 2011; Sen and Lerman, 2007). The information sender, who is sharing his/her opinions, and the receiver, who is receiving the information, constitutes the two sides of WOM

communication (see Figure 2.1) (Bansal and Voyer, 2000). The relationship between the sender and the receiver is the determinant factor in terms of reliability. If the ties between the sender and receiver of the information are strong, the credibility of the information will be high enough for the receiver to believe that the seller is reliable (Brown and Reingen, 1987).
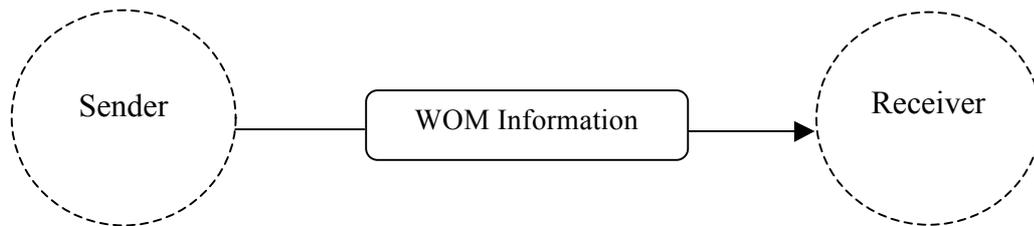
Figure 2.1: WOM Communication

On the other hand, WOM has gained a new dimension due to frequent usage of the Internet (King et al., 2014). The Internet has facilitated WOM communications by providing ever-increasing space for consumers to share personal opinions and experiences (Erkan, 2014). Also, it provides quick access to information. In this way, consumers can easily reach the content created by other consumers regarding brands, products, and services. This new form of exchanging information has been called eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). There are many different online platforms that allow eWOM communications amongst consumers. These include blogs, consumer review websites, discussion forums, shopping websites and, most recently, social media websites (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). The rest of this section provides a much more comprehensive discussion about both WOM and eWOM.

2.2.1 Word of Mouth

WOM has always been considered an important marketing tool (Bone, 1995; Engel et al., 1969; Feldman and Lynch, 1988). It comes as no surprise, then, that it has been studied by a milieu of different researchers (Arndt, 1967; Brown and Reingen, 1987; Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Herr et al., 1991; Knoll and Proksch, 2015). One of the most accepted definitions of WOM has been posited by Arndt (1967) as being an oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a sender in which the receiver receives non-commercial messages related to

products or services from the sender. As WOM communications simply occur between receivers and senders, the relationship between them is one of the major factors which influence the results of WOM. Strong relationships between receivers and senders increase the power of WOM (Bansal and Voyer, 2000). Besides this factor, there are four more factors which determine the power of WOM.

Bansal and Voyer (2000) draw attention to the importance of the level of knowledge which the WOM source (sender) has. WOM sources could either be people or platforms; nevertheless, their level of knowledge is of essential importance. If the receivers think that they are acquiring qualified information, they can be convinced easily. In other words, the level of knowledge influences the reliability of the WOM source; and, depending on that reliability, the WOM will affect the consumers' purchase intentions (Brown and Reingen, 1987). In addition, the intention of senders for providing information is another critical factor on WOM (Romani, 2006). When the receivers feel that the sender's intent is for the purpose of advertising it, they try to avoid these *"hidden ads."* Being natural is one of the major appealing sides of WOM because consumers would prefer to learn about real opinions and experiences rather than company-based suggestions.

Furthermore, the receiver's behaviour also plays a critical role on WOM. According to Sweeney et al. (2012), WOM can be more influential when the receiver really wants to learn the information in order to reduce his or her risks. The WOM information which is because the receiver has expressed an interest in receiving that kind of information is more effective than random WOM information initiated by senders (Sweeney et al., 2012). Finally, sharing personal experiences is another important element which makes WOM information more persuasive (Deighton et al., 1989; Prendergast et al., 2010). Consumers can find specific information that meets their personal demands while they are learning about other consumers' experiences. Deighton et al. (1989) also found that consumers empathise with the information that senders share. It is for this reason that WOM is influential on consumers.

WOM can either be consumer-generated (i.e. has no external effects and starts directly between consumers) or marketer-generated (i.e. started by marketers deliberately). Consumer-generated WOM, however, has been found to be more credible than marketer-generated WOM by consumers (Arndt, 1967). These two

terms are also called *"organic WOM"* and *"fertilised WOM,"* respectively, in the literature (Trusov et al., 2009, p. 98). Likewise, it has been also been categorised as positive WOM (PWOM) and negative WOM (NWOM) in the literature. PWOM can simply be defined as being *'product-related information transmitted by satisfied customers'* (Holmes and Lett, 1977). Blodgett et al. (1994) has described NWOM as the communication between friends and relatives regarding dissatisfying experiences that they had with products or services. NWOM can have a serious, destructive influence on a company's reputation, image, sales, and even market share (Lee and Cranage, 2012). While some researchers found that PWOM affected consumers more than NWOM (East et al., 2008), others believe NWOM to be more influential (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Mittal et al., 1998).

Consequently, like any other marketing concept, all types of WOM have their advantages and disadvantages. Misner (1999) identifies WOM as being both one of the most effective and one of the least comprehended marketing strategies in the world; the latter feeling id due to its being difficult to track and control. Kotler (2003), on the other hand, has argued that the advertisements created by marketers cannot be as persuasive as friends, acquaintances, or other consumers who make suggestions based on their experiences in the form of WOM. The following subsection discusses these positive and negative aspects of WOM.

2.2.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Word of Mouth

Cakim (2009) highlighted a behaviour which consumers utilise for the purpose of managing a cornucopia of messages from all the different types of advertisement sources: i.e. they filter these messages by doing their own personal research in order to find suitable products and services before making their final decisions. Considering the fact that WOM consists of real reviews and actual information about products and services, it is one of the most valuable resources that consumers can utilising in order to make better decisions (Balter and Butman, 2005). One of the most important factors which makes WOM information more credible is that it is generated by other consumers instead of marketers (Allsop et al., 2007). Rather than receiving commercial messages from companies, consumers prefer to obtain information from more personal sources, such as family members, friends, and acquaintances (Jansen et al., 2009), or from the experienced people around them

(Cakim, 2009). WOM is also advantageous for marketers; marketing messages can quickly be conveyed amongst consumers without any costs (Trusov et al., 2009). If customers share their positive experiences with the people around them, it may bring positive results for marketers. Nevertheless, WOM is also disadvantageous for companies in several ways.

For instance, WOM can be detrimental for companies when negative comments are shared by unsatisfied customers. This, in turn, could lead people to avoid the products, services, brands, and companies which are being portrayed in a negative light. In fact, some researchers have found that negative conversations influence consumers more than positive ones (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Mittal et al., 1998). Also, the difficulty of managing that information is another negative aspect of WOM. According to Nyilasy (2006), WOM cannot be fully controlled because of its inherent structure. WOM occurs in daily conversations of consumers. Therefore, any wrong or misunderstood information can also be spread during these conversations. It can even turn into big problems before the intervention of companies. It creates another disadvantage for marketers attempting to design a successful marketing strategy. Since WOM occurs during the private conversations of consumers, it is very difficult for companies to measure (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004; Kiss and Bichler, 2008). Nonetheless, even though the results of WOM marketing cannot be thoroughly measured, it is still popular amongst marketers and researchers due to its well-known influence on consumers' purchase intentions. Table 2.1 summarizes the mentioned advantages and disadvantages of WOM.

Table 2.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of WOM

Advantages	Disadvantages
Access to diverse audience through social contacts	Potential negative impact
Reaches audience within a short period of time	Uncontrollable nature
Inexpensive	Difficult to measure

Source: Adapted from Woerdl et al. (2008) and Dobele et al. (2005)

2.2.3 Electronic Word of Mouth

The Internet has transformed and facilitated the way people communicate. As an example, it has made the sharing of personal opinions and experiences more convenient. This progress has brought a new, ground-breaking perspective to WOM, along with the new name: "*electronic word of mouth (eWOM).*" EWOM has been defined as: '*any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet*' (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). Besides the term "electronic word of mouth," it is also known as "*online word of mouth.*" Also, '*word of mouse,*' '*Internet WOM*' (Goldenberg et al., 2001, p. 212), '*buzz marketing*' (Thomas, 2004, p. 64), and '*electronic word of mouth communication*' (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.38) are some other expressions in the literature which refer to eWOM (Vilpponen et al., 2006). EWOM can be both consumer-generated and marketer-generated, just like traditional WOM. While the information on the Internet is often provided by marketers via company-generated websites, online communities enable people to share their views with others by creating media content as pictures, videos or texts. Blogs, consumer review websites, discussion forums, shopping websites, and social media websites are all different types of eWOM platforms (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Cheung and Thadani, 2012) (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Different Types of eWOM Platforms

eWOM Platforms	Examples
Blogs	Blogger.com
Consumer Review Websites	Epinions.com
Discussion Forums	Ukbusinessforums.co.uk
Shopping Websites	Amazon.com
Social Media Websites	Facebook.com

Source: Adapted from Cheung and Thadani (2012)

2.2.4 Advantages and Disadvantages of Electronic Word of Mouth

The growing usage of the Internet has contributed to the progress of eWOM. WOM communication strategies have become easier and faster via technology, particularly the Internet (Trusov et al., 2009). In addition, the advent of mobile devices has made eWOM more and more convenient, as they allow people to reach the Internet from anywhere and at any time. As with traditional WOM, this new way of conducting WOM has some advantages and disadvantages for both consumers and marketers.

The first advantage is that the Internet has increased the volume of WOM (Chatterjee, 2001). People are now able to access more information about the products and services that they are intending to purchase. Consumers can either search for marketer-generated information or the information generated by other consumers. Also, both consumers and marketers can post visual instruments via the Internet, such as pictures and videos. On the one hand, this is a great opportunity for marketers to introduce their products and services in a cost-effective way; and, on the other hand, this gives consumers a chance to acquire visually-supported information which will, in turn, help them to make better decisions. Furthermore, the Internet provides an appropriate platform for marketers and consumers to communicate with one another. While consumers can contact the companies at any time through their official websites, thanks (in particular) to social media, companies are now able to contact the consumers at any time. This chance for communication can be beneficial for both consumers and marketers; for instance, consumers can state their demands and complaints or marketers can receive consumers' opinions about their new products before it is released into the market.

Nevertheless, eWOM has two more critical features which can be both advantages and disadvantages for marketers. First, eWOM is able to reach a large audience for a message can be conveyed to hundreds, thousands, or even millions of users through the Internet (Cakim, 2009; Filieri and McLeay, 2014; Liu, 2006; Sohn, 2014). Second, an eWOM message can be spread in a very short period of time (Huang et al., 2011; Hung and Li, 2007; King et al., 2014). These two features offer great opportunities for marketers. For example, Hotmail, the email service provider, became famous and reached huge success because of the spread of positive eWOM by their consumers in 1997 (Montgomery, 2001). Negative comments, though, can

also spread quickly amongst a huge number of consumers as well; in such cases, eWOM can be detrimental to the image of companies (Ferguson and Johnston, 2011). Although eWOM provides a chance for marketers to follow consumers' notions and interfere if necessary, the effects of eWOM are still difficult to control, just as is the case with traditional WOM (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004; Haywood, 1989); the reputation of companies can be influenced negatively because of these two critical features of eWOM. Overall, eWOM has some negative aspects in addition to its positive ones. Nevertheless, it continues to be considered a powerful marketing tool (Sen and Lerman, 2007; Sweeney et al., 2012).

2.2.5 Difference between Word of Mouth and Electronic Word of Mouth

Above, it has been demonstrated that both WOM and eWOM have some advantages and disadvantages; however, in terms of comparison, some features of WOM enable make it more advantageous than eWOM, whereas other features of eWOM make it seem superior.

Traditional WOM information can affect many receivers since it passes through a chain of consumers (Lau and Ng, 2001). In the online case, however, eWOM can diffuse faster amongst hundreds, thousands, or sometimes even millions of consumers (Brown et al., 2007; Jeong and Jang, 2011). The fact that the Internet makes the dissemination of eWOM information extremely faster is the most prominent difference between WOM and eWOM. Secondly, eWOM provides visually supported information for consumers. People can use media content, such as pictures or videos, while talking about products and services in order to support their opinions and experiences. In the offline case, sometimes oral communications do not allow people to visualise the information being transmitted; nevertheless, eWOM makes it easier for consumers. Furthermore, WOM and eWOM are also not similar in terms of tracking their influence. Due to its natural structure, tracking WOM is considered to be very difficult (Misner, 1999; Nyilasy, 2006). The Internet, on the other hand, provides some facilities for marketers to track their customers' conversations. For instance, social media websites, discussion forums, and review websites are useful platforms for tracking eWOM conversations. Tracking customers' and potential customers' opinions is very important for marketers seeing as they can shape their strategies more appropriately by using those valuable

feedbacks. Table 2.3 summarizes the differences between WOM and eWOM (Yildirim, 2011).

Table 2.3: Differences between WOM and eWOM

	WOM	eWOM
Audience	Person-to-person	Person-to-people
Speed	Slow	Fast
Type	Spoken	Written
Tracking	Very difficult	Relatively possible
Accessibility	Not Always	Always
	Time limited	Time independent
	Scope limited	Not limited to geography

Source: Adapted from Yildirim (2011)

Furthermore, as it can be seen on Table 2.3, Yildirim (2011) also draws attention to differences between WOM and eWOM in terms of accessibility. As WOM conversations occur person to person, it is not possible for other people to access these conversations; however, eWOM conversations provide chances to be accessed by other people since they occur on the Internet. Similarly, eWOM conversations provide chances for interactions without time and location constraints, while WOM conversations are not independent from the time and the place (Yildirim, 2011). Contrary to WOM, eWOM brings individuals together on the Internet regardless of their geographical locations (Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

On the other hand, according to latest International Telecommunication Union reports, almost 57 per cent of the world's population does not use the Internet (ITU, 2015). Although this percentage is very low in developed countries (18%), statistics demonstrate that more than half of the people in the world still are not familiar with

the Internet. In this sense, eWOM is weaker against offline WOM. Additionally, some researchers found traditional WOM to be more powerful than eWOM (Keller, 2007) because eWOM tends to occur between anonymous people on the Internet—at least, that is, before the advent of social media websites. Therefore, eWOM was considered as not being as effective as traditional WOM since WOM takes place between people who are familiar with one another (Yildirim, 2011). Nevertheless, social media has closed this particular gap between WOM and eWOM seeing as it allows Internet users to communicate with people they know (Chu and Choi, 2011; Moran and Muzellec, 2014). This study therefore focuses on eWOM in social media. Social media will be introduced in Section 2.4 which is after the following section.

2.3 WOM, eWOM and Purchase Intention

Intention to purchase has long been considered significant in order to understand the influence of both WOM and eWOM (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Engel et al., 1969; Prendergast et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2012). It is therefore employed as the dependent variable of this study. Thus, along this vein, this section discusses WOM and eWOM with relation to purchase intention.

2.3.1 Word of Mouth and Purchase Intention

Consumer behaviour can be influenced by several different kinds of advertising methods; however, both early and contemporary studies show that WOM has a stronger effect on consumer decisions than other types of advertisement (Day, 1971; Engel et al., 1969; Trusov et al., 2009; Wangenheim and Bayón, 2004). One of the earliest researches ever conducted was the one done by Engel et al. (1969); based on the results of the 173 telephone surveys and 249 face-to-face interviews of their research, WOM was found to be the most important information sources (including magazines, newspapers, television, radio commercials, and direct company email advertising). A relatively recent research conducted by Trusov et al. (2009) obtained similar results. In the study, they tested new customer acquisition for a social networking website. Both WOM referrals and traditional marketing vehicles were used and their effects on the number of new sign-ups were compared. Based on this empirical study, the effects of WOM referrals have been found to be twenty times

higher than the effects of marketing events and thirty times higher than media appearances. Therefore, based on both studies (Engel et al., 1969; Trusov et al., 2009), WOM has been found to be more effective on consumers than any other traditional marketing tool.

Consumers try to acquire reliable information about the products that they are considering to purchase because they would like to reduce their perceived risk (Bettman, 1973). Therefore, seeing as WOM is believed to be a trustworthy source of information for most consumers, it plays an important role on consumers' purchase intentions and preferences (Lau and Ng, 2001; Leskovec et al., 2007). According to Wangenheim and Bayón (2004), WOM affects consumers' decision-making process and can lead them to change their decisions. In their empirical study, 800 people were interviewed from two groups. The decisions of the first group of 400 people who had given some information via WOM were compared to the second group of people who were not given any information. The first group of people were more prone to changing their decisions based on the new information that they received. As this and the other aforementioned studies mentioned, WOM can affect consumer decisions; this is why it has always been such a remarkable topic for marketing researchers.

2.3.2 Electronic Word of Mouth and Purchase Intention

EWOM has been found to be very influential on consumers' purchase intentions by a considerable number of researchers (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Chan and Ngai, 2011; Huang, 2010; Kumar and Benbasat, 2006; Park et al., 2007; See-To and Ho, 2014; Zhang et al., 2010). It is also considered to be a convenient way for consumers to dispel doubts about their decisions (Hung and Li, 2007; Lee, Lee, et al., 2011; Schau et al., 2009; Wu et al., 2014). Barton (2006) highlights that eWOM usually occurs on web platforms through which purchase decisions are performed. If consumers take eWOM messages into consideration, it can immediately turn into purchase action either through the companies' websites or through shopping websites. This makes eWOM very powerful and leads researchers to be interested in how eWOM influences purchase intention.

Bickart and Schindler (2001) were amongst the first researchers who studied the influence of eWOM on consumer purchase intentions. In their study, they compared the effect of user-generated eWOM with marketer-generated eWOM during a 12-week-long experiment. Participants' purchase intentions were tested after having been provided with similar product information from different sources. As a consequence, user-generated eWOM was found to be more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than marketer-generated eWOM. Consumers considered user-generated eWOM more credible because it evoked empathy within them. In addition, another research regarding the impacts of eWOM was conducted by Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006). The authors discussed the impacts of consumer reviews on book sales by using the reviews posted on Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com. In the research, they discovered a positive relationship between book sales and online reviews. Also, in investigating and comparing the influences of positive and negative reviews on the sites, they found that negative eWOM impacted book sales more than positive eWOM.

Furthermore, a study which aimed to explore the relationship between eWOM on discussion forums and consumers' purchase intentions was conducted by Prendergast et al. (2010). Participants' forum usages and behavioural intentions were measured using the survey method. As a result of this empirical study, the authors have found that the similarity between forums' theme and consumer interests have had a direct influence on consumers' purchase intentions. Likewise, Wang et al. (2012) also examined the effects of eWOM communications on purchase intentions, albeit utilising a different context. The authors tested the eWOM conversations made on social media websites by means of conducting a survey with 292 participants. The results show that eWOM communications in social media positively affects purchase intentions in two ways: they had a direct effect on conformity as well as an indirect effect on consolidating product involvement.

The influence of eWOM on purchase intentions has been justified by many studies which were conducted through different eWOM platforms. An important point, however, should be underlined about this marketing tool. EWOM does not only have a positive influence on online shopping intentions; consumers consider eWOM information when they make offline decisions as well (Bazaarvoice, 2015; Chan and Ngai, 2011; Lee et al., 2008). Researchers did not limit the influence of eWOM to

online purchase intentions alone; this is likewise the case with how traditional WOM influences offline purchase intentions. Therefore, the ways in which eWOM and WOM influence the market cannot be thought about separately although there are some differences in the way they occur.

2.3.3 Determinants of Purchase Intention

Intention to purchase has been tested by researchers in many different research contexts. As an example, Creyer (1997) examined the influence of firm behaviour on purchase intention; while Chang and Chen (2008) tested the impact of online store environment on purchase intention. The relationship between 3-D advertising and purchase intention has been studied by Li et al. (2002); while Laroche et al.'s (1996) study focuses on the relationship between brand familiarity and purchase intention. Moreover, previous researchers have also found several factors which influence consumers' purchase intentions such as information quality (Lee and Shin, 2014; Park et al., 2007), information credibility (Nabi and Hendriks, 2003; Prendergast et al., 2010) and information usefulness (Lee and Koo, 2015). More specifically, Lee and Shin (2014) conducted a web-based experiment to examine how the quality of online product reviews influences the participants' opinions. The results showed that high-quality reviews led participants to have stronger purchase intentions (Lee and Shin, 2014). Prendergast et al. (2010) have studied the persuasiveness (credibility) of messages shared in online forums and as a result, a positive relationship has been determined between information credibility and consumers' purchase intentions (Prendergast et al., 2010). Furthermore, Lee and Koo (2015) conducted an experiment on online reviews to test the relationship between message usefulness and purchase intention. The results showed that information usefulness is positively associated with purchase intention (Lee and Koo, 2015). In this study, these aforementioned factors have been employed in order to understand the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions.

On the other hand, the above-mentioned factors mostly focus on the characteristics of information which influence purchase intention. However, Knoll (2015) argues that there might be some determinants which involve consumers' behaviours towards information. The model of this study (IACM), therefore evaluates the characteristics of eWOM information along with the consumer behaviours (i.e. needs of

information, attitude, and adoption). Needs of information had previously been used as "advice seeking" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Wolny and Mueller, 2013). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) found this factor to be one of the determinants of eWOM engagement, while Wolny and Mueller (2013) did not confirm this result in their study examining the eWOM engagement on social media. Needs of information is tested in this research as one of the antecedents of purchase intention. People who need eWOM information on social media are more likely to find them adoptable. Moreover, this study tested the "attitude" as another determinant of purchase intention. The relationship between the attitude and behavioural intention was previously proposed by several theories such as theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985) and technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1989). Finally, information adoption was considered to be a further potential antecedent of purchase intention in this study. Consumers who adopt the eWOM information which they receive are more likely to have higher purchase intentions. Although as yet this relationship has not been empirically tested, it has been suggested by previous researchers (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Cheung et al., 2009).

2.4 Social Media

Social media websites have changed the way people communicate with one another (Nambisan and Baron, 2007; Wang et al., 2012). Social media has been defined as Internet-based services which create an environment in which people can build their personal profiles and networks while at the same time allowing them to access others' personal profiles and networks (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Another definition was proffered by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as being a group of Internet-based applications which allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Whereas the first definition emphasises the usage of social media, the second one looks at it using the outputs perspective. In addition to the term "social media websites," the expression "social networking sites" has also been used in order to refer to the same phenomenon by researchers.

Social media websites have become very popular in recent years. Millions of users have integrated these websites into their daily lives (Okazaki, 2009). According to

the latest statistics from Alexa.com (2015), there are three primary social media websites (namely, Facebook.com, Youtube.com, and Twitter.com) in the "top ten most visited websites in the world" list. In fact, the users of these websites are not only from the same home country that the company is established in but also come from all around the world. For instance, almost 83% of daily active users of Facebook live outside the US and Canada (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). Due to the growing interest of Internet users, the number of social media websites is still increasing. The latest data shows 90 social media websites with more than one million registered users (Wikipedia, 2015). Moreover, these websites lead users to spend more time with them. Indeed, according to Nielsen's social media report (2012), people spend 20 per cent of their online time on social media. In particular, young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years old spend 21 hours per month on social media.

Social media encourages people to build and maintain their friends network by means of social or professional interaction (Trusov et al., 2009). For this interaction to take place, all users have their own personal user profiles. These user profiles usually consist of personalised pictures, texts or videos that provide information to other users regarding the profile owner. People can acquire new friends by sending friend requests or "following" them. This is, in essence, how social media websites work for individuals. On the other hand, due to people's having such a huge interest in this type of site, marketers also give great importance to them as well. For example, marketers can have official accounts on social media websites and contact their current and potential customers through the facilities provided by these websites (Alboqami et al., 2015; Casteleyn et al., 2009; Weber, 2009). Furthermore, companies can introduce their products and services on their brand pages. In this sense, social media is popular among companies as well as individuals. The latest research shows that 77% of Fortune 500 companies use Twitter, that 70% use Facebook, and that 69% use YouTube actively (Barnes et al., 2013).

In terms of connecting people, social media websites look similar at first glance; nevertheless, they have specific, characteristic features (Erkan, 2015). Even the top three most visited social media websites Facebook, YouTube and Twitter (Alexa.com, 2015) differentiate between one another. Some researchers categorise these websites as networking sites (Facebook), video-sharing sites (YouTube), and

microblogs (Twitter) (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Facebook is a tremendous milestone in the evolution of social media. Even though there were some other websites before the creation of Facebook that served the same purpose (e.g. MySpace), with its advent, it has brought a new perspective to the medium through its interaction-based structure (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012). According to the company, people use Facebook '*to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them*' (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). Facebook was founded in 2004 and today has 968 million daily active users on average for June 2015; it has 1.49 billion monthly active users as of June 30, 2015 (Facebook Newsroom, 2015). It is obviously one of the leading social media websites in being able to bring billions of people together.

YouTube, on the other hand, is a leading social networking website for posting, watching and sharing videos (Liu-Thompkins and Rogerson, 2012). Recent data show that YouTube has more than 1 billion users and that 300 hours of video is being uploaded to YouTube every minute (YouTube Statistics, 2015). Besides uploading videos, YouTube also allows users to set up personal profiles and subscribe to others' "channels," not to mention the ability to post, view, like/dislike and comment just as other social media websites do (Smith et al., 2012). Users can be both individuals and companies and are able to create their own channels on YouTube. In addition to videos for fun, users can also create brand-related videos; the "unboxing" of recent products, footages from company-based events, or amateur commercials are some examples of the types of video being uploaded (Pace, 2008; Smith et al., 2012). These brand-related videos created by consumers can quickly spread through the Internet and reach other consumers. In fact, according to Ertimur and Gilly (2012), these consumer-generated videos stimulate more engagement than marketer-generated videos. This shows how vital YouTube is for companies; for any positive or negative information could influence thousands or even millions of peoples' views about them.

Twitter is another type of social media website called a microblog. It allows users to read and share short texts, pictures, videos or web links (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011) and has become very popular amongst Internet users. According to the latest statistics, Twitter has 316 million monthly active users; furthermore, 500 million

tweets are sent every day (Twitter, 2015). Twitter has gained the interest of people from across a variety of different fields, from actors and actresses to politicians, and from authors and academics to sportsmen and sportswomen. In addition, many famous people use it to interact with other users. One of the distinctive features of Twitter is that users are only able to post within the 140 character-limit of its platform. Character limitation makes sharing content easier in Twitter. In fact, users can also share their ideas by simply "retweeting" others' tweets. The main features of the content of microblogs are their being short, instantaneous, and requiring subscriptions to receive new posts (Jansen et al., 2009), just as it is in Twitter. Due to their consisting of short messages, tweets are not only easy to write but also easy to read. This convenience allows people to reach more opinions made by customers regarding the brands, products and services that they are interested in buying. According to the research conducted by Bazaarvoice (2012), which is based on the analysis of 26 million tweets, the number of tweets containing brand names has increased by 113% from 2011 to 2012, while the overall number of tweets have increased by 143%. These results demonstrate that eWOM conversations have an important place on Twitter.

2.5 Social Media and Electronic Word of Mouth

The Internet has facilitated eWOM communication through a variety of platforms; however, there is one major difference between social media and other eWOM platforms. Before the advent of social media websites, eWOM only occurred between people who did not know one another. In other words, users were talking with "strangers" (i.e. anonymous people) on the Internet. For this reason, understanding the reliability of comments was difficult (Schindler and Bickart, 2005). Consumers searching for information on the Internet could reach many suggestions regarding products and companies but did not know how trustworthy the information was. The only strong tool for determining the reliability of the information was the number of similar comments (Park et al., 2007). With the advent of social networking sites, however, people started talking using their own identities on the Internet. Although eWOM still continues among anonymous people through online reviews, social media has brought with it a new, pioneering perspective in that

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it allows eWOM to take place amongst people who already know each other. Figure 2.2 demonstrates the diversification of WOM (Erkan, 2014).

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│      Word of Mouth       │
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│  Electronic Word of Mouth │
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│ Electronic Word of Mouth in Social Media │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
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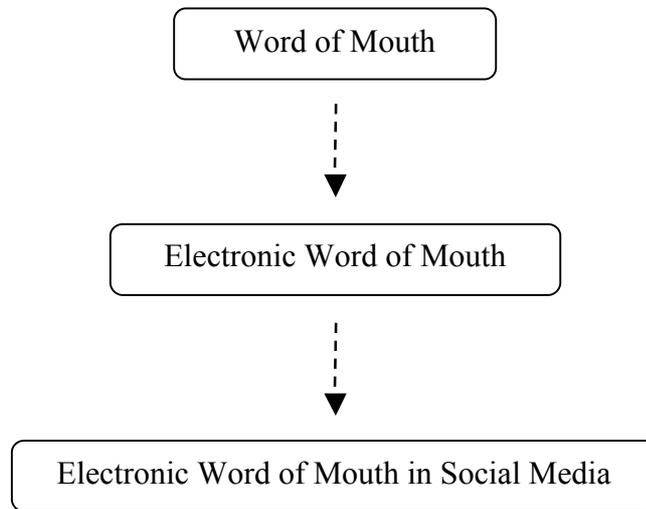
Figure 2.2: Diversification of WOM

Consumers have found a great opportunity for conveying and discussing their opinions and experiences regarding products, services, and brands with their friends and acquaintances (Kozinets et al., 2010; Moran and Muzellec, 2014). This is why social media websites are considered absolutely appropriate platforms for eWOM (Canhoto and Clark, 2013; Erkan and Evans, 2014; Kim et al., 2014; Knoll and Proksch, 2015; Toder-Alon et al., 2014). In fact, recent studies show that consumers increasingly apply social media for the purpose of acquiring information about unfamiliar brands (Baird and Parasnis, 2011; Barreda et al., 2015; Goodrich and de Mooij, 2014; Naylor et al., 2012; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014). Furthermore, since people are more likely to use social media accounts with their real names rather than nicknames, the anonymity matter has been resolved. This critical feature of social media transposes the feeling of providing offline WOM to the Internet. Communicating eWOM on social media sites, thus, may be more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than the eWOM communicated on other online platforms. That is why this study examines the influence of eWOM on social media both contextually and comparatively. In the comparative phase, the influence of eWOM on social media is compared to the influence of eWOM on other online

platforms. For this reason, the following section will discuss the other online platforms one which eWOM occurs.

2.6 Other Online Platforms and Electronic Word of Mouth

Since its earliest days, the Internet has been providing great opportunities for consumers to discuss their opinions with others. At the beginning of the Internet era, online discussion forums encouraged users to talk about anything. Over time, though, these forums became more and more specialised and dealt only with specific topics. In these websites, users were able to share their knowledge and experiences while learning about others'; they even ended up developing relationships with people who shared similar interests as themselves (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Chiou and Cheng, 2003). Then, in the course of time, a new phenomenon arose: blogs. People started writing their own opinions, experiences, diaries and comments on their blogs which, in turn, were open to the contributions of those who read it. Although these websites were not built simply for conversations related to products, services, or brands, researchers have noted that half of all bloggers provide brand-related information at least once a week (Chu and Kamal, 2008). In fact, even companies started to follow this blogging wave since they considered blogs as opportunity to have immediate feedback from consumers and to initiate positive WOM (Hsu and Tsou, 2011). Later on, consumer review websites, which are other examples of online platforms upon which eWOM is exchanged, were created, on the other hand, to stimulate people for the express purpose of exchanging their knowledge and experiences about products and services (Purnawirawan et al., 2012) The information obtained by consumers on these websites are generally perceived as more reliable and useful since they are generated by other users instead of marketers (Purnawirawan et al., 2012; Willemsen et al., 2011).

Furthermore, the reviews provided on shopping websites (e.g. Amazon.com) are other tools which contributed the evolution and diversification of eWOM. Consumers who had had experience regarding a particular product were able to share their reviews on shopping websites for the purpose of helping other consumers searching for the same information. People find online reviews helpful for making better purchase decisions (Park and Kim, 2008; Park et al., 2007; Senecal and Nantel,

2004). In fact, the interest that consumers express regarding online reviews encourages other retailers to provide this reviewing system as a service on their websites as well (Jiménez and Mendoza, 2013). These types of eWOM messages are useful for consumers who search for information generated by former customers; the authenticity of this information, on the other hand, has always been put under question (Chu and Choi, 2011). According to Freedman's report (2008), more than half of customers (63%) read 4-15 reviews to be able to judge whether they should buy the product or service in question. Nevertheless, the reviews provided on shopping websites are considered as important as other eWOM tools; and thus, they are studied by many researchers (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Gu et al., 2012; Li and Zhan, 2011), as blogs (Hsu and Tsou, 2011; Kozinets et al., 2010), consumer review websites (Gauri et al., 2008; Purnawirawan et al., 2012) and discussion forums (Chiou and Cheng, 2003; Huang and Chen, 2006).

2.7 Literature Gaps

The relationship between WOM and purchase intention has been studied by a great number of previous researches; thus, the impact of WOM on consumers has long been acknowledged (Brown and Reingen, 1987; Engel et al., 1969; Herr et al., 1991; Trusov et al., 2009; Wangenheim and Bayón, 2004). The relationship between eWOM and purchase intention has also been studied by many researchers, with the majority of them finding that eWOM had an influential on consumers (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Kumar and Benbasat, 2006; Lee and Youn, 2009; Prendergast et al., 2010). More specifically, previous researchers have focused on eWOM in a variety of different platforms provided by the Internet. The impacts of eWOM on blogs (Chu and Kamal, 2008; Hsu and Tsou, 2011; Lin et al., 2012), consumer review websites (Cheung et al., 2008; Gauri et al., 2008; Purnawirawan et al., 2012), discussion forums (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Chiou and Cheng, 2003; Huang and Chen, 2006), and shopping websites (Gu et al., 2012; Li and Zhan, 2011; Park et al., 2007) have all been studied by researchers.

Nevertheless, due to being relatively new, far less attention has been given to the influence of eWOM transmitted via social media (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Even though the research still continue and eWOM on social media has been found to be

influential by some researchers (See-To and Ho, 2014; Wang et al., 2012), there is still a lack of research regarding the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions. Therefore, the first phase of this research focuses on this gap. Furthermore, more specifically, previous studies which examine the influence of eWOM mostly focused on either a) characteristics of eWOM information (Cheung et al., 2008, 2009; Shu and Scott, 2014) or b) consumers' behaviour towards eWOM information (Prendergast et al., 2010; Reichelt et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2012). However, as Knoll (2015) argues, recent eWOM studies conducted in the social media context show that a) characteristics of eWOM information and b) consumers' behaviour towards eWOM information should be considered together in order to understand the influence of eWOM. This research, hence, develops a new theoretical model and tests this argument.

The theoretical model was developed based on the integration of IAM and related components of TRA. The IAM explains the characteristics of the eWOM information (Sussman and Siegal, 2003), while the related components of TRA expresses the behaviour of consumers towards eWOM information (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). However, the offered model in this study, which is named as IACM (Erkan and Evans, 2016a), offers a more comprehensive approach through considering the behaviour of consumers together with the characteristics of eWOM information within the same model. The IACM provides a greater understanding of eWOM through empirically testing the mentioned argument which is also suggested by recent studies (Knoll, 2015).

Furthermore, this research does not only examine the influence of eWOM on social media contextually; a comparative study is also conducted in order to provide a better understanding for the influence of eWOM on social media. Previously, separate studies have been conducted to understand the impact of eWOM between familiar people on social media (Iyengar et al., 2009; See-To and Ho, 2014; Wallace et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012), and the impact of eWOM between anonymous people on other platforms (Gauri et al., 2008; Hsu and Tsou, 2011; Huang and Chen, 2006; Park et al., 2007). However, although there is an important difference between social media and other online platforms in terms of the anonymity of eWOM; the influences of eWOM on these platforms have not yet been compared. Moreover, some previous researchers consider the anonymity issue as an advantage for eWOM

(Chatterjee, 2001; Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006) while many others do not agree with this opinion and expect the opposite. The latter group of researchers anticipate the eWOM on social media to be more influential since it occurs between people who already know each other (Chu and Choi, 2011; Moran and Muzellec, 2014; Park et al., 2007). In order to elucidate this uncertainty, the second phase of this research empirically compares the impacts of eWOM on these different platforms.

Ultimately, due to the substantial growth of social media, there is a need for both academics and marketers to understand its relationship with strong marketing tools such as eWOM. This research therefore aims to provide better understanding for the eWOM on social media.

2.8 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, a review of existing literature regarding this research was presented; and the research gaps were highlighted. Initially, the evolution of eWOM was introduced from where it starts: WOM. The advantages and disadvantages of eWOM were presented. Then, the relationships between WOM, eWOM, and purchase intention were examined. Thereafter, the chapter has introduced the eWOM on social media and other online platforms. Finally, the identified research gaps were presented in the latter part of the chapter.

The next chapter discusses the theoretical background and the proposed hypotheses in this research.

CHAPTER 3:

THEORETICAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical background and hypotheses development of both contextual and comparative studies conducted in this research. For this purpose, the chapter is divided into four main sections. The next section introduces the theoretical model developed within the first phase of this research, which aims to explore the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions. Thereafter, section three explains the theoretical background of the second phase of this research which aims to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions. Finally, the last section concludes the chapter.

3.2 Theoretical Model and Hypotheses Development of the First Phase of This Research

This section presents the theoretical model developed in the contextual study conducted in this research. To provide better understanding, it is organised as three subsections which are the theoretical background of the research model, hypotheses development, and a summary of the section.

3.2.1 Theoretical Background of the Research Model

This study develops a theoretical model to identify the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions. To do so, the information adoption model (IAM) (Sussman and Siegal, 2003) was extended with related components of theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The model introduced in this study, named as information acceptance model (IACM) (Erkan and Evans, 2016a), shows that the influence of eWOM on social media not only depends on the characteristics of eWOM information, such as quality and credibility of information, but it also depends on the consumers' behaviour towards eWOM information.

It is intended that the research within this thesis proposes a specific and unique conceptual model which extends and enhances IAM, instead of using the technology

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acceptance model (TAM) or it's revised versions (Davis, 1989). This section, therefore, will initially discuss the reasons for not using the TAM, TAM2, TAM3, and UTAUT. The IAM, which is being extended to IACM, will then be introduced along with the required justifications. Thereafter, the adopted constructs of TRA will be explained, before concluding the section by presenting the research model of this study: IACM.

3.2.1.1 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

TAM is a widely accepted theory, proposed by Davis (1989), which identifies any behavioural issues of users in the acceptance of new technologies (Lee et al., 2011; Venkatesh and Davis, 2000; Venkatesh et al., 2003; Yiu et al., 2007). TAM was derived from the TRA (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975); however, TAM is more 'information systems' specific, while TRA focuses on behavioural theories (Özkan et al., 2010). TAM is underpinned by two main constructs, which are 'perceived usefulness' and 'perceived ease of use' (Davis, 1989), for predicting an individual attitude towards accepting certain technology (Tarhini et al., 2015). It is therefore widely used by researchers within different contexts such as Internet usage (Porter and Donthu, 2006), social media usage (Rauniar et al., 2014), online banking (Yiu et al., 2007), e-learning (Tarhini et al., 2013) and e-government (Alenezi et al., 2015). In addition, TAM has also been employed to explain the adoption of information in the context of eWOM (Ayeh, 2015; Elwalda et al., 2016; Yang, 2013).

However, on the other hand, although the TAM is considered as a very important model, it has also been widely criticised for its limited explanatory power (Bagozzi, 2007; Bhattacherjee and Premkumar, 2004; Riffai et al., 2012; Tarhini et al., 2015). TAM mainly focuses on the individual usage of a computer, with the concept of 'perceived usefulness,' and disregards the essential social processes of information development and implementation (Riffai et al., 2012). Particularly in the context of eWOM, where the information is generated by separate individuals, TAM might not deliver adequate understanding of users' attitudes and intentions (Ayeh, 2015). Furthermore, TAM is also criticised by researchers since it neglects the relationship between intention and actual behaviour while focusing on the usage (Bagozzi, 2007). As there is a time gap between the intention and behaviour, the behaviour is open to

be influenced by external factors such as psychological and instrumental procedures (Bagozzi and Edwards, 1998; Bagozzi, 2007).

3.2.1.2 Technology Acceptance Model 2 (TAM2)

The large number of studies which detected the limitations of TAM led researchers to develop this model through the addition of new constructs. One of the most accepted revised versions, known as TAM2, was developed by Venkatesh and Davis (2000). TAM2 mainly brings two groups of new factors: (1) social influence processing factors, and (2) cognitive instrumental processing factors (Tarhini et al., 2015).

Social influence processing factors, which are subjective norms, voluntariness, experience, and image, refer to factors which have a direct influence on an innovation adoption decision. However, cognitive instrumental processing factors, which are job relevance, output quality, result demonstrability, are related to the decision process between system capability and system usefulness. The results showed that these additional factors have increased the explanatory power of TAM (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). TAM2 has been tested by several researchers within differing contexts such as website usage (Lee, 2009), mobile information technology (Zhang et al., 2010), and healthcare informatics (An et al., 2015).

Although TAM2 overcomes many of the TAM limitations, it has also been criticised by researchers. Particularly, TAM2 neglects some external factors since it assumes that all actions of consumers need to be made on a voluntarily basis (Tarhini et al., 2015). However, this is not considered to be possible in practice owing to external factors such as limited skill, limited time, unconscious habits, and environmental limits (Abu-Shanab, 2012). In addition, TAM2 disregards the antecedents of perceived ease of use, while it mostly focuses on perceived usefulness. As a result of these limitations, Venkatesh et al. (2003) proposed a new version of this model: Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT).

3.2.1.3 Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

UTAUT aims to explain consumers' behavioural intentions to use an information system together with their usage behaviour. This model postulates that there are four factors which are essential for accepting technology: performance expectancy, effort

expectancy, facilitating conditions, and social influence (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Moreover, age, gender, experience, and voluntariness of use are proposed in order to moderate the influence of the four factors on usage intention and behaviour previously mentioned.

UTAUT has been developed through the consolidation of the constructs of eight models used to explain information technology adoption. Early tests of this model shows that it explains 70% of the variance in behavioural intention and approximately 50% in usage behaviour (Holden and Karsh, 2010; Venkatesh et al., 2003). UTAUT therefore is considered as an important model; and has been applied in different research contexts such as cloud computing services (Moryson and Moeser, 2016), healthcare informatics (Chen et al., 2003), and mobile banking (Zhou et al., 2010). Conversely, Williams et al. (2011) heavily criticise this model claiming that UTAUT became notable as it relies on TAM. According to their systematic literature review results, almost 90% of articles citing UTAUT only mention it as opposed to testing or developing the model (Williams et al., 2011). Nevertheless, this model is one of the most well-known extension of the TAM.

3.2.1.4 Technology Acceptance Model 3 (TAM3)

The continuous development of TAM leads to the inclusion of other additional factors. Unlike the TAM2, this version of the model mostly focuses on the antecedents of perceived ease of use and brings two set of new factors which are categorised as: (1) Anchor, (2) Adjustment (Venkatesh and Bala, 2008).

The first set of factors are principally based on individual and situational variables which relate to anchoring (i.e., internal control (computer self-efficacy), external control (facilitating conditions), emotion (computer anxiety), and intrinsic motivation (computer playfulness)); while the second set of new factors are adjustments-based (i.e., perceived enjoyment and objective usability) (Venkatesh, 2000; Wook et al., 2014). This model integrates the antecedents of perceived usefulness (Venkatesh, 2000) with the antecedents' perceived ease of use. TAM3 therefore provides a more comprehensive approach than the previous versions in order to explain information technology adoption. Previous researchers have applied this model in many different contexts such as business intelligence (Huang et al., 2012), and data mining technology adoption (Wook et al., 2014). However, although this model is the most

developed (latest) version of TAM, it is still a relatively new model and further empirical research is needed to test its practical use (Tang and Chen, 2011).

Based on the criticisms mentioned above, the use of TAM or it's revised versions is not deemed to be appropriate for this study, although some of its key components were employed. This study therefore has preferred to develop its own research model, IACM, in order to explore how the information obtained in computer-mediated communication platforms is internalised and accepted by consumers. To do so, the IAM (Sussman and Siegal, 2003) was extended with the related components of TRA. Thus, the following section discusses the IAM.

3.2.1.5 Information Adoption Model (IAM)

EWOM conversations consist of basic information transfer. However, whereas the influence of the information might change from person to person; the same content can evoke different notions among receivers (Chaiken and Eagly, 1976; Cheung et al., 2008). To understand how people internalise the information they receive, previous studies have focused on the information adoption process (Nonaka, 1994). In the information systems literature, researchers have applied TRA / TAM – based models to define how people are affected by adopting ideas or information (Ajzen, 1985; Davis, 1989; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). However, Sussman and Siegal (2003) extend this knowledge further by integrating them with dual process theories. IAM is proposed by integrating TAM (Davis, 1989) with the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Petty et al., 1981) which posits that people can be affected by a message in two routes, which are central and peripheral (Shen et al., 2013; Sussman and Siegal, 2003). The central route refers to the essence of arguments within the message, while the peripheral route refers to issues which are indirectly related to the essence of the message (Cheung, Lee, and Rabjohn, 2008; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Shu and Scott, 2014). The IAM has four components: argument quality (which represents the central route), source credibility (which represents the peripheral route), information usefulness and information adoption. With this integration, the IAM offers an explanation as to how people are affected by the information on computer mediated communication platforms. Figure 3.1 shows the IAM.
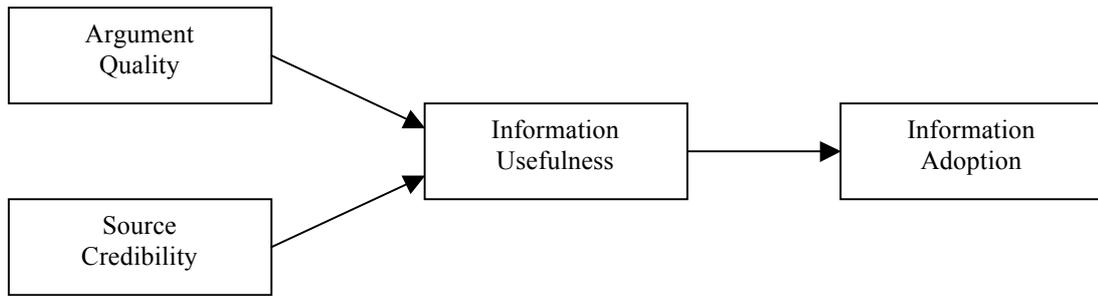
Figure 3.1: Information Adoption Model (Sussman and Siegal, 2003)

EWOM information can be generated by almost every user on the Internet; therefore, quality and credibility of information has now become more critical (Xu, 2014). As the model draws attention, these are among the key determinants for consumers to apply in order to decide whether the information is useful or not; and they have also indirect effects on consumers' information adoption. Furthermore, people tend to act upon information when they find it useful; Davis (1989) also considers the usefulness of information as an essential predictor of information adoption as stated by Sussman and Siegal (2003). Finally, the model shows that information usefulness plays an important role on the information adoption of consumers.

As this model particularly focuses on the influence of information on computer mediated communication platforms, it has been considered applicable to eWOM studies by many researchers (Cheung et al., 2008, 2009; Shu and Scott, 2014). In particular, Cheung et al. (2008) has applied this model within the online discussion forums context, while it is employed by Shu and Scott (2014) within the social media context. As this research focuses on eWOM on social media, the use of IAM is deemed to be appropriate for this study. The components of IAM are applied into this study as information quality, information credibility, information usefulness and information adoption.

Nonetheless, although IAM is a commonly used model, this study criticises it since it only focuses on the characteristics of information, which are quality, credibility and usefulness. The influence of information, however, should not be limited to characteristics of information; consumers' behaviours towards information should also be considered. More specifically, this study argues that the influence of eWOM

on social media not only depends on the characteristics of eWOM information, but also depends on consumers' behaviours towards eWOM information. Although this argument has not yet been empirically tested, it is also supported by Knoll (2015), who reviews the recent eWOM studies conducted in the social media context. The developed model in this study, IACM, therefore extends the IAM through considering behaviours of consumers towards information. The components relating to consumers' behaviour towards eWOM information are derived from TRA. The following section thus discusses the TRA.

3.2.1.6 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The TRA postulates that behavioural intentions, which are the antecedents of behaviour, are decided by attitude and subjective norms (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Madden et al., 1992; Zhang et al., 2014). This theory has been frequently used by the previous research regarding the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Prendergast et al., 2010; Reichelt et al., 2014). However, this study uses only two components of TRA which are attitude and behavioural intention. Behavioural intention is selected instead of behaviour as the aim of this study is to explore the influence of eWOM on purchase intention. Behavioural intention is considered as the antecedent of actual behaviour by a significant number of theories, such as TRA, theory of planned behaviour (TPB), and TAM (Ajzen, 1985; Davis, 1989; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). However, when it comes to the buying behaviour, it is criticised by both old and recent studies, since the buying behaviour is open to be influenced by external factors such as unanticipated income shifts and unexpected promotions (De Cannicre et al., 2009; Foxall, 2005; Infosino, 1986; Morrison, 1979; Sun and Morwitz, 2010). In other words, consumers might not buy the product or service although they have purchase intentions. As the aim of this study is to understand the influence of eWOM information, only the purchase intention is used rather than the actual purchase behaviour.

On the other hand, the component of subjective norms is disregarded, as it is also criticised by some researchers (Miller, 2002). Subjective norms refer to how people consider other people would view them if they performed the behaviour. This relationship was also proposed by TPB (Ajzen, 1985). However, Miller (2002)

argues that if a person's personality is not influenced by the thoughts of others, then subjective norms would carry little weight in predicting the intention or behaviour. Therefore, only the aforementioned two constructs are borrowed and applied as attitude towards information and purchase intention. Additionally, this study adds needs of information to the research model as another, further construct. Needs of information is found as consumer behaviour towards eWOM information, during the review of the literature (Chu and Kim, 2011; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Wolny and Mueller, 2013). The following subsection demonstrates the research model along with all the constructs.

3.2.1.7 The Research Model (IACM)

This study claims that the characteristics of eWOM information are not sufficient to examine the influence of eWOM on consumers' purchase intentions; the behaviour of consumers towards the eWOM information should be included in the evaluation. Therefore, it creates a new model, which is named IACM. Both characteristics of eWOM information and consumers' behaviour towards eWOM information are considered together whilst developing the IACM (Erkan and Evans, 2016a).

As explained above, this model extends the IAM (Sussman and Siegal, 2003) through the integration of related parts of TRA (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The IAM explains the characteristics of eWOM information, while the related components of TRA represents consumer behaviour regarding eWOM information. With this integration, the research model of this study offers to carry the IAM one step further. The current version of IAM only explains the adoption of information, whereas the IACM expands the notion of information adoption through the inclusion of the behaviour of the consumer; and defines how this process influences behavioural intention.

Consequently, the IACM examines the relationships between the following components: information quality, information credibility, needs of information, attitude towards information, information usefulness, information adoption and purchase intention. Figure 3.2 demonstrates the proposed research model of this study.
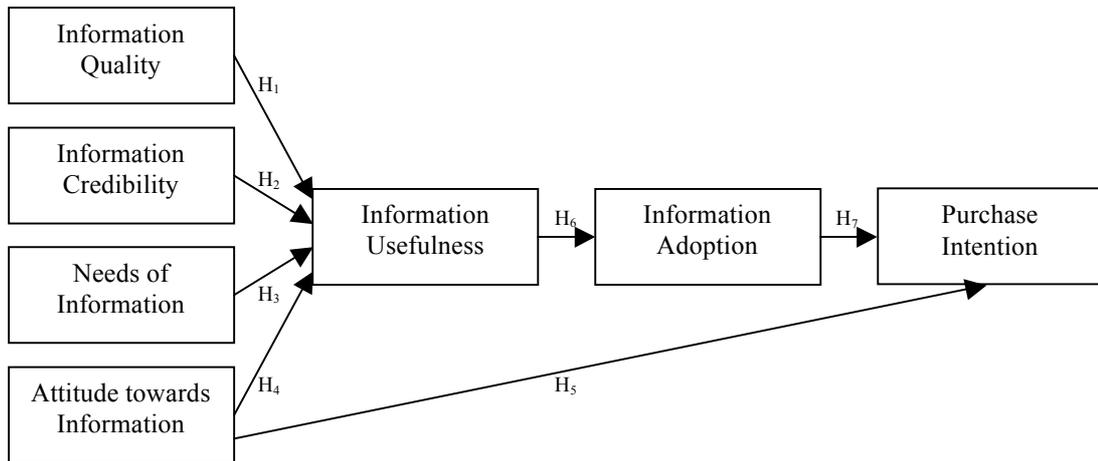
Figure 3.2: The Proposed Research Model in the Contextual Study (the 1st phase)

3.2.2 Hypotheses Development

As shown in figure 3.2, the research model consists of seven constructs and seven hypotheses which are detailed and discussed below:

H1:   Quality of eWOM information is positively related to usefulness of eWOM information.

H2:   Credibility of eWOM information is positively related to usefulness of eWOM information.

H3:   Needs of eWOM information is positively related to usefulness of eWOM information.

H4:   Attitude towards eWOM information is positively related to usefulness of eWOM information.

H5:   Attitude towards eWOM information is positively related to consumers' purchase intention.

H6:   Usefulness of eWOM information is positively related to adoption of eWOM information.

H7:   Adoption of eWOM information is positively related to consumers' purchase intention.

3.2.2.1 Information Quality and Information Usefulness

Information quality refers to the persuasive strength of the message (Bhattacherjee and Sanford, 2006). Consumers consider the information useful when they consider the quality of information high and satisfying (Cheung et al., 2008; Sussman and Siegal, 2003); leading them to approach products and services more eagerly (Olshavsky, 1985). Therefore, the information quality has been considered as an important element by the research in different contexts (DeLone and McLean, 1992; Lin et al., 2011; Rieh, 2002). It has also been studied within the eWOM context (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Cheung et al., 2008); in fact, previous researchers found that the quality of online reviews has a positive influence on purchase intention (Lee and Shin, 2014; Park et al., 2007). For this reason, this study predicts the quality of eWOM information as one of the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions; and it is influential on the usefulness of eWOM information.

H1:   Quality of eWOM information is positively related to usefulness of eWOM information.

3.2.2.2 Information Credibility and Information Usefulness

Information credibility refers to a message receiver's perception of the credibility of a message. According to Cheung et al. (2008), consumers find the information more useful when they consider it to be credible. Significant importance has been given by previous researchers to the information credibility; while Wathen and Burkell (2002) consider it as the initial factor in the individuals' persuasion process, Awad and Ragowsky (2008) find the information credibility to be the main determinant in the decision making process of consumers. In fact, prior studies have also shown the influence of information credibility on information adoption (McKnight and Kacmar, 2006) and consumers' purchase intentions (Nabi and Hendriks, 2003; Prendergast et al., 2010). Therefore, based on IAM, this study predicts that the credibility of eWOM information is positively related to the usefulness of eWOM information.

H2:   Credibility of eWOM information is positively related to usefulness of eWOM information.

3.2.2.3 Needs of Information and Information Usefulness

Needs of information have previously been studied as a motivator for WOM engagement (Sundaram et al., 1998). Afterwards, this notion has been used as "advice seeking" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Wolny and Mueller, 2013) and "opinion seeking" (Chu and Kim, 2011) by subsequent studies with different research questions. However, this study added needs of information into its research model as one of the dependent variables as it anticipates that people who need eWOM information on social media, are more likely to find them useful and adoptable. Eventually, as one of the consumer behaviours towards eWOM information, "needs of information" can have an influence on purchase intention. Therefore, as a result of findings on the related literature, it is included to the research model as a dependent variable and the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3:   Needs of eWOM information is positively related to usefulness of eWOM information.

3.2.2.4 Attitude towards Information and Information Usefulness

Attitude towards information is another factor which this study considered as one of the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions. This component is adapted from the Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory, TRA. Attitudes of consumers regarding eWOM have been examined in several studies (Park et al., 2007; Prendergast et al., 2010; Wolny and Mueller, 2013). However, its influence on information usefulness has not been tested yet. Consumers, who have positive attitudes towards eWOM information on social media are more likely to find them useful and adoptable. Therefore, attitude towards information is added as a dependent variable and the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4:   Attitude towards eWOM information is positively related to usefulness of eWOM information.

3.2.2.5 Attitude towards Information and Purchase Intention

Consumers are more likely to have higher purchase intentions if they have positive attitudes towards eWOM information on social media. The influence of the attitudes of consumers on behavioural intentions has been highlighted and strongly validated in several theories. In addition to the TRA (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), TPB (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) and TAM (Bagozzi et al., 1992; Davis, 1989) also indicate the relationship between attitude and behavioural intention. According to TRA, attitude is one of the critical predictors of behavioural intention. Therefore, using the TRA, this study hypothesises that attitudes of social media users towards the eWOM information can have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions.

H5:   Attitude towards eWOM information is positively related to consumers' purchase intention.

3.2.2.6 Information Usefulness and Information Adoption

Information usefulness refers to people's perception that using new information will improve their performance (Bailey and Pearson, 1983; Cheung et al., 2008). Information usefulness is considered as a main predictor of information adoption (Davis, 1989; Sussman and Siegal, 2003) and purchase intention (Lee and Koo, 2015); because consumers tend to engage with the information when they find it useful. In fact, previous research related to eWOM, found usefulness of eWOM information influential on adoption of eWOM information (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Liu and Zhang, 2010). Consumers who consider the information to be useful are likely to have more confidence in adopting it (Nabi and Hendriks, 2003), particularly on social media, as people encountering a significant amount of eWOM information (Chu and Kim, 2011), might have greater likelihood of adopting it when they find the eWOM information useful. Owing to the aforementioned reasons, the following hypothesis is proposed between information usefulness and information adoption.

H6:   Usefulness of eWOM information is positively related to adoption of eWOM information.

3.2.2.7 Information Adoption and Purchase Intention

Social media users, either intentionally or unintentionally, are exposed to a lot of eWOM information and prior studies found such information effective on consumers' purchase intentions (Iyengar et al., 2009; See-To and Ho, 2014; Wang et al., 2012). However, not all eWOM information on social media has the same effect on consumers; the level of impact can vary (Yang, 2012). Consumers who adopt the eWOM information which they receive are more likely to have higher purchase intentions. Although the influence of the adoption of eWOM information on purchase intention has not been empirically tested yet, it has been suggested by previous researchers (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Cheung et al., 2009). Therefore, through linking the IAM and TRA, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

H7:   Adoption of eWOM information is positively related to consumers' purchase intention.

3.2.3 Summary of the Section

This section has briefly presented the research need and the importance of developing a research model to understand the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions. The theoretical background which underpins the research model consisted of two core theories: IAM and TRA. Selection of both theories were discussed and justified. Furthermore, the use of these theories in this research was explained. Thereafter, based on the theoretical background section, the research model with seven hypotheses was presented. Consequently, all the hypotheses were supported from the previous literature. The following section introduces the theoretical background and hypothesis development of the second phase of this research.

3.3 Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development of the Second Phase of This Research

This section presents the theoretical background of the comparative study conducted in this research. To provide better understanding, it is organised as four subsections which are theoretical background, research framework, hypotheses development, and a summary of the section.

3.3.1 Theoretical Background

The second phase of this research aims to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions. EWOM is considered as one of the most helpful information sources by consumers as it consists of opinions and experiences of fellow customers instead of marketer generated information (Brown et al., 2007; Mazzarol et al., 2007; Munnukka et al., 2015). The Internet has facilitated this eWOM communication between consumers through variety of platforms such as blogs, consumer review websites, discussion forums, shopping websites, and social media websites (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). The eWOM on all the mentioned platforms were found influential on consumers in several studies (Gauri et al., 2008; Hsu and Tsou, 2011; Huang and Chen, 2006; Park et al., 2007; See-To and Ho, 2014). However, there is one major difference between social media and other online platforms in terms of eWOM. Social media enables users to communicate with familiar people while other platforms allow anonymous communication between users (Kozinets et al., 2010; Moran and Muzellec, 2014). This reduced anonymity has the potential to make eWOM information more credible (Chu and Choi, 2011; Wallace et al., 2009). Therefore, this study expects the influence of eWOM on social media to be more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than the eWOM on other online platforms (Erkan and Evans, 2016b). Figure 3.3 illustrates the mentioned research gap which has arisen by the advent of social media:

The advent of
Social Media

Before
Social Media

With
Social Media

EWOM
was only occurring
between
anonymous
people

EWOM
is occurring
between people
who know each
other

Their impacts
on consumers' purchase
intentions should be different
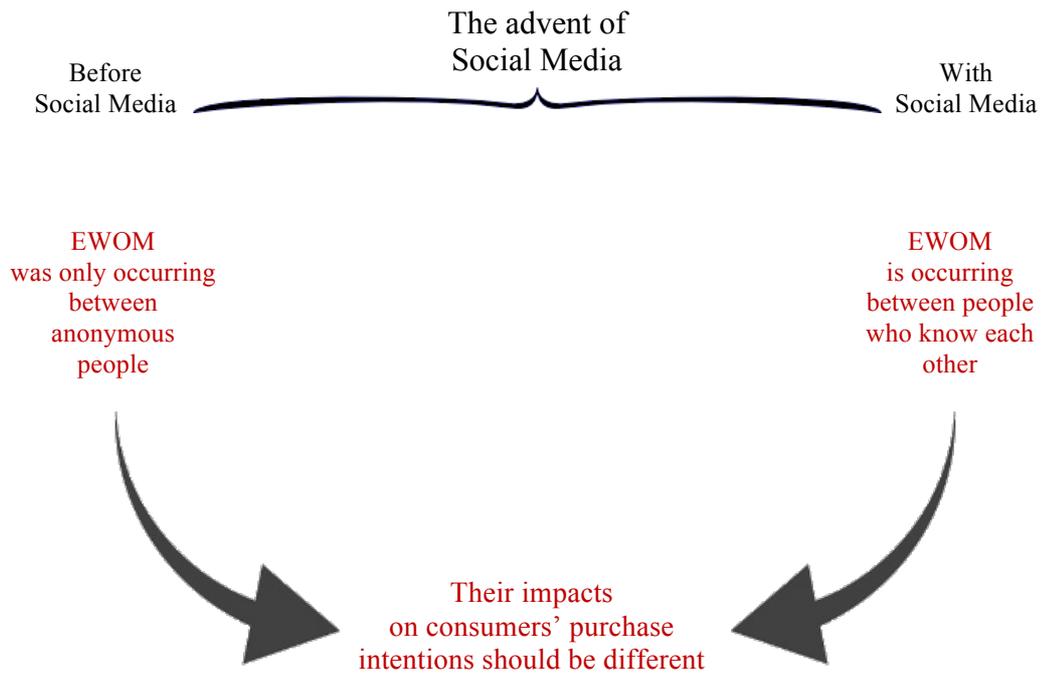
Figure 3.3: The Research Gap

Previously, separate studies have been conducted to understand the impact of eWOM between familiar people on social media (Iyengar et al., 2009; See-To and Ho, 2014; Wallace et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012), and the impact of eWOM between anonymous people on shopping websites through online reviews (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Gu et al., 2012; Li and Zhan, 2011; Park et al., 2007). However, those impacts have not been compared yet. Moreover, some previous researchers consider the anonymity issue to be an advantage for eWOM (Chatterjee, 2001; Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006) while many others do not agree with this opinion and expect the opposite. The second group of researchers anticipate the eWOM on social media to be more influential since it occurs between people who already know each other (Chu and Choi, 2011; Moran and Muzellec, 2014; Park et al., 2007). In order to elucidate this uncertainty, this study empirically compares the impacts of eWOM on these different platforms. For this comparison, this study selected social media and shopping websites. Social media was selected as it allows eWOM between familiar people. Shopping websites were selected among the other anonymous eWOM platforms since reaching users of these websites is more convenient than blogs, consumer reviews websites, and discussion forums.

3.3.2 Research Framework

This study empirically tests and compares the impacts of eWOM on the aforementioned platforms based on six variables: information quality, information credibility, needs of information, attitude towards information, information usefulness, and information adoption. These variables were considered as the determinants of eWOM information which influence consumers' purchase intentions, since they were validated in the first phase of this research. Four of these variables (namely, information quality, information credibility, information usefulness, and information adoption) were adapted from IAM (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). Also, needs of information was developed from Chu and Kim's study (2011), while attitude towards information was adapted from Fishbein and Ajzen's theory, TRA (1975). Figure 3.4 demonstrates all the variables which were used in order to compare the influence of eWOM between familiar people on social media and eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms in the context of purchase intention.
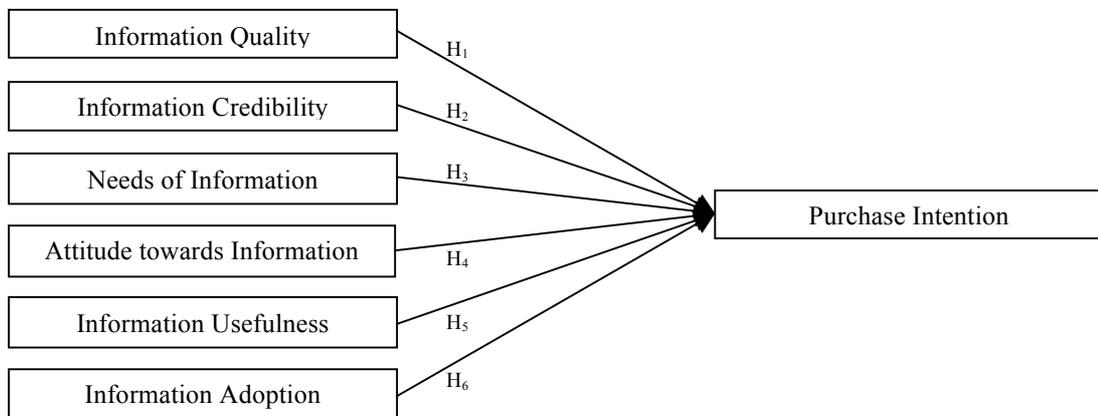
Figure 3.4: Framework of the Comparative Study (the 2nd phase)

3.3.3 Hypotheses Development

As shown in figure 3.4, the framework of this study consists of six dependent variables; the hypotheses are proposed as follows:

H1:   Quality of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the quality of eWOM information on shopping websites.

H2:   Credibility of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the credibility of eWOM information on shopping websites.

H3:   Needs of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the needs of eWOM information on shopping websites.

H4:   Attitude towards eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the attitude towards eWOM information on shopping websites.

H5:   Usefulness of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the usefulness of eWOM information on shopping websites.

H6:   Adoption of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the adoption of eWOM information on shopping websites.

These hypotheses are detailed and discussed below.

3.3.3.1 Information Quality

Information quality has been described as the strength of the meaning embedded in a message (Yeap et al., 2014). As a result of extensive Internet usage, eWOM information can now be generated by almost everyone; thus, quality of information has become more important for consumers (Reichelt et al., 2014; Yoo et al., 2015). It therefore plays a critical role on consumers' evaluations about product and services (Filieri and McLeay, 2014). The information quality has been studied by previous researchers within the eWOM context (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Cheung et al., 2008); and was found to be influential on consumers (Lee and Shin, 2014). In fact, Park et al. (2007) found that quality of reviews on shopping websites influences consumers' purchase intentions. Also, in the first phase of this research, information

quality was found to be one of the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions. However, as the aim of this phase of the research is to compare the effects of eWOM information on different platforms, the hypothesis is proposed as the following:

H1:   Quality of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the quality of eWOM information on shopping websites.

3.3.3.2 Information Credibility

Information credibility refers to the perceptions of the message receivers about the credibility of a message. It is considered as one of the critical factors in the decision making process of consumers (Awad and Ragowsky, 2008; Wathen and Burkell, 2002). Also, many previous studies have shown a positive relationship between information credibility and consumers' purchase intentions (Dou et al., 2012; Hsu and Tsou, 2011; Nabi and Hendriks, 2003; Park et al., 2007; Prendergast et al., 2010). Additionally, the first phase of this research has found the information credibility to be one of the determinants of eWOM information which influences consumers' purchase intentions. Therefore, this study regards information credibility as one of the factors which affects consumers' purchase intentions; and, within the context of this study, it predicts that the credibility of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the credibility of eWOM information on shopping websites.

H2:   Credibility of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the credibility of eWOM information on shopping websites.

3.3.3.3 Needs of Information

Needs of information is another determinant which was found influential on consumers' purchase intentions through the first phase of this research. Needs of information was adapted from the previous studies which use this concept as

"opinion seeking" (Chu and Kim, 2011), and "advice seeking" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Wolny and Mueller, 2013) in different research contexts. Chu and Kim (2011) consider it as one of the aspects of eWOM behaviour on social media; while Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), and Wolny and Mueller (2013) regard it as one of the motivators of eWOM. Early researchers have also used this notion as a motivator for WOM engagement (Sundaram et al., 1998). Flynn et al. (1996) highlights that consumers who have high needs of information tend to search for information from others when they are in a purchase decision making process. This study therefore considers it as one of the determinants; and, within the context of the study, it hypothesises that the needs of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the needs of eWOM information on shopping websites.

H3:   Needs of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the needs of eWOM information on shopping websites.

3.3.3.4 Attitude towards Information

Attitude towards information was adapted from the Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory, TRA. TRA assumes the attitude towards behaviour as the antecedent of behavioural intention. In addition to TRA (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), two further theories, TPB (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) and TAM (Bagozzi et al., 1992; Davis, 1989), also draw attention to same relationship between attitude towards behaviour and behavioural intention. The relationship has been tested in several studies; however Prendergast et al. (2010) have tested this relationship in the eWOM and purchase intention context. According to the results of their study, Prendergast et al. (2010) underline that consumers' positive attitudes towards eWOM information in an online forum strengthen purchase intention. In other words, consumers who have positive attitudes towards eWOM information are more likely to have higher purchase intentions; as it is validated in the first phase of this research. However, attitude towards information is used as one of the determinants of the comparison, within the context of this study. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H4:   Attitude towards eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the attitude towards eWOM information on shopping websites.

3.3.3.5 Information Usefulness

Information usefulness indicates perceptions of consumers' that using information will enhance their performance (Bailey and Pearson, 1983; Cheung et al., 2008). Chiang and Jang (2007) have highlighted the relationship between information usefulness and purchase intention and have found it worthy to study. Subsequently, information usefulness was found positively related to purchase intention by other researchers (Lee and Koo, 2015; Liu and Zhang, 2010; Xia and Bechwati, 2008). More specifically, Lee and Koo (2015) have examined the message usefulness of online reviews; and found it to be positively associated with purchase intention. Furthermore, the first phase of this research has tested this notion within the social media context; and it was found to be one of the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions. Consumers who consider the information to be useful have more confidence using it for purchasing decisions (Nabi and Hendriks, 2003). Therefore, the information usefulness is used in this study to compare the influences of eWOM information on different platforms; and the following hypothesis is proposed.

H5:   Usefulness of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the usefulness of eWOM information on shopping websites.

3.3.3.6 Information Adoption

Consumers who engage and adapt eWOM information are more likely to have higher purchase intentions. This relationship between information adoption and purchase intention had been suggested by previous researchers (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Cheung et al., 2009). Thereafter, the first phase of this research has tested the aforementioned relationship and has found a direct positive influence of information adoption on purchase intention. The information adoption was found to be one of the determinants of eWOM on social media which influences consumers' purchase

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intentions. However, the information adoption process can be different in varied eWOM platforms (Cheung et al., 2009; Fang, 2014). Therefore, this study predicts that the adoption of eWOM information on social media and shopping websites could have a different influence on consumers' purchase intentions. In fact, as eWOM information has been exchanged among familiar people on social media rather than anonymous people as it is in shopping websites, this study anticipates that social media has a stronger effect than shopping websites in terms of adoption of eWOM information. The last hypothesis is proposed as the following.

H6:   Adoption of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the adoption of eWOM information on shopping websites.

3.3.4 Summary of the Section

This section has briefly presented the research need and theoretical background of the second phase of this research, along with the importance of comparing the influence of eWOM between familiar people on social media and the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms. Research hypotheses were then presented based on the theoretical background. Consequently, all the six hypotheses were supported with the related literature and the results of the first phase of this research. The following section concludes the chapter.

3.4 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, the theoretical background and hypotheses development of both contextual and comparative studies conducted in this research were presented. The employed theories were discussed and their uses were explained. In addition, the theoretical background of the research model developed in the first phase and the framework used in the second phase were presented along with the related research hypotheses.

The next chapter discusses the specified methodology to validate the theoretical model and proposed hypotheses in this research.

CHAPTER 4:
METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, this research developed a theoretical model named IACM, in order to explore the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions (in the first phase). Additionally, for the second phase, a framework was built in order to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions. To be able to conduct these both contextual and comparative studies, this current chapter discusses different research methodologies to address the most appropriate ones. For this purpose, various research philosophies, approaches, and strategies are introduced in this chapter along with the justifications of methodological choices.

More specifically, three research philosophies (namely – positivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism) are discussed in Section 4.2 in order to identify the most appropriate philosophy for this research. Section 4.3 then provides an outline of research design and explains the general research plan in the form of a diagram. Next, two main research approaches, which are deductive approach and inductive approach, are highlighted and justifications of selected approach are presented in Section 4.4. Section 4.5 discusses different research strategies and explains the appropriate strategy for this research. Section 4.6 introduces different data collection methods and presents the justifications of these selected methods. Section 4.7 defines the sampling together with the different sampling strategies. The selected sampling strategy in this research is also introduced in this section along with the population and sample size. Section 4.8 provides the details of pilot testing conducted in this research. Thereafter, Section 4.9 discusses the data analysis techniques employed in this research. Finally, ethical considerations are presented in the Section 4.10; and Section 4.11 concludes the chapter.

4.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to the philosophical view and assumptions of a researcher regarding how research should be conducted to develop knowledge (Collis and Hussey, 2003). The researcher can select the most appropriate research strategy and method based on these assumptions (Saunders et al., 2012); therefore understanding

of research paradigms is critical for researchers. In other words, researchers can have a more productive approach to the research process, the way of data collection and the analysis if they consider the details and differences of research paradigms. Research philosophies can be thought of on a continuum with two extremes, namely positivism and interpretivism (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Positivism considers reality as a 'concrete structure,' while interpretivism considers it as a 'projection of human imagination' (Creswell, 2009; Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Morgan and Smircich (1980) identify six stages on this continuum of core ontological assumptions, which are demonstrated in Figure 4.1.

Positivism   **Interpretivism**

| Reality as a concrete structure | Reality as a concrete process | Reality as a contextual field of information | Reality as a realm of symbolic discourse | Reality as a social construction | Reality as a projection of human imagination |
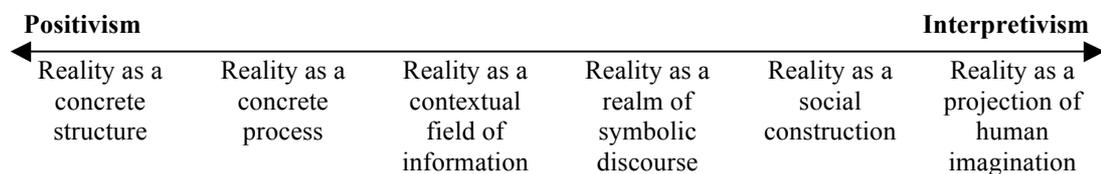
Source: Adapted from Morgan and Smircich (1980)

Figure 4.1: Continuum of Core Ontological Assumptions

Adopting research philosophies is argued to have important implications on the research approach and employed methods (Collis and Hussey, 2009). The assumptions of chosen paradigms can lead researchers to achieve the purpose of the study. Different research paradigms not only have differing ontological assumptions; they also have different epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, methodological assumptions. Table 4.1 presents the philosophical assumptions of the two main paradigms, which are positivism and interpretivism. In addition, Table 4.2 shows the main features of these two paradigms.

Table 4.1: The Assumptions of the Positivism and Interpretivism

Assumption	Question	Positivism	Interpretivism
Ontological	What is the nature of reality?	Reality is objective and singular, apart from the researcher	Reality is subjective and multiple as seen by participants in a study

Epistemological	What is the relationship of the researcher to that researched?	Researcher is independent from that being researched	Researcher interacts with that being researched
Axiological	What is the role of values?	Value-free and unbiased	Value-laden and biased
Rhetorical	What is the language of research?	- Formal - Based on set definitions - Impersonal voice - Use of accepted quantitative words	- Informal - Evolving decisions - Personal voice - Use of accepted qualitative words
Methodological	What is the process of research?	- Deductive process - Cause and effect - Static design (categories isolated before study) - Context-free - Generalisations leading to prediction, explanation and understanding - Accurate and reliable through validity and reliability	- Inductive process - Mutual simultaneous shaping of factors - Emerging design (categories identified during study) - Context-bound - Patterns, theories developed for understanding - Accurate and reliable through verification

Source: Collis and Hussey (2003, p.49)

Table 4.2: The Main Features of the Positivism and Interpretivism.

Positivism	Interpretivism
Tends to produce quantitative data	Tends to produce qualitative data
Uses large samples	Uses small samples
Concerned with hypothesis testing	Concerned with generating theories
Data is highly specific and precise	Data is rich and subjective
The location is artificial	The location is natural

Reliability is high	Reliability is low
Validity is low	Validity is high
Generalises from sample to population	Generalises from one setting to another

Source: Collis and Hussey (2003, p.55)

4.2.1 Positivism

Positivism assumes that the reality can be objectively described by measurable properties and is dependent upon the researchers' instruments; therefore the positivism is linked with quantitative methods and statistical analysis (Collis and Hussey, 2003). The quantitative and deductive approach predicts and explains situations in the social world by examining causal relationships between its components. Positivist studies employ the previously examined relationships, which are tested with structured instrumentation (Babbie, 1997; Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). They use this existing literature to establish proper theories with appropriate hypotheses (Creswell, 2009). This paradigm considers numerical data collection for investigating and understanding human behaviours (Saunders et al., 2012). As the collected data is numerical, the results usually suggest valid or invalid outcomes, more commonly known as acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses (Saunders et al., 2012).

4.2.2 Interpretivism

On the other hand, unlike positivism, interpretivism assumes that the reality cannot be objectively measured since it is in our mind and subjective; and also the reality is affected by the act of examining it (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Interpretivists therefore have an inductive approach; and they use qualitative methods and analysis to understand social phenomenon. In this paradigm, the knowledge is considered hidden and needs to be revealed through deep thinking (Schwandt, 2000). The researcher reveals the knowledge by reasoning the interactive dialogues with participants (Ponterotto, 2005). Interactive researchers, therefore, tend not to use quantitative methods and numerical data; favouring the use of qualitative data collection methods in order to investigate and understand human behaviours.

4.2.3 Pragmatism

In addition to positivism and interpretivism; Saunders et al. (2012) draw attention to another perspective which is called pragmatism. A pragmatist paradigm considers the research question as the most important determinant of the research philosophy. If the research question does not specifically require either a positivist or interpretivist paradigm, the pragmatist paradigm finds it possible to work with both philosophies (Saunders et al., 2012). Since the major concern of this paradigm is the problem itself rather than the methods used (Patton, 2015); researchers can use all the approaches to understand the problem (Creswell, 2009). Pragmatists combine different methods in a single study. The quantitative techniques are usually used to summarise the large amount of data to generalise the results, whereas the qualitative techniques are used to understand social phenomenon from the respondents' perspective for developing themes and revealing stories. This paradigm is also preferred by many researchers in social and behavioural sciences (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

4.2.4 Rationale for the Adopted Research Philosophy

Given the various assumptions explaining positivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism; it can be understood that this research was conducted with a pragmatist paradigm. The first phase of this research investigates the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions. To do so, it started by reviewing the related literature and developed a research model along with seven hypotheses. It was thus carried out by using quantitative methods, as the primary focus of this study is to test the proposed research model, IACM. From the methodological perspective, quantitative methods are more employable to examine the relationships between independent and dependent variables and to test the hypotheses through collected data (Saunders et al., 2012). Additionally, in the second phase, as the aim of the study is to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions, a comparison was conducted based on the related hypotheses. Hence, this part of the comparative study was also carried out by using quantitative methods. However, in the second part of the comparative study; since some results were contrary to expectations, they

brought a new question starting with a common interrogative word: "Why?" Rather than leaving the question unanswered, this research also administered in-depth interviews to enlighten the insightful results found in the study. Therefore, the adopted philosophy in this research is considered as pragmatism.

Different research philosophies were introduced in this section along with the appropriate philosophy for this research. The following section introduces the design of this research.

4.3 Research Design

Research design is defined as the general plan of research which helps to obtain answers to research questions (Saunders et al., 2012). A detailed plan which includes clear research objectives, coherent research questions, a specific source of data collection and techniques for data analysis can be helpful for researchers to guide and focus their studies (Saunders et al., 2012). The plan of this study has three main stages: preparing the research design, conducting the first phase, and conducting the second phase. In the first stage, a detailed literature review was performed and the research needs were identified. Thereafter, a theoretical model and hypotheses were developed and the research strategy was chosen.

In the second stage, the first phase of this research was conducted in two steps; data collection and analysis. Initially, a pilot study was carried out in order to check the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The final questionnaire was then formed and main data collection was conducted. Thereafter the collected data was analysed using SEM technique; and the results were discussed to draw implications.

In the third stage, the second phase of this research was conducted in three steps. To answer research questions, firstly the hypotheses were tested through using a multiple regression analysis technique. However, since the results were contrary to those expected, in-depth interviews were conducted in the second step in order to enlighten the found results. Finally, the collected data was examined through thematic analysis to identify key themes within the data; findings were then discussed to draw implications. Figure 4.2 re-illustrates the design of this research.
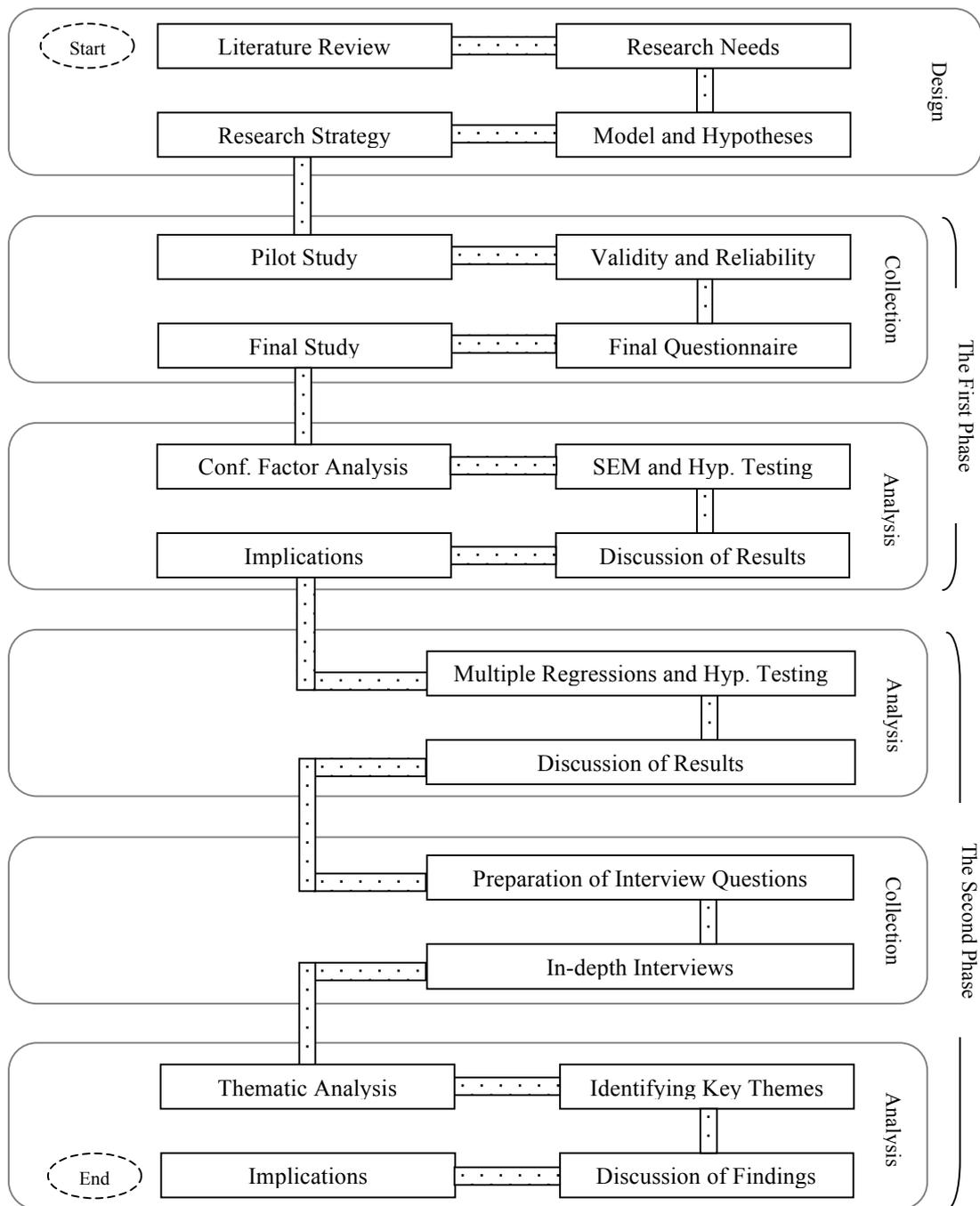
Figure 4.2: The Design of This Research

The design of this research was introduced in this section. The following section introduces different research approaches in addition to the adopted approach in this research.

4.4 Research Approach

Research approach is another essential principle for researchers as well as research philosophy. Therefore, initially this section introduces deductive and inductive approaches. Triangulation of these approaches is then discussed. Finally, the last part of this section justifies the adopted research approach.

4.4.1 Deductive and Inductive Approaches

There are two main research approaches usually chosen by researchers, namely deductive approach and inductive approach (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The deductive approach is generally associated with quantitative research where the theory guides the study (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Quantitative research tests objective theories by investigating the relationships among variables (Creswell, 2009). In the deductive approach, the research starts with hypotheses and continues with empirical examination in order to confirm or reject them; therefore it is connected with positivist paradigm (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Finally, quantitative studies apply experiment or survey as data collection methods (Saunders et al., 2012). However, conversely, the inductive approach is in the opposite position of the deductive approach. The inductive approach is usually associated with qualitative research where the theory is an outcome of the study (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Qualitative research explores social or human problems by understanding individuals and groups (Creswell, 2009). Unlike the deductive approach, the research does not start with hypotheses in the inductive approach. Instead, researchers use research questions to narrow the scope of the study and draw conclusions through findings; therefore it is connected with interpretivist paradigm (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Finally, qualitative studies apply the following as data collection methods: case study, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, and ethnography (Saunders et al., 2012). Table 4.3 presents the differences between deductive approach and inductive approach.

Table 4.3: Differences between Deductive and Inductive Approaches

	Deductive Approach	Inductive Approach
Logic	In a deductive inference, when the	In an inductive inference, known

	premises are true, the conclusion must also be true	premises are used to generate untested conclusions
Generalizability	Generalising from the general to the specific	Generalising from the specific to the general
Use of data	Data collection is used to evaluate propositions or hypotheses related to an existing theory	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns and create a conceptual framework
Theory	Theory falsification or verification	Theory generation and building

Source: Saunders et al. (2012, p.144)

4.4.2 Triangulation of Different Approaches

On the other hand, as Saunders et al. (2012) draw attention, there are no rigid divisions between deductive and inductive approaches; it is possible to combine these approaches within the same piece of research. Triangulating / mixing the quantitative and qualitative methods can provide a better understanding for the research problem (Creswell, 2009; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Particularly in marketing research, this approach can bring valuable outcomes since the weakness of one method is compensated for by the strengths of the other (Deshpande, 1983); it is therefore preferred by marketing researchers (Harrison and Reilly, 2011). The reasons for combining methods are considerably various. Bryman (2006) summarises these reasons which lead users to triangulate the methods; having different research questions, enhancing validity or credibility, explaining surprising results, are considered as some of these reasons. For instance, researchers combine quantitative and qualitative methods when one brings surprising outputs which can be clarified by employing the other (Bryman, 2006).

4.4.3 Rationale for the Adopted Research Approach

Collis and Hussey (2009) underline the need for adopting the correct research approach which supports the achievement of the research aim and objectives. The first phase of this research develops a theoretical model and associated hypotheses

based on the current literature with the purpose of testing them to ascertain whether they are confirmed or rejected. The second phase of this research also has hypotheses to be tested. This study, therefore, has developed measurement instruments for each of the seven variables (information quality, information credibility, needs of information, attitude towards information, information usefulness, information adoption, and purchase intention) used to statistically assess the influence of eWOM on social media and shopping websites. However, as previously mentioned, insightful test results in the second phase of this research brought a question starting with "Why," and this situation led the research to also apply qualitative methods. Rather than leaving the new question unanswered, this research conducted in-depth interviews to enlighten the survey results. A qualitative method is employed here since it is considered appropriate when there is a need to reveal what surrounds a phenomenon (Brannen, 1992; Carson et al., 2001). Thus, the adopted approach in this research is considered as triangulation (Saunders et al., 2012).

Different research approaches were introduced in this section along with the appropriate approach for this research. The following section introduces the strategy performed in this research.

4.5 Research Strategy

Research strategy is considered as the methodological link between the selected research paradigm and the following preferences of methods for data collection and analysis (Saunders et al., 2012). It refers to a plan of researchers in order to conduct successful research by fully addressing the research questions (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2012). Saunders et al. (2012) summarise the different research strategies as: experiment, survey, archival research, case study, ethnography, action research, grounded theory, narrative inquiry. Among these research strategies; experiment and survey are principally linked with quantitative research design; archival research and case study are principally linked with mixed method design, where quantitative and qualitative techniques are combined; and the rest of the strategies, which are ethnography, action research, grounded theory and narrative inquiry, are principally linked with qualitative research design (Saunders et al.,

2012). Table 4.4 presents the mentioned research strategies with linked research approaches.

Table 4.4: Research Strategies with linked Research Approaches

Research Approach	Research Strategy
Quantitative	Experiment
	Survey
Mixed	Archival Research
	Case Study
	Ethnography
	Action Research
	Grounded Theory
Qualitative	Narrative Inquiry

Source: Adapted from (Saunders et al., 2012)

Collis and Hussey (2009) are also the researchers who draw attention to the impact of adopted research philosophy on the selection of research strategy. Therefore, as this study has adopted a quantitative approach for its first phase; experiment and survey strategies appeared as possible alternatives for this research. Furthermore, since this research needs to test and validate its theoretical model and hypotheses, the experiment and survey strategies are considered relevant. In the following subsection, thus, the strategies, which are principally linked with quantitative approach, are introduced.

4.5.1 Experiment as a Research Strategy

Experimental studies test controlled conditions in order to examine the validity of hypotheses and answer the research questions. These studies can be conducted either in a natural environment or in a laboratory (Collis and Hussey, 2009). This research strategy enables researchers to explore causal relations of the variables in the research context. Since the researchers have control over all variables, they can

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manipulate the independent variables to observe their influence on the dependent variables (Saunders et al., 2012). Previous studies on eWOM have used experiments; the influence of eWOM messages created by the researchers were tested on consumers in a laboratory environment (Sen and Lerman, 2007; Zhang et al., 2010). For instance, Lee and Youn (2009), who want to test the influence of different eWOM platforms on consumer product judgement, create their own eWOM information through online reviews and show them to participants of the study. However, experimental technique is not found appropriate for the aim and objectives of this study. Since this study aims to measure the influence of eWOM on social media created by friends, instead of anonymous people; the eWOM information tested in this study should be real (it cannot be manipulated). The eWOM information tested in this study, thus, should be created by friends of the participants. Therefore, as this method is not suitable, the survey method is employed as a research strategy of this study.

4.5.2 Survey as a Research Strategy

Survey methods are primarily used to collect data from a sample with the aim of statistically analysing it to generalise the results to a population (Collis and Hussey, 2009). This research strategy allows researchers to collect a large amount of data from a large population in a highly economical way (Saunders et al., 2012). Survey methods are usually associated with a deductive approach which starts with the hypotheses to test them to ascertain whether they are confirmed or rejected (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Also, surveys are appropriate for research which attempts to test its theory to improve the understanding of the social phenomenon (Collis and Hussey, 2009). These aforementioned features enable survey methods appropriate for this study.

Firstly, since this study aims to test its hypotheses; it would require a large quantity of data for statistical analysis. As survey methods provide a) fast, b) easy and c) cost-effective way of data collection from a large amount of participants, they were considered to be appropriate for this study (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Malhotra et al., 2012; Saunders et al., 2012). Secondly, this method produces consistent data since the participants are provided with a number of fixed answers, which makes the collected data easier to code, analyse, and interpret (Malhotra et al., 2012). This

research, therefore, has chosen the survey methods as a research strategy. Fowler (2014) underlines three important aspects for conducting a survey; data collection method, instrument development, and sampling. These aspects are discussed in the following sections (Section 4.6 and 4.7).

This research was conducted with the survey strategy. However, in the second phase, the results were found contrary to expectations. As mentioned earlier, in order to enlighten the results, this research also includes in-depth interviews. As this research was conducted with a quantitative approach while the mentioned method is a qualitative technique; the following subsection explains how the in-depth interviews were adopted in this research.

4.5.3 The Adoption of In-depth Interviews

Creswell (2009) highlights two types of triangulation which combine quantitative and qualitative methods concurrently or sequentially. In sequential procedures, researchers can begin with qualitative methods for explorative purposes and continue with quantitative methods to generalize the results by using a large sample. Alternatively, researchers can start with quantitative methods in order to test hypotheses and continue with qualitative methods to bring deeper understanding for the research. This research has followed the latter sequential procedure for the second phase; it has started with a quantitative method and is followed by a qualitative one.

The aim of the second phase of this research is to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions. Therefore, a comparison between the influences of eWOM on the mentioned platforms was conducted based on the related hypotheses. The hypotheses which claimed superiority of social media on other online platforms were tested through multiple regression analyses in SPSS 20 software. The results revealed significant differences between the mentioned platforms. However, contrary to the expectations of the study, the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms were found to be more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than the eWOM between familiar people on social media. Therefore, in-depth interviews were then

conducted to understand the results found through the survey in the latter phase of the study. An interview technique was chosen instead of other early mentioned research strategies which are principally linked with qualitative approach; because, in-depth interviews are considered appropriate where the researcher aims to clarify the results (Bryman, 2006), and to provide better understanding for the research problem (Creswell, 2009; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003).

Different research strategies were introduced in this section along with the appropriate strategy for this research. The following section introduces the data collection method employed in this research.

4.6 Data Collection Method

There are several data collection methods in survey strategies. In addition, the interview method can adopt various forms. In this section, firstly, the chosen survey strategy is introduced along with the reasons for the selection. Then the interview method is discussed with the required justifications.

4.6.1 Survey Method

In survey strategies there are various data collection methods, such as self-administered questionnaires, telephone and face to face interviews. Determining the most relevant and efficient tool depends on the advantages and disadvantages of each method in relation to the aim and objectives of the study. This research aims to conduct large-scale empirical investigation to validate its theoretical model and hypotheses. To achieve this aim, the self-administered questionnaire was chosen as the data collection method for several reasons.

Questionnaires are considered as one of the most appropriate data gathering tools to collect data from the large samples (Saunders et al., 2012); this method thus perfectly suits the aim of this study. Also the questionnaire method is known to be efficient in terms of time and money (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In addition, this method is found convenient for both participants and researchers; participants can answer the questions quickly and researchers can code the questions for analysis in a short period of time (Gray, 2014). However, telephone or face to face interview methods

are not as easy as the self-administered questionnaire method; participants and researchers should arrange a suitable time and location to be able to conduct the research. This makes it difficult for researchers to reach a large audience. Therefore, the questionnaire is selected as the data collection method instead of telephone or face to face interviews.

Using the questionnaire method is very popular among business researchers (Collis and Hussey, 2009); however there is an important point which needs to be considered by researchers who intend to use the questionnaire as a data collection method. The design of the questionnaire can affect the response rate, reliability and validity of the data; it therefore requires a large amount of care (Collis and Hussey, 2009; Saunders et al., 2012). However, there are some useful recommendations made by previous researchers to design more user-friendly questionnaires which helps researchers to achieve high response rates through reliable and valid data. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), a) using a cover letter and providing clear instructions for participants, b) avoiding long questions and preparing as short a questionnaire as possible and c) creating appealing layouts, are among the key points for more efficient questionnaire designs. Consequently, this study has considered the abovementioned recommendations during the design process of the questionnaire. In addition, special attention was given to the development of instrument measurements. The following subsection discusses the measures of this study.

4.6.1.1 Questionnaire Development

Developing instrument measurements is another critical issue for researchers as it has a direct influence on the reliability and validity of the collected data. For this reason, Bryman and Bell (2011) recommend using existing measures which were already tested by previous researchers. In this study, therefore, the measures were drawn from the existing literature and modified through considering the research aim and objectives.

More specifically, "information quality" and "attitudes towards information" were assessed by five-item and six-item scales (respectively) which were adapted from the study of Park et al. (2007). "Information credibility" was measured by adapting four items used by Prendergast et al. (2010). Four-item scales were used to measure "needs of information" and "information adoption"; and a two-item scale was used

to measure "information usefulness" which were adapted by the following research: (respectively) Chu and Kim (2011), Cheung et al. (2009), and Bailey and Pearson (1983). Finally, for measuring purchase intention, three items were adopted from Coyle and Thorson (2001) and one item adapted by the study of Prendergast et al. (2010). Table 4.5 demonstrates all the measures employed in this study.

The questionnaire of this study was designed using a multi-item approach; each construct therefore was measured with several items in order to improve validity and reliability. All variables were carried out using the Likert scale (Bryman and Bell, 2011). A five-point rating scale is used where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Furthermore, this study included both positive and negative questions to ensure that the participants read and answer each question carefully (Saunders et al., 2012).

Table 4.5: Instrument Measurements

Information Quality (Park et al., 2007)	The information about products which are shared by my friends in social media...	
	IQ1	I think they have sufficient reasons supporting the opinions.
	IQ2	I think they are objective.
	IQ3	I think they are understandable.
	IQ4	I think they are clear.
	IQ5	In general, I think the quality of them is high.
Information Credibility (Prendergast et al., 2010)	IC1	I think they are convincing.
	IC2	I think they are strong.
	IC3	I think they are credible.
	IC4	I think they are accurate.
Needs of Information (Chu and Kim, 2011)	NOI1	I like to apply them when I consider new products.
	NOI2	If I have little experience with a product, I often use them.

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| | NOI3 | I usually consult them to choose best alternative for me. |
| | NOI4 | I frequently gather them before making a purchase. |

Attitude towards Information (Park et al., 2007)	ATI1	I always read them when I buy a product.
	ATI2	They are helpful for my decision making when I buy a product.
	ATI3	They make me confident in purchasing product.
	ATI4	If I do not read them when I buy a product, I worry about my decision.
	ATI5	They impose a burden on me when I buy a product.
	ATI6	They irritate me when I buy a product.
Information Usefulness (Bailey and Pearson, 1983)	IU1	I think they are generally useful.
	IU2	I think they are generally informative.
Information Adoption (Cheung et al., 2009)	IA1	They contribute to my knowledge about the product.
	IA2	They make easier for me to make purchase decision.
	IA3	They enhance my effectiveness in making purchase decision.
	IA4	They motivate me to make purchase decision.
Purchase Intention (Coyle and Thorson, 2001; Prendergast et al., 2010)		After considering information about products which are shared by my friends in social media...
	PI1	It is very likely that I will buy the product.
	PI2	I will purchase the product next time I need a product.
	PI3	I will definitely try the product.
	PI4	I will recommend the product to my friends.

4.6.2 Interview Method

The interview method can adopt various forms such as structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interview. Structured interviews use questionnaires based on 'standardised,' identical set of questions where researchers collect quantifiable data; therefore, they are also known as 'quantitative research interviews' (Saunders et al., 2012). However, semi-structured and unstructured interviews are relatively 'non-standardised' and they do not contain an identical set of questions; thus, they are often referred to as 'qualitative research interviews' (Saunders et al., 2012). In semi-structured interviews, researchers have a list of themes and key questions; while they do not have predetermined questions in unstructured interviews. In this research, a semi-structured form of interview was chosen, since the research has key questions before data collection. Semi-structured interviews are also considered appropriate when the research has an exploratory or explanatory approach (Willig, 2001). As this reseach aims to explore and explain the reasons of surprising results found through survey, semi-structured interviews are thus found to be well-suited for the aim of the research. Table 4.6 presents the usage of different types of interview in different categories (Saunders et al., 2012).

Table 4.6: Usage of Different Types of Interview in Different Categories

	Exploratory Research	Descriptive Research	Explanatory Research
Structured		✓✓	✓
Semi-structured	✓		✓✓
Unstructured	✓✓		

✓✓ = More frequent, ✓ = Less frequent.

Source: Saunders et al. (2012, p.377)

The following subsection introduced the questions asked during the interviews.

4.6.2.1 Preparation of Interview Questions

Saunders et al. (2012, p.384) draw attention to the importance of careful preparation of interview questions with the '*five Ps*' rule, which is: '*prior planning prevents poor performance.*' Prior planning before semi-structured interviews is considered essential as it is in the self-administered questionnaire method. In this subsection, therefore, the preparation of interview questions is discussed with a brief background of the research topic.

The aim of the second phase of this research is to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions. For this purpose, six hypotheses (introduced in the Chapter 3) are proposed which claim superiority of eWOM information on social media over eWOM information on shopping websites. However, as mentioned earlier, results found through survey were contrary to expectations; and this was the reason of conducting semi-structured interviews. Therefore, since the aim of the semi-structured interviews is to enlighten the mentioned results, explorative questions were prepared for the interviews.

Initially, questions which aim to understand participants' attitudes about social media and shopping websites were addressed at the beginning of the interviews. After that, questions which aim to explore whether the participants prefer to read friends recommendations on social media or anonymous customer reviews on shopping websites before making a purchase, were asked. In this part, according to the answers of participants, further questions were addressed starting with "Why?" in order to obtain better understanding. Thereafter, participants were asked the following two questions: "How often do you purchase a product recommended by a friend on social media?" and "How often do you purchase a product recommended by customer reviews on shopping websites?" Again, questions were expanded with the additional ones starting with "Why?" in order to compare the eWOM on both platforms and enlighten the results found through survey. The questions which were asked to the participants are presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Questions used in the Semi-structured Interviews

Purpose	Questions
These questions were asked at the beginning of interviews in order to understand participants' attitudes.	How often do you use social media? How often do you use online shopping?
When participants' preferences were understood with the questions A and B; further questions starting with "Why?" were asked in order to obtain a deeper understanding.	A) How often do you read your friends recommendations on social media before making the purchase? B) How often do you read online customer reviews before making the purchase? Further Question: Why A? Or Why B?
When participants' preferences were understood with the questions A and B; further questions starting with "Why?" were asked in order to obtain a deeper understanding.	A) How often do you purchase a product recommended by a friend on social media? B) How often do you purchase a product recommended by customer reviews on shopping websites? Further Question: Why A? Or Why B?

Different data collection methods in survey strategies, and various forms of interview method were discussed in this section (section 4.6) along with the chosen survey strategy, selected form of interview method, and related justifications. Additionally, developments of the questions employed in both stages are presented. The following section introduces sampling strategies and sample size.

4.7 Sampling Strategies and Sample Size

Identifying an appropriate sampling strategy and sample size is considered essential for almost all quantitative studies (Collis and Hussey, 2009). In this section, thus, initially different sampling strategies are discussed, and the chosen sampling strategy

is explained with justifications. Thereafter, in the latter part, the sample size employed in this research is introduced.

4.7.1 Sampling Strategies

Sampling strategies refers to choosing a segment of the population, carrying out investigation on this selected group, and then generalising the findings to the large population (Burns, 2000). A sample is described as any part of the population which is chosen for examination (Bryman and Bell, 2011), where the population is described as the full set of cases (Saunders et al., 2012). Given the research context explained above, the population of this study is social media users in the UK. However, it is not practical for this study to research on the whole population due to time, money and access limitations (Bryman and Bell, 2011); therefore a representative sample was selected. There are two main methods used by researchers to choose appropriate sample: probability sampling and non-probability sampling.

In the probability sampling, each case in the entire population has equal chance to be selected (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Probability sampling includes different methods, such as simple, stratified, systematic and cluster sampling (Saunders et al., 2012). Conversely, in the non-probability sampling, each case in the entire population does not have equal chance to be selected; this probability is not known (Saunders et al., 2012). Non-probability sampling also includes different methods such as convenience, quota and snowball sampling (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Among the aforementioned sampling strategies, this study applied convenience sampling because of its high efficiency in terms of time, money and effort. Convenience sampling encourages researchers to access the data through the easiest subjects, such as students, locals or Internet users. Moreover, convenience sampling gives countenance to purposive sample selection which meets the aim and objectives of this study (Saunders et al., 2012). University students were considered appropriate for this study due to latest statistics which present people between the ages of 18-29 as being the majority of social media users; 89% of this age group use these websites, as of January 2014 (PRC, 2014). Younger age groups are also more familiar with online shopping. According to latest reports, 83% of 16 to 24 year olds and 90% of 25 to 34 year olds who live in the UK use online shopping (National Statistics, 2014). This study not only examines the influence of eWOM on social

media itself, but also compares it with the influences of eWOM on anonymous online platforms (i.e. shopping websites). This study therefore had to be conducted with consumers who use both social media websites and shopping websites. Due to the statistics mentioned above, university students were deemed appropriate for this study.

In the latter part of data collection, again, a purposive, convenience sampling method was chosen as the sampling strategy. This method was considered appropriate due to the exploratory nature of the study (Esterberg, 2002; Turnbull and Wheeler, 2014). The data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with university students. The following subsection discusses the sample size employed in this research.

4.7.2 Sample Size

Defining the sample size is another critical issue for researchers who determined the appropriate sample. Collis and Hussey (2009) emphasize that sample size should be large enough to represent the population. A larger sample size would better reflect the population; and it is important for researchers to generalise the results and address the research aim and objectives. Therefore, in this research, data from a total of 384 university students in the UK is employed. The sample size of 384 is deemed appropriate when the population constitutes of millions of people (at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error) (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970; Sekaran, 2006). Also, Collis and Hussey (2009) draw attention to a risk of using small sample sizes; it might prevent researchers being able to carry out important statistical tests and find relationships among the proposed variables. However, the sample size of this study is found good enough for using SEM and analysing a theoretical model (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2014).

In the additional part of data collection, 10 students were selected from the participants of the first phase (survey). Interviews reached theoretical saturation (Morse, 1994) with interview 10; and the data collection process was completed at this point.

In this section (section 4.7), sampling strategies and sample size were discussed; the chosen sampling strategy and sample size were then introduced along with the

related rationales. The following section introduces the pilot test conducted in this research.

4.8 Pilot Testing

In this research, a pilot test was conducted in order to test the employed questionnaire. Testing the questionnaire before using it for data collection is an important step for researchers. Pilot study can be done by identifying a small group of participants who resemble the sample of full study. The aim of pilot testing is to notice the readability problems, to discover confusing instructions, and to uncover questions which make participants uncomfortable (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Through pilot tests, researchers can clarify the statements in the questionnaire and improve the flow of content; ultimately it allows researchers to increase reliability and validity of the questions (Saunders et al., 2012). This study, therefore, conducted a pilot study with 10 participants. All participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire and provide feedback with regards to clarity and readability of questions in addition to the layout and flow. Consequently, critical feedback was obtained from the participants during the pilot study and the questionnaire was revised based on these comments. Some questions were clarified and some of them were repositioned. In addition, the layout and flow of the questions were edited in order to ensure that participants had no problems answering the questionnaire. The final version of the questionnaire is presented in Appendix A. The next section introduces the data analysis methods employed in this research.

4.9 Data Analysis

To achieve the aim of this study, several data analysis methods are used. In this section, initially, the analysis of the data collected through survey is introduced; thereafter, in the latter part, the analysis of the data collected through interviews is presented.

4.9.1 Analysis of Quantitative Data

In order to ensure the data has no missing value or outliers, the data analysis starts with data cleaning. In this study, SPSS 20 software was used for data coding and screening. Then, in the next step, descriptive statistics of collected data were examined. Thereafter, reliability tests were conducted to understand the consistency of measurements. Finally, SEM was employed by using AMOS 20 software in order to validate the theoretical model of the study.

4.9.1.1 Reliability and Validity

To test the internal reliability of the instruments, Cronbach's alpha (α) test is employed. Cronbach's alpha test shows the consistency between measurements which form the scales. In addition, this study has applied convergent and discriminant validity tests. Convergent validity, which was examined by using the composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE) and factor loadings, demonstrates how the measures are related to each other; and simply, whether they can be in the same scale or not (Hair et al., 2010). Discriminant validity, on the other hand, allows researchers to examine whether a measurement is not a reflection of any other measurement or not (Hair et al., 2010).

4.9.1.2 Structural Equation Modelling

SEM is considered as one of the most important statistical techniques for theory development and testing (Bentler and Chou, 1987; Hair et al., 2010). Researchers in social sciences have increasingly applied SEM in recent years (Fan et al., 1999). SEM is a statistical methodology which consists of various multivariate techniques and it simultaneously tests the relationships between dependent and independent variables in the entire hypothesised model (Henri, 2007). This study, therefore, has selected the SEM technique to validate its proposed theoretical model and hypotheses.

SEM technique includes two phases which are confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and testing the structural model. CFA is used to confirm the relationship between a set of measurement items and their related factors, while testing the structural model refers to examining the relationships between the factors as hypothesised. However,

many scholars draw attention to the assessment of model fit. The model should be fit to be able to discuss CFA and hypotheses. There are several most commonly used fit indices such as chi-square (X^2) to degree of freedom (Df), comparative fit index (CFI), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), incremental fit index (IFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). In fact, Hair et al. (2010) recommend the use of at least four different tests of model fit for CFA and structural model. This study, therefore, has applied various model fit indices to examine both CFA and structural model. Furthermore, based on the SEM, the proposed hypotheses were tested using the critical ratio (t-value), critical value (p-value) and standardised estimate.

4.9.1.3 Multiple Regression Analyses

In order to test the proposed hypotheses in the second phase of this research, multiple regression analyses were conducted. Multiple regression analysis allows assessing the relative impacts of independent variables on dependent variable (Cohen et al., 2003). It is therefore found appropriate since the hypotheses aim to compare the influence of eWOM in social media and shopping websites on consumers' purchase intentions. As the multiple linear regression models the relationship between dependent variable and independent variables by fitting them into a linear equation, it provides partial regression coefficients for each independent variable. These partial regression coefficients in the multiple regression analysis allow researchers to consider the relative relationships between dependent variable and independent variables (Hair et al., 2010). More clearly, higher partial regression coefficient value refers to the stronger relationship between that specific variable and the dependent variable (Churchill, 1995). Table 4.8 facilitates the understanding of this part through illustrating the dependent and independent variables used in this study.

Table 4.8: Independent and Dependent Variables Used in the Comparative Study

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable
The Influence of eWOM on Social Media The Influence of eWOM on Shopping Websites	Consumes' Purchase Intentions

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In this subsection, the analysis of the quantitative data is presented; the following subsection introduces the analysis of the qualitative data collected in this research.

4.9.2 Analysis of Qualitative Data

The data collected through semi-structured interviews was initially open coded during the interviews with the emerging themes noted. After the first interview, the open codes were revised and categorised based on potential themes. This means the analysis commenced from the beginning of the data collection process. This method was preferred as it enabled the interviewer to have an opportunity to clarify interview questions for the remainder of the interviews as well as being helpful for having well-organised data and preventing data overload (Saunders et al., 2012). After completing interviews, voice recordings were transcribed to organise the data. The transcripts were examined through thematic analysis to identify key themes within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Flick, 2009). Microsoft Word software was used for organising the data and generating relevant themes. Themes were categorised based on different colours (an example is presented in Appendix B). The software NVIVO was not preferred for the analysis since the amount of the data was not extensive. Finally, in order to present the findings, selective coding was applied to classify possible quotes (Fielding, 2005).

In this section (section 4.9), the data analysis methods employed in both quantitative and qualitative phases were introduced. The following section presents the ethical issues considered in this research.

4.10 Ethical Consideration

Ethical issues refer to moral values and principles which should be considered by the researcher during the study (Blumberg et al., 2014; Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Punch (2005) draws attention to the importance of ethical issues when humans are involved in research as participants. Researchers must consider the confidentiality of participants and obtain their consent (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Cooper and Schindler (2014) specify the ethical matters should be considered by a researcher as follows:

a) The rights of the participants should be protected.

b) Sponsors of the research should be informed.

c) The research should be designed based on ethical standards.

d) The safety of the research team members should be provided.

e) The designed research should be followed.

This study has considered and fulfilled the requirements through all phases of the research. The participants were informed about the aim of the study and the importance of their participation. In addition, the participants were assured that all responses would remain confidential and would be analysed at an aggregate level rather than individual level. The participants were also assured that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the survey at any time with no obligations. Furthermore, the data collection process was guided by the Brunel University Research Ethics Committee and research was conducted after getting the approval of the committee.

Additionally, in the second phase of the data collection, the ethical requirements were reconsidered and fulfilled. Again, the process was guided by the Brunel University Research Ethics Committee; and research was conducted after gaining the second approval of the committee. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the importance of their participation. Furthermore, participants were assured that all conversations during the interview would remain confidential.

4.11 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has outlined the research design of this study and has discussed the adopted research methodology in detail. The different research philosophies were examined and the reason for choosing a pragmatist paradigm was explained. Then, different research approaches were introduced along with the chosen approach. Next, this chapter examined different research strategies and discussed the reason for selecting survey strategy and the adoption of in-depth interviews. Thereafter, the alternative data collection methods were considered; and selected methods were justified. Within the same section, the developments of instrument measurements and the questionnaire were presented in addition to preparation of interview questions. Finally, this chapter has defined the research context; sampling strategies were

introduced along with the chosen strategy and sample size. Additionally, pilot testing; analysis of the data; and ethical consideration were also presented.

The following chapter presents the results and findings of this research.

CHAPTER 5:
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results and findings of both contextual and comparative studies conducted in this research. For this purpose, the chapter is divided into five main sections. The next section introduces the results of the first phase of this research which aims to explore the determinants of eWOM information social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions. Then, section three introduces the results and findings of the second phase, which aims to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions. Thereafter, joint evaluation of the results and findings achieved in both phases is presented. Finally, the last section concludes the chapter.

5.2 Results of the First Phase

This section demonstrates the results of the survey introduced in the previous chapter. As mentioned earlier, this study has employed SEM technique to analyse the collected data. For this purpose, the software AMOS 20 was used. The remainder of the section is organised as follows: Subsection 5.2.1 introduces the preliminary examination of the data; and subsection 5.2.2 introduces the demographic profile of the respondents. Then subsection 5.2.3 provides the descriptive statistics. This subsection also outlines the reliability test and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The following subsection presents the results of structural equation modelling including CFA, validity assessment and hypotheses testing. Finally, the last subsection provides the summary of this section.

5.2.1 Preliminary Examination of the Data

The data was initially checked for missing values; however, no missing values were found in this study. Thereafter, further preliminary examination of data using outliers and normality tests were conducted in order to prepare the data for further analysis.

5.2.1.1 Outliers

Outliers refer to the values which have different characteristics from the rest of the data (Hair et al., 2010). As outliers are extreme values (either very low or very high), they might cause non-normal data and distorted statistics (Hair et al., 2010; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2014). In this study, therefore, the data was checked to detect outliers. To do so, univariate detection method was employed (Hair et al., 2010). In this method, all variables' scores need to be converted to a standard score. If the sample is larger than 80, a case is considered as an outlier when the standard score is ± 3.29 or above (Field, 2005). In this study, no cases were identified as outliers. Table 5.1 presents the standard scores of the all variables.

Table 5.1: Standard Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum
Zscore: Information Quality	384	-3.08	2.12
Zscore: Information Credibility	384	-2.65	1.94
Zscore: Needs of Information	384	-2.51	1.87
Zscore: Attitude towards Information	384	-2.53	1.36
Zscore: Information Usefulness	384	-2.66	1.52
Zscore: Information Adoption	384	-2.73	1.68
Zscore: Purchase Intention	384	-3.11	2.34

5.2.1.2 Normality

In this study, the data was also checked for normality. In order to understand whether the data is normally distributed or not, Skewness and Kurtosis tests were employed. The results indicate that the data of this study is in the acceptable range for these tests (i.e. ≤ 2.58) (Hair et al., 2010). In addition, the graphical analysis shows that the data is normally distributed, since the mean and the median scores have similar

values. Table 5.2 presents the Skewness and Kurtosis scores of all the variables used in this study.

Table 5.2: Skewness and Kurtosis Scores

	N	Mean	Median	Skewness	Kurtosis
Information Quality	384	3.36	3.40	-0.481	0.464
Information Credibility	384	3.30	3.50	-0.498	0.052
Needs of Information	384	3.29	3.50	-0.468	-0.124
Attitude towards Information	384	2.94	3.00	-0.382	0.123
Information Usefulness	384	3.54	4.00	-0.685	0.252
Information Adoption	384	3.47	3.50	-0.611	0.268
Purchase Intention	384	3.71	3.75	-0.099	-0.127

5.2.2 Demographic Profile

This study collected data from 384 university students in the UK between the periods of Mar 2015 to Apr 2015. The demographic profiles of the respondents are detailed below. Table 5.3 presents the age of the respondents. The figures show that 39.8 % of the respondents were between the ages of 18-22; followed by 25.5 % between the ages of 28-32 and then 24.5 % between the ages of 23-27. The frequencies demonstrate that almost 90 % of the respondents were between the ages of 18-32 and only 10 % of the respondents were over 32.

Table 5.3: Age of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 22	153	39.8
23 – 27	94	24.5
28 – 32	98	25.5
33 – 37	28	7.3
38 – 42	6	1.6
Over 42	5	1.3

The gender of the respondents is shown in the Table 5.4. The results present that gender of the respondents is almost equally split at 51.8 % female and 48.2 % male.

Table 5.4: Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	185	48.2
Female	199	51.8

The education level of the respondents is shown in Table 5.5. The majority of the respondent's education levels were at Bachelors with 42.7 %; followed by PhD level with 34.4 % and Masters with 22.9 %. In other words, postgraduate students constitute 57.3 % of respondents while 42.7 % is comprised of undergraduate students.

Table 5.5: Education Level of the Respondents

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's	164	42.7

Master's	88	22.9
PhD	132	34.4

The social media usage of the respondents is introduced in Table 5.6. The majority of (81.3 %) the respondents use social media websites every day. 8.9 % of the respondents use social media four to five days per week; while the usage of 7 % of the respondents' is only once or twice a week, and the usage of 2.9 % of the respondents' is very rare.

Table 5.6: Social Media Usage of the Respondents

Social Media Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Everyday	312	81.3
4 – 5 days per week	34	8.9
Once or twice a week	27	7.0
Very rare	11	2.9

The Internet familiarity of the respondents is introduced in Table 5.7. The table highlights that 88.8 % of the respondents had been familiar with the Internet for over six years; while the familiarity of 10.2 % of the respondents is between four to six years. The table also demonstrates that the familiarity of 0.8 % of the respondents is between one to three years; while only 0.3 % of the respondents were familiar with the Internet for less than one year. The frequencies reveal that almost 99 % of the respondents had been familiar with the Internet for over four years.

Table 5.7: Internet Familiarity of the Respondents

Internet Familiarity	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 year	1	0.3
1 to 3 years	3	0.8

4 to 6 years	39		10.2
More than 6 years	341		88.8

5.2.3 Descriptive Statistics

All measures were carried out by a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The mean score for all seven variables are as follows; information quality is between 3.22 and 3.57, information credibility is between 3.17 and 3.44, needs of information is between 3.09 and 3.41, attitude towards information is between 2.26 and 3.53, information usefulness is between 3.51 and 3.57, information adoption is between 3.35 and 3.55, and purchase intention is between 3.56 and 3.77. The use of mean scores was found appropriate in this study, since the sample size was large and did not include outliers. Also, mean value is the most frequently used measure of central tendency to explore statistical relationships (Saunders et al., 2012). Table 5.8 lists means and standard deviations for all measurements.

Table 5.8: Descriptive Statistics of Survey Measurements

Variable	Measures	Mean	Std. Deviation
Information Quality	IQ1	3.35	0.95
	IQ2	3.22	1.01
	IQ3	3.57	0.95
	IQ4	3.43	0.97
	IQ5	3.23	0.96
Information Credibility	IC1	3.44	1.01
	IC2	3.29	0.97
	IC3	3.32	1.04
	IC4	3.17	0.97

Needs of Information	NOI1	3.34	1.09
	NOI2	3.41	1.09
	NOI3	3.31	1.13
	NOI4	3.09	1.14
Attitude towards Information	ATI1	3.18	1.18
	ATI2	3.53	1.11
	ATI3	3.50	1.10
	ATI4	2.76	1.23
	ATI5	2.42	1.01
	ATI6	2.26	1.09
Information Usefulness	IU1	3.57	1.04
	IU2	3.51	1.01
Information Adoption	IA1	3.55	1.01
	IA2	3.53	1.03
	IA3	3.43	1.01
	IA4	3.35	1.07
Purchase Intention	PI1	3.72	0.65
	PI2	3.77	0.68
	PI3	3.56	0.61
	PI4	3.77	0.67

5.2.3.1 Reliability Assessment

Reliability is described as the consistency of a measure of a concept (Bryman and Bell, 2011). There are three important forms that help to understand whether a measurement is reliable or not: stability, internal reliability, and inter-observer consistency. Stability refers to considering whether the measure is stable over time or not. Measuring almost similar results at two different points in time is considered as important for researchers (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The internal reliability examines the multiple indicators which measure a specific construct; the indicators should be consistent and be related to each other (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Inter-observer consistency is considered important where more than one observer is involved in an activity which might cause inconsistency in their decisions (e.g. categorizing the open ended questions). This study has employed the internal reliability as it has different constructs with multiple measures. Cronbach's alpha is one of the most used techniques for testing the internal reliability (Hair et al., 2010). The ideal Cronbach's alpha value is considered over than 0.70 by researchers (Hair et al., 2010). More specifically, as a rule of thumb, a figure of ≤0.90 is considered as excellent reliability, 0.70-0.90 is regarded as high reliability, 0.50-0.70 is viewed as moderate reliability, and below 0.50 is considered as low reliability (Hinton et al., 2014). The Cronbach's alpha figures for all seven variables of this study are presented in Table 5.9. The results show that all variables have high reliabilities which highlight internal consistency for all the scales used in this study.

Table 5.9: Reliability Assessment

Variable	Number of the Measures	Cronbach's Alpha	Type
Information Quality	5	0.847	High Reliability
Information Credibility	4	0.890	High Reliability
Needs of Information	4	0.834	High Reliability
Attitude towards Information	6	0.770	High Reliability
Information Usefulness	2	0.834	High Reliability

Information Adoption	4	0.897	High Reliability
Purchase Intention	4	0.854	High Reliability

5.2.3.2 KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

KMO and Bartlett's test is a very important step for researchers in order to proceed to CFA; because KMO and Bartlett's test highlights whether the data is appropriate for CFA or not (Hinton et al., 2014). KMO test examines sampling adequacy; and Bartlett's test of sphericity examines the suitability of using factor analysis for the study (Hair et al., 2010). The outcomes of the KMO test ranges from 0 to 1 where the values which are closer to 1 are considered excellent (Hinton et al., 2014). However, according to Kaiser (1974), values between 0.5 and 1.0 indicate that the data is appropriate for factor analysis; while values below 0.5 mean that the factor analysis is not applicable. In terms of the Bartlett's test of sphericity, the P value should be less than 0.05 for the significance; and it means that a factor analysis is recommended for the study (Hair et al., 2010). Table 5.10 presents the results of KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity for this study. As the figures provide the required values, the results confirm the suitability of data for CFA.

Table 5.10: KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Test		Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.909
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1516.477
	Df	21
	Sig.	0.000

5.2.4 Structural Equation Modelling

SEM technique includes two main phases which are confirming the factor analysis and testing the structural model (Hair et al., 2010). The CFA confirms the

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relationships between the variables and their measures, while the structural model confirms the relationships between the variables as hypothesized. This subsection presents the results of CFA and the structural model of this study.

5.2.4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Hair et al. (2010) has proposed that the validity of the CFA should be tested through two stages which are goodness of fit indices assessment and construct validity assessment. This study, therefore, has considered the aforementioned two stages to conduct its CFA.

5.2.4.1.1 Goodness of fit indices assessment

The initial CFA was conducted on seven variables along with 29 measures. All variables, which are information quality (IQ), information credibility (IC), needs of information (NOI), attitude towards information (ATI), information usefulness (IU), information adoption (IA), and purchase intention (PI), are loaded with their measures and were examined through CFA. According to Hair et al. (2010), CFA and Structural model should be tested with at least four tests of model fit. However, this study has employed eight goodness of fit indices which are as follows: Chi square (X^2) to the degree of freedom (Df), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), incremental fit index (IFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and *p* value of close fit (PCLOSE). Table 5.11 presents goodness of fit indices for initial CFA, and recommended criteria for these tests (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 5.11: Goodness of Fit Indices for Initial CFA

Model Fit Indices	Recommended Criteria	Default model
X^2 / Df	1:3	2.370
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.861
AGFI	≥ 0.80	0.830
IFI	≥ 0.90	0.928
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.917

CFI	≥ 0.90	0.927
RMSEA	< 0.50	0.060
PCLOSE	> 0.50	0.001

The results show that some of the goodness of fit indices was achieved on the initial CFA. However, GFI (0.861), RMSEA (0.060), and PCLOSE (0.001) are still below the recommended criteria. This study, therefore, has conducted a refinement on the model. According to Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the refinement can be employed by deleting some measures or relating them to a different variable; and applying correlated measurement errors. Also, according to Hair et al. (2010), the model fit indices can be enhanced by controlling the modification indices and standardised residuals. The model fit of this study was improved by following the aforementioned suggestions and deleting some measures. After these steps a further test was conducted; Table 5.12 shows the goodness of fit indices for final CFA.

Table 5.12: Goodness of Fit Indices for Final CFA

Model Fit Indices	Recommended Criteria	Default model
X^2 / Df	1:3	1.772
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.936
AGFI	≥ 0.80	0.909
IFI	≥ 0.90	0.976
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.969
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.976
RMSEA	< 0.50	0.045
PCLOSE	> 0.50	0.824

All goodness of fit indices was achieved on final CFA including GFI, RMSEA and PCLOSE which are the ones not at requirement level on the initial CFA. The final figure for X^2 / Df (1.772), GFI (0.936), AGFI (0.909), IFI (0.976), TLI (0.969), CFI

(0.976), RMSEA (0.045), and PCLOSE (0.824) all satisfied the recommended criteria, as presented in Table 5.12. Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2 demonstrate the initial and final CFA's of the study.
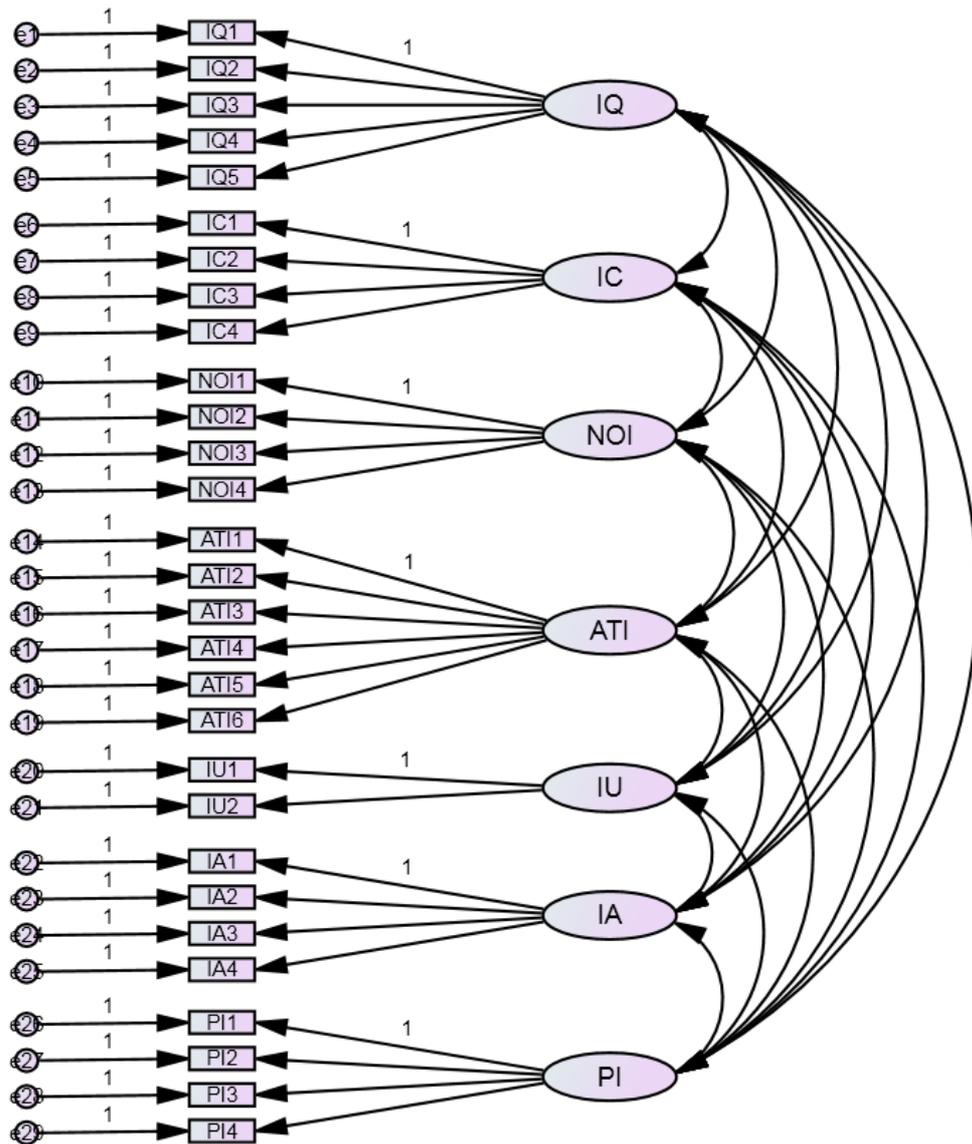
Figure 5.1: Initial Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)
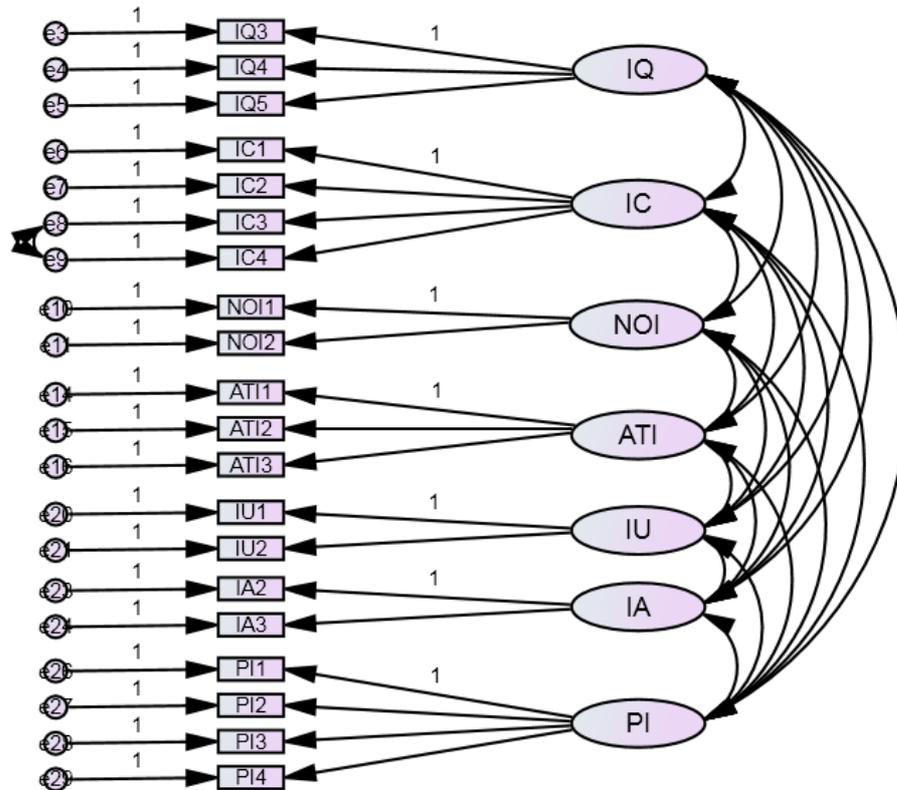
Figure 5.2: Final Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

5.2.4.1.2 Construct validity assessment

Hair et al. (2010) emphasize the importance of validating the CFA results through construct validity. Construct validity examines scales and measures in order to indicate whether they accurately represent the concept of interest or not (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Therefore, in this study, two tests were conducted in order to examine the construct validity: (1) convergent validity, (2) discriminant validity. Convergent validity demonstrates how the measures are related to each other; and simply, this test shows whether measures can be in the same scale or not. Convergent validity is examined by using the factor loading, critical ratio (t-value), composite reliability (CR), and the average variance extracted (AVE). As a rule of thumb, factor loadings should be greater than 0.50 and all critical ratios should be higher than 1.96 (Hair et al., 2010). Also, the lower acceptable value is 0.70 for CR and 0.50 for AVE (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As presented in the Table 5.13, all the factor loadings in this

study are greater than 0.50 and all critical ratios are above 1.96. CR of each variable are more than 0.70 (0.815 to 0.883) and AVE of each variable are more than 0.50 (0.592 to 0.745) which refers that the convergent validity is achieved in this study.

Table 5.13: Convergent Validity

Variable	Measure	Factor Loading	Critical Ratio (t-value)	CR	AVE
Information Quality	IQ3	0.79	-	0.837	0.631
	IQ4	0.82	16.479		
	IQ5	0.76	15.210		
Information Credibility	IC1	0.86	-	0.883	0.654
	IC2	0.85	20.533		
	IC3	0.78	17.920		
	IC4	0.73	16.284		
Needs of Information	NOI1	0.86	-	0.815	0.687
	NOI2	0.80	16.392		
Attitude towards Information	ATI1	0.74	-	0.851	0.657
	ATI2	0.86	15.974		
	ATI3	0.83	15.477		
Information Usefulness	IU1	0.90	-	0.837	0.721
	IU2	0.80	18.841		
Information Adoption	IA2	0.89	-	0.854	0.745
	IA3	0.83	19.421		
Purchase	PI1	0.77	-	0.852	0.592

Intention	PI2	0.84	15.978
	PI3	0.73	14.071
	PI4	0.73	13.906

Note: CR = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted

Additionally, discriminant validity was analysed in order to examine whether a scale is not a reflection of any other scale. In this analysis, each of the square roots of AVE should be higher than the other correlation coefficients for adequate discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As presented in the Table 5.14, the square root of AVE for each variable is greater than the other correlation coefficients which indicate that the discriminant validity is achieved in this study.

Table 5.14: Discriminant Validity

	IQ	IC	NOI	ATI	IU	IA	PI
Information Quality (IQ)	*0,794*						
Information Credibility (IC)	0,768	*0,808*					
Needs of Information (NOI)	0,618	0,713	*0,829*				
Attitude towards Information (ATI)	0,627	0,665	0,711	*0,810*			
Information Usefulness (IU)	0,717	0,751	0,776	0,671	*0.849*		
Information Adoption (IA)	0.672	0.696	0.710	0.668	0.846	*0.863*	
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.416	0.547	0.521	0.459	0.516	0.520	*0.769*

Note**:** Italicised elements are the square root of AVE for each variable.

5.2.4.2 Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

This study has employed eight goodness of fit indices to test its structural model, which are as follows: Chi square (X^2) to the degree of freedom (Df), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), incremental fit index (IFI),

Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and *p* value of close fit (PCLOSE). Table 5.15 presents goodness of fit indices for the structural model, and recommended criteria for these tests (Hair et al., 2010). The results show that all goodness of fit indices were achieved on the tests for structural model. The figures for X^2 / Df (1.854), GFI (0.930), AGFI (0.906), IFI (0.972), TLI (0.966), CFI (0.972), RMSEA (0.047), and PCLOSE (0.696) all met the recommended criteria.

Table 5.15: Goodness of Fit for Structural Model

Model Fit Indices	Recommended Criteria	Default model
X^2 / df	1:3	1.854
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.930
AGFI	≥ 0.80	0.906
IFI	≥ 0.90	0.972
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.966
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.972
RMSEA	< 0.50	0.047
PCLOSE	> 0.50	0.696

The research hypotheses were tested by using path estimates, critical ratios (t values) and *p* values. Relationships between variables are significant when t values are above 1.96 and *p* values are below 0.05. Table 5.16 presents the results of path estimates of seven hypotheses existed in this study. The figures show that six hypotheses of this study were found statistically significant as the t values are above 1.96 and the *p* values are below 0.05, while one of the hypotheses was not found significant (Erkan and Evans, 2016a).

More specifically, H1 is supported, since the relationship between information quality and information usefulness was found significant ($\beta = 0.313$, t value = 3.595, $p < 0.05$). H2 is supported, since the information credibility was found significantly

related to information usefulness ($\beta = 0.228$, t value = 2.702, $p < 0.05$). Similarly, H3, which predicts a positive influence of needs of information on information usefulness, is also supported, since the relationship of these variables was found significant ($\beta = 0.398$, t value = 5.350, $p < 0.05$). However, H4 is not supported; attitude towards information was not found to be influential on information usefulness ($\beta = 0.114$, t value = 1.661, $p = 0.097$). Moreover, attitude towards information was found to have a positive influence on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.140$, t value = 3.059, $p < 0.05$); therefore, H5 is supported. Information usefulness was found influential on information adoption ($\beta = 0.883$, t value = 18.420, $p < 0.05$); therefore, H6 is also supported. Finally, H7 is supported, since the relationship between information adoption and purchase intention was found significant ($\beta = 0.236$, t value = 5.324, $p < 0.05$). In summary, the results revealed that all hypotheses except H4 are supported with the achieved figures. Figure 5.3 demonstrates the structural model and path coefficients of all relationships.

Table 5.16: Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Estimate	S.E	C.R	P Value	Finding
H1: IQ → IU	0.313	0.087	3.595	***	Supported
H2: IC → IU	0.228	0.084	2.702	0.007	Supported
H3: NOI → IU	0.398	0.074	5.350	***	Supported
H4: ATI → IU	0.114	0.069	1.661	0.097	Not Supported
H5: ATI → PI	0.140	0.046	3.059	0.002	Supported
H6: IU → IA	0.883	0.048	18.420	***	Supported
H7: IA → PI	0.236	0.044	5.324	***	Supported

Note: Estimate = Standardized Regression Weights (Path Estimate), S.E = Standard Error, C.R = Critical Ratio (t-value), P Value = Significance Value, *** = $p < 0.001$.
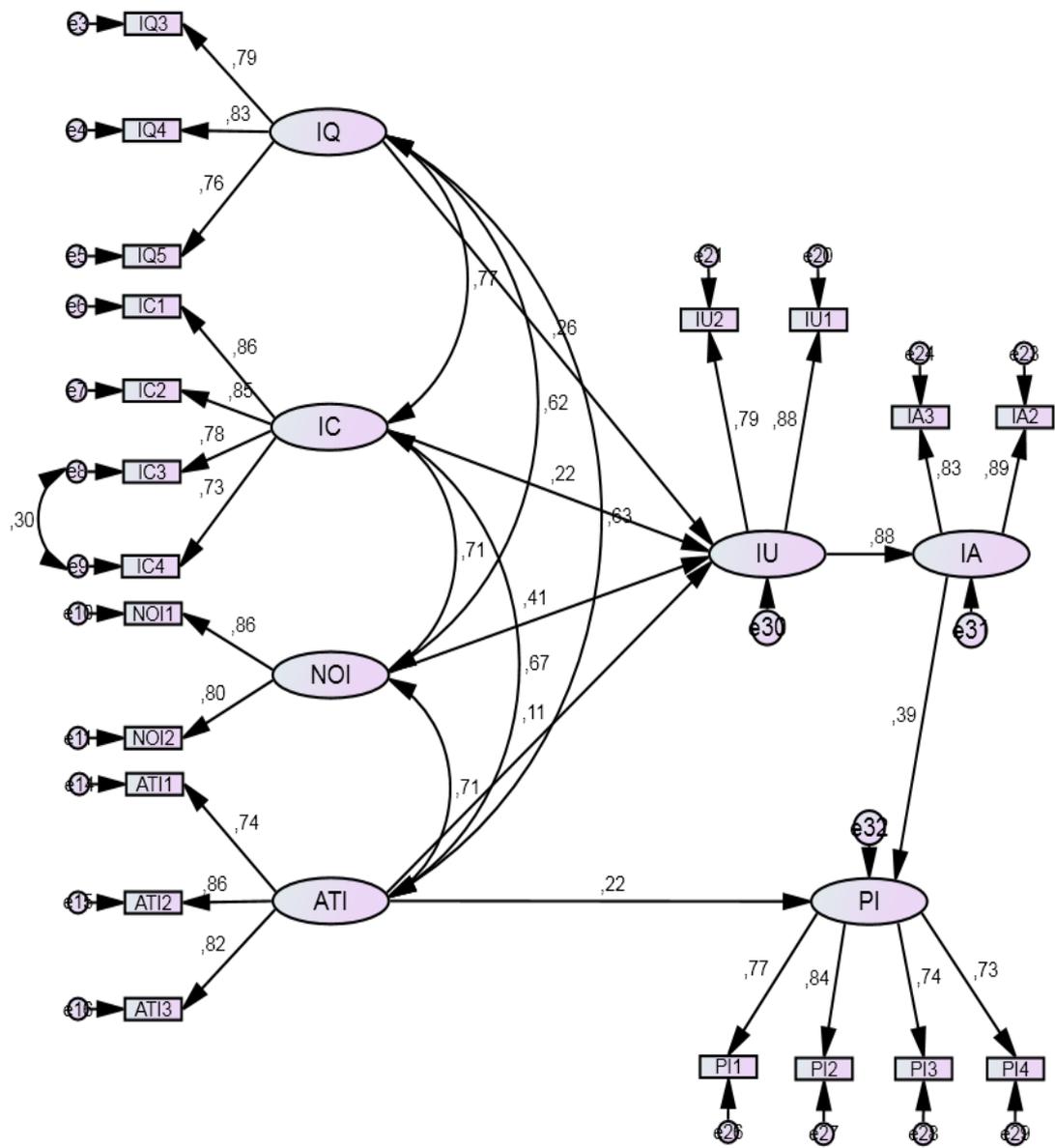
Figure 5.3: Structural Model

5.2.5 Summary of the Section

This section has presented the results of the first phase of this research. Initially, the preliminary examination of data, the demographic profile of respondents and descriptive statistics of variables were displayed. Then, the results of SEM were demonstrated based on two stages, CFA and structural model. CFA was validated through goodness of fit indices assessment and construct validity assessment. As

these test results were above the recommended criteria, this study conducted a structural model and hypotheses testing. The results show that six hypotheses were accepted, while one of them was rejected. The following section introduces the outcomes of the second phase of this research.

5.3 Results and Findings of the Second Phase

This section presents the results and findings of the second phase of this research. As introduced earlier, this comparative study has two parts: 1) reanalysis of the survey data, and 2) in-depth interviews. Initially, this study has employed multiple regression analysis technique to analyse the collected data through survey. For this purpose, the software SPSS 20 was used. Thereafter, in the latter part, this study has employed thematic analysis to analyse the collected data through interviews. In this section, firstly the results of quantitative part will be presented. Findings of the qualitative part will then be provided. The last subsection will conclude the section by summarizing it.

5.3.1 Results of the Quantitative Part

In the first phase of this study, the data was collected through a survey of 384 university students in the UK between the periods of Mar 2015 to Apr 2015. In the second phase, the data was reanalysed with a different perspective; and a comparison was conducted based on multiple regression analysis. The results are presented in this subsection as follows: demographic profile, descriptive statistics, reliability assessment, hypotheses testing and multiple regression analyses.

5.3.1.1 Demographic Profile

Age of the respondents (Table 5.3), gender of the respondents (Table 5.4), education level of the respondents (Table 5.5), social media usage of the respondents (Table 5.6), and Internet familiarity of the respondents (Table 5.7) were already presented in the demographic profile section of the first phase of this research (Section 5.2.2). However, the following two tables were preferred to be demonstrated here since they are more related to this second phase. Table 5.17 demonstrates the online reviews usage of the respondents. The majority of the respondents (34.4 %) use online

reviews sometimes; while 33.1 % of the respondents frequently use them. The table also shows that 28.1 % of the respondents always apply online reviews; whereas 4.4 % of the respondents do not use them. The frequencies reveal that over 95 % of the respondents apply online reviews; and the percentages for the answers of 'always,' 'frequently,' and 'sometimes' are close to each other.

Table 5.17: Online Reviews Usage

Online Reviews Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Always	108	28.1
Frequently	127	33.1
Sometimes	132	34.4
Never	17	4.4

The shopping websites usage of the respondents is presented in Table 5.18. Figures show that 45.6 % of the respondents, (which is the majority of the participants), use shopping websites more than once a month; while 29.4 % use them once a month. Also, according to figures, 23.2 % of the respondents have very rare usage; whereas very few of the respondents (1.8 %) do not use shopping websites.

Table 5.18: Shopping Websites Usage

Shopping Websites Usage	Frequency	Percentage
More than once a month	175	45.6
Once a month	113	29.4
Very rare	89	23.2
Never	7	1.8

5.3.1.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of survey measurements used for eWOM information on social media websites were already presented in the descriptive statistics section of the first phase of this research (Section 5.2.3, Table 5.8). In this subsection, the descriptive statistics of survey measurements used for eWOM information on shopping websites are presented. All measures were carried out by a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The mean score for all seven variables are as follows; information quality is between 3.31 and 3.70, information credibility is between 3.41 and 3.68, needs of information is between 3.41 and 3.67, attitude towards information is between 2.22 and 4.00, information usefulness is between 3.88 and 3.93, information adoption is between 3.55 and 3.93, and purchase intention is between 3.61 and 3.86. Table 5.19 lists means and standard deviations for all measurements.

Table 5.19: Descriptive Statistics of Survey Measurements

Variable	Measures	Mean	Std. Deviation
Information Quality	IQ1	3.63	0.85
	IQ2	3.31	0.99
	IQ3	3.70	0.86
	IQ4	3.60	0.91
	IQ5	3.41	0.90
Information Credibility	IC1	3.68	0.87
	IC2	3.52	0.91
	IC3	3.43	0.93
	IC4	3.41	0.88
Needs of Information	NOI1	3.67	1.00
	NOI2	3.67	1.06

	NOI3	3.41	1.12
	NOI4	3.42	1.15
Attitude towards Information	ATI1	3.83	1.02
	ATI2	4.00	0.96
	ATI3	3.79	0.99
	ATI4	3.27	1.23
	ATI5	2.50	1.07
	ATI6	2.22	1.08
Information Usefulness	IU1	3.93	0.87
	IU2	3.88	0.91
Information Adoption	IA1	3.93	0.86
	IA2	3.88	0.96
	IA3	3.72	0.94
	IA4	3.55	1.02
Purchase Intention	PI1	3.86	0.67
	PI2	3.85	0.68
	PI3	3.61	0.63
	PI4	3.79	0.67

5.3.1.3 Reliability Assessment

Cronbach's alpha is the most commonly used tool in order to test the reliability multi-scale measurement tools (Hair et al., 2010). The aim of this test is to understand whether the measures in a same scale are consistent or not (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The bottom line is considered as 0.70 for ideal Cronbach's alpha value;

the value equal to 0.70 or above means that the measures make a reliable set as a scale (Hair et al., 2010). Figures between 0.50 and 0.70 are considered as moderate reliability while those below 0.50 are viewed as low reliability (Hinton et al., 2014). The Cronbach's alpha values of all seven variables which measure the eWOM information on social media were displayed in the reliability assessment section of the previous chapter (Section 5.2.3.1, Table 5.9); they all have high reliability as the figures were above 0.70. This section presents the Cronbach's alpha values of all seven variables which measure the eWOM information on shopping websites on Table 5.20.

Table 5.20: Reliability Assessment

Variable	Number of the Measures	Cronbach's Alpha	Type
Information Quality	5	0.824	High Reliability
Information Credibility	4	0.848	High Reliability
Needs of Information	4	0.806	High Reliability
Attitude towards Information	6	0.688	Moderate Reliability
Information Usefulness	2	0.866	High Reliability
Information Adoption	4	0.869	High Reliability
Purchase Intention	4	0.857	High Reliability

The results show that all the scales used in this study have high reliabilities except the one for 'attitude towards information.' The Cronbach's alpha value of the mentioned scale was found to be 0.688 on the initial reliability test. Although this value was very close to the 0.70 boundary and considered acceptable by researchers (Hinton et al., 2014); it was still below the ideal value which is 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, the scale for attitude towards information was reconsidered based on test results; and one measure, (ATI6), was deleted to improve the reliability of the scale. After that reliability of the scale for attitude towards information was increased

to 0.743 which is considered as high reliability by researchers (Hair et al., 2010). Final results show internal consistency for all the scales employed in this study.

5.3.1.4 Hypotheses Testing and Multiple Regression Analyses

The aim of this research is to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions. For this purpose, the impacts of eWOM on these platforms were compared based on the six determinants of eWOM information which influence consumers' purchase intentions, found in the first phase of this research: Information Quality, Information Credibility, Needs of Information, Attitude towards Information, Information Usefulness, and Information Adoption.

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to test each hypothesis. Multiple regression analysis allows assessing the relative impacts of independent variables on dependent variable (Cohen et al., 2003). Mathematically it is shown as follows:

$$y = b_0 + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2 + ... + b_n X_n$$

where:

y = the estimated value of the dependent variable

b_0 = the regression constant or intercept

b_1, b_2, b_n = partial regression coefficients

X_1, X_2, X_n = independent variables

In this equation, partial regression coefficients (b_1, b_2, b_n) represent the change on the estimated value of the dependent variable (y) corresponding to a unit change in independent variables (X_1, X_2, X_n) (Hair et al., 2010). Partial regression coefficients (b_1, b_2, b_n) in the multiple regression analysis are used to consider the relationships between y and X_1, X_2, X_n. Higher partial regression coefficient value refers to the stronger relationship between that specific variable and the dependent variable (Churchill, 1995).

Partial regression coefficients are displayed as Beta values (β) in the SPSS software. Table 5.21 shows the results of multiple regression analysis for the H1. The test was found significant as the *p* value is below 0.05; however, the hypothesis is rejected. H1 claims that the quality of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the quality of eWOM information on shopping websites. However, conversely, quality of eWOM information on shopping websites (β = 0.200) was found more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than the quality of eWOM information on social media (β = 0.164).

Table 5.21: The Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for the H1

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Constant Value	(β) Social Media	(β) Shopping Websites
Information Quality	Purchase Intention	2.490	0.164	0.200

Note: p < 0.001

Table 5.22 shows the results of multiple regression analysis for the H2. The test was found significant as the *p* value is below 0.05; however, the hypothesis is rejected. H2 claims that the credibility of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the credibility of eWOM information on shopping websites. However, conversely, credibility of eWOM information on shopping websites (β = 0.221) was found more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than the credibility of eWOM information on social media (β = 0.132).

Table 5.22: The Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for the H2

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Constant Value	(β) Social Media	(β) Shopping Websites
Information Credibility	Purchase Intention	2.530	0.132	0.221

Note: p < 0.001

Table 5.23 shows the results of multiple regression analysis for the H3. The test was found significant as the *p* value is below 0.05; however, the hypothesis is rejected. H3 claims that the needs of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the needs of eWOM information on shopping websites. However, conversely, needs of eWOM information on shopping websites ($\beta = 0.156$) was found more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than the needs of eWOM information on social media ($\beta = 0.122$).

Table 5.23: The Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for the H3

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Constant Value	(β) Social Media	(β) Shopping Websites
Needs of Information	Purchase Intention	2.790	0.122	0.156

Note: p < 0.001

Table 5.24 shows the results of multiple regression analysis for the H4. The test was found significant as the *p* value is below 0.05; however, the hypothesis is rejected. H4 claims that the attitude towards eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the attitude towards eWOM information on shopping websites. However, conversely, attitude towards eWOM information on shopping websites ($\beta = 0.168$) was found more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than the attitude towards eWOM information on social media ($\beta = 0.110$).

Table 5.24: The Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for the H4

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Constant Value	(β) Social Media	(β) Shopping Websites
Attitude towards Information	Purchase Intention	2.821	0.110	0.168

Note: p < 0.001

Table 5.25 shows the results of multiple regression analysis for the H5. The test was found significant as the *p* value is below 0.05; however, the hypothesis is rejected. H5 claims that the usefulness of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the usefulness of eWOM information on shopping websites. However, conversely, usefulness of eWOM information on shopping websites ($\beta = 0.199$) was found more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than the usefulness of eWOM information on social media ($\beta = 0.141$).

Table 5.25: The Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for the H5

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Constant Value	(β) Social Media	(β) Shopping Websites
Information Usefulness	Purchase Intention	2.468	0.141	0.199

Note: p < 0.001

Table 5.26 shows the results of multiple regression analysis for the H6. The test was found significant as the *p* value is below 0.05; however, the hypothesis is rejected. H6 claims that the adoption of eWOM information on social media has a stronger effect on consumers' purchase intentions than the adoption of eWOM information on shopping websites. However, conversely, adoption of eWOM information on shopping websites ($\beta = 0.228$) was found more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than the adoption of eWOM information on social media ($\beta = 0.183$).

Table 5.26: The Results of Multiple Regression Analysis for the H6

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Constant Value	(β) Social Media	(β) Shopping Websites
Information Adoption	Purchase Intention	2.251	0.183	0.228

Note: p < 0.001

Consequently, the results of the multiple regression analyses show that all hypotheses of this study were rejected. This means the eWOM information on social media was not found to be more influential than the eWOM information on shopping websites. However, contrary to expectations, multiple regression test results show that eWOM information on shopping websites, between anonymous people is more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than eWOM information on social media between familiar people. To enlighten these results and provide a better understanding for this study, the following subsection presents the findings of semi-structured interviews.

5.3.2 Findings of the Qualitative Part

As all the hypotheses were rejected, the results of the quantitative part of this study clearly indicate that there should be some reasons which make eWOM on shopping websites more influential than eWOM on social media. In other words, there should be some reasons for consumers to prefer eWOM on shopping websites although they are anonymous. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were used to investigate the factors which lead consumers to prefer anonymous reviews rather than friends' recommendations on social media. Findings revealed four main themes: information quantity, information readiness, detailed information, dedicated information (Erkan and Evans, 2016b).

Information Quantity	Information Readiness	Detailed Information	Dedicated Information
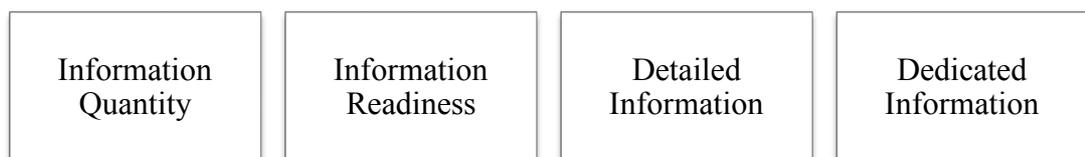
Figure 5.4: Reasons for Consumers to Prefer Online Reviews on Shopping Websites more than Friends' Recommendations on Social Media

5.3.2.1 Information Quantity

Most interviewees expressed the importance of the number of the reviews; and they also indicated that they did not frequently see friends' posts about brands or their products and services on social media. However, shopping websites have many

reviews for particular products and this gives an opportunity for consumers to compare different comments. For example, people can access hundreds of comments even for small products such as a pen or pencil. Whereas, on the other hand, they can only find a few comments regarding products and services of brands which have been shared by their friends on social media. It can be recognised that a large number of reviews make people more comfortable. People feel more confident in terms of the accuracy of information. Interviewees stated this issue with examples. One interviewee (ID: 10) stated that one or two comments shared by friends on social media are not "tangible," while another interviewee (ID: 1) also emphasised the same issue by sharing her recent experience. Information quantity, therefore, is found to be one of the reasons for consumers to prefer online reviews.

> I prefer reviews, because it is more. For example, on Amazon.com, you can see up to 300 reviews; but from friends on social media... it is just one product and it is just one or two friends. This is not really tangible. So, if I want to buy a product, numbers of the reviews give me that confidence... Because, you know, if 300 people are saying good things, that means, something must be good about this product. (ID: 10)

> I can give you an example from my latest experience. I was looking for a certain juicer. A lot of people have said, like it's been one of a faulty batch or something. So, they all said: "Don't buy the product. Don't waste your money." Of course, I considered them. I listen to reviews, if there's like six or seven. Obviously... because it is building up an image in my mind, there's obviously something wrong. Then, I'd be a fool to buy the product, you know... (ID: 1)

In addition, the difficulty of seeing different reviews on social media about a particular product was also emphasised by respondents. Although sometimes people can come across with product reviews on social media, these reviews are limited to a few products. Another interviewee (ID: 1) also underlined the remote possibility of seeing different comments on the same product.

> There are more people talking about products on Amazon.com, and there is a range of more products. But my friends would only talk about a few products that they like, and they have bought. I can consider their recommendations,

but I will probably still go online and do my research; and my research will boil down to a bunch of strangers again on the Internet (the interviewee laughs saying this). (ID: 10)

Reviews on social media, from my friends? I don't see them often, not often at all. Once in a blue moon, that's why I wouldn't consider it really... and even if you do see them, what's the chances that you'll have two or three reviews from friends at one time on the same product? (ID: 1)

I don't apply social media to search comments about products and services, because my friends don't share things like that. Sometimes, I can see some comments on specified groups (on Facebook); however, apart from those comments, I almost never come across a review about products on social media. (ID: 3)

Interviewees also talked about how information quantity helps them to overcome the anonymity issue on online reviews. When consumers see a high number of people agreeing with each other, they tend not to consider anonymity as an issue. If the majority of people who make reviews have a common opinion, this makes readers feel satisfied. In fact, if the majority of reviewers have positive comments on a specific product, this defeats the influence of negative comments. One interviewee (ID: 6) stated that if a product is only liked by a few people, the reason for this might be personal and could be ignored. This means that the overall opinion of the majority of people is considered to be both far more important and influential. Another interviewee (ID: 7) drew attention to the risk of manipulation. In cases where there are only a small number of reviews, credibility is likely to be uncertain as they might have written by owners of the products. However, people feel more relaxed and safer if there are lots of reviews. Information quantity, thus, is found as an important factor.

We, of course, don't know the personality of reviewers on shopping websites; he or she can be a person who doesn't like anything. However, when I continue to read the other reviews, I understand the overall opinion about the product. If there are 5000 comments and if the majority of people like the product, then how can I consider that specific person's comment? There might a problem with his personal preferences. (ID: 6)

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I don't read only one review. If there is one, there may be a risk of manipulation; but for example, if there are ten reviews; then how can all ten people leave fake comments? So, if there are ten reviews and nine of them praise the product apart from one review, then I feel satisfied and think that I got the enough information (ID: 7)

5.3.2.2 Information Readiness

Always being ready is another important reason which makes reviews on shopping websites superior to friends' recommendations on social media. Interviewees expressed that they are always able to access online reviews on shopping websites, while social media does not provide that convenience. It can be understood that people would like to reach the reviews when they need them rather than having random accessibility. For example, a person who intends to buy a product can quickly access related reviews on shopping websites, unlike with social media, where this does not happen. People who want to read reviews on a specific product need to wait until someone shares their comments or they need to contact their friends and ask through personal messages. These methods are deemed uncomfortable as the online reviews are readily available on shopping websites. Information readiness, therefore, is found to be one of the reasons for consumers preferring online reviews.

Reviews are not always available on social media; you can't always find them. That's why I follow the other consumers' reviews. They are easy to find and ready to use. (ID: 5)

When I am looking for information about products, shopping websites like Amazon.com are available for that, ready for it, reviews are there... but in social media, it is very difficult to find the information that I need. Even if I scroll down and go back to posts shared within the last two years, it is still not easy to find. (ID: 4)

When consumers require information about specific products, shopping websites are considered to be very useful. Interviewees underlined this advantage of online reviews on shopping websites over friends' recommendations on social media. Interviewees explained this situation by sharing their recent experiences with one (ID: 6) mentioning a coffee brand; while another interviewee (ID: 7) referred to a

wireless router. Additionally, one interviewee (ID: 8) drew attention to the difficulty of finding reviews for little decorative products on social media. Information readiness, thus, is found as an important factor.

> The products my friends and I use are not always the same. That's why I like review websites; you can find specific comments for every type of product. I of course consider my friends' recommendations on social media as well, but it's not easy to see them for specific products. For example, if I would like to learn something about Jack's beans coffee, probably I won't be able to learn anything from my friends on social media as they do not even know that brand. When it comes to specific brands, social media cannot be helpful. (ID: 6)

> If I already have something in my mind to buy, I use the reviews on shopping websites, especially, when I am looking for specific brand, specific product, and specific colour etc. I apply to reviews. Also finding reviews for some products is not possible on social media. For example, little products for decoration such as Chinese flags etc. But you can find some reviews on shopping websites. (ID: 8)

> My recent experience was about a wireless router. I read many online reviews about that product as I was not familiar with it. However, I didn't go and search this product on social media, why would anyone do that? You cannot find this kind of product information on social media. That's why I directly searched on Amazon.com and read the reviews. These reviews are ready, any time you need them, you can go and read. (ID: 7)

5.3.2.3 Detailed Information

Interviewees also described the significance of detailed information. They emphasised that information shared by friends regarding brands on social media is not detailed whereas reviews on shopping websites provide answers for specific questions. In particular, one interviewee (ID: 3) mentioned the importance of comparing different products produced for the same purpose. The reviews on shopping websites offer this to people searching for information about specific products. Extensive explanations also enable readers to understand the expertise of

those who wrote the information, allowing people to be more comfortable before making a purchasing decision. In addition, one interviewee (ID: 1) explained that detailed information helps to "build an image of the product" in her mind. Detailed information, therefore, is found to be one of the reasons for consumers to prefer online reviews.

> You can reach detailed information about products through online reviews. Plus, you can find the comparison of the different products for the same purpose. Reviewers explain his / her personal experience with the product and sometimes you can see how expert they are. However, on social media, comments of my friends usually don't have details... Also they don't compare different products as it in online reviews. That's why reviews on shopping websites are naturally more satisfying. (ID: 3)

> I read quite a lot of reviews on shopping websites... because some people take the time to write, you know, sometimes a paragraph or so... and I mean all the while adding up, this is building an image of the product to me and how it works efficiently. I see some products have faults, so these all contribute. (ID: 1)

One interviewee (ID: 10) also explained the importance of detailed information by giving an example of her recent experience when buying a pair of jeans. The example clearly shows how consumers find detailed information useful.

> Before I spend my money to buy something I have to be sure it's what it... The online reviews give me, it's like I can feel the product when I read the review, you know... Some people will say, "Yes, this cup is really nice but the handle is quite big for me as I have a small hand." This really helps me. For example, my recent experience... I read the reviews for a pair of jeans I wanted to buy; a lady was very specific with her review. She said, I'm 5 4 and these jeans is just the perfect length for me. Before reading this review, I wasn't sure, because I'm 5" 4'. On the website the model is 6" 2' and she's wearing this pair of jeans, so that's why I was not sure it is going to look exactly the same way on me. But the review said, I'm 5" 4' and, you know, and I'm a size 14, which is my size, I'm 5" 4' and I'm a size 14, and she said, "You should go a size higher if you're picking these jeans out because the

jeans are quite a small fit because of the style." That was how I picked the jeans and it was perfect for me, because someone else had written it out so clearly. (ID: 10)

Furthermore, interviewees mentioned that they are able to find information about both the positive and negative sides of products through online reviews on shopping websites, whereas the eWOM information on social media refers to either the positive or negative sides of products. Interview findings showed that people did not prefer short suggestions such as "Try it, it's nice." Instead, they wanted to understand the reason for the product having been liked / hated. One interviewee (ID: 1) also mentioned that she came across more negative reviews than positive ones on social media. However, consumers would like to receive detailed information about the products which includes both the positive and negative reviews. Detailed information, thus, is found as an important factor.

On social media, sometimes I see very brief positive or negative information about products and services. Rather than detailed information, I can only see suggestions with very short sentences such as "Try it, it's nice" and "I hate it, please avoid" etc. However, I can't see a great evaluation about products with both positive and negative sides... but it is not like this on shopping websites, for example on Amazon.com. (ID: 7)

My friends are more likely to complain rather than voice good opinions on social media. People don't really go out of their way to say, "Oh, that was a great service." If you're content with it, you just carry on using it; you only really voice yourself if there is a problem. That's why I don't trust social media, because you are likely to have more negative than positive reviews always. Whereas on reviews (on shopping websites), you can see the both positive and negative sides of the product that you're looking for. (ID: 1)

5.3.2.4 Dedicated Information

Interviewees considered social media and shopping websites as being separate sources of information. Social media websites were considered to be as an environment for socialising, while the purpose of online reviews on shopping websites were considered as an aid to assist purchasing decisions. This perceived

difference also affects people's intentions for sharing and the time they spend writing reviews. Interviewees explained the difference between social media and shopping websites through examples. They also emphasised that they primarily use social media websites for communicating with their friends (socialising) and to keep up to date. This means that product reviews are not the primary focus for using social media. Conversely, those reviews are a focus for using shopping websites. Consequently, participants find the information on online reviews to be more dedicated. Dedicated information, therefore, is found to be one of the reasons for consumers preferring online reviews.

> They are different contexts, like you shouldn't put reviews on Facebook necessarily, there's a dedicated site for it. It's like a camera and a phone, okay maybe not now because the cameras on phones are really advanced, but if you want a great picture you'll use an SLR. If you're a photographer you won't use your iPhone 6, sure the iPhone 6 takes good pictures, but your SLR is still going to take way better clarity resolutions, you know... It's dedicated to product reviews, so I spend more time looking at them than one friend who has written a review on Facebook. (ID: 1)

> I use social media for socialising. You know... to chat with my friends, to read some news... I mean, the aim is not reading reviews. Also, I think this is the reason for why we don't come across with lots of comments about products on social media. (ID: 6)

> People go on social media to do other things, like posting pictures... The primary purpose is to logon and do social things (the interviewee laughs saying this). Social media is now part of our life, just the same way before you buy a newspaper on the street and now I actually go on social media for news. So, it's not impossible that you'd go there for reviews, but it's also not the primary focus. That's why no matter what happens on social media I'm still going to go back to Amazon and read reviews. (ID: 10)

Interviewees also talked about how they consider the intention of people who share information about products on social media and on shopping websites. In particular, as these can be understood by their explanations, consumers tend to trust reviews if they consider the intention of writer to be positive. However, if they feel that the post

has been shared merely for a purpose of showing off, they do not find this type of review useful. Dedicated information, thus, is found as an important factor.

> My friends rarely share something about products and services on social media; sometimes I see their pictures taken in Starbucks for example... but I think they post these in order to increase their social status. However, you can't get useful information by these posts, can you? Because the purpose of sharing is not reviewing a product or service; they just want to show off their lifestyle through brands. (ID: 4)

> Actually, I feel that the aim of the people who write reviews is helping others. I think, they write in order to show good sides or bad sides of products to inform next customers. However, on social media -let's say Facebook- why would anyone share something similar on Facebook? Instead of helping others, maybe it's for bragging or to find a solution for a problem that they have with any products and services. So, I don't prefer social media for that reason. (ID: 7)

5.3.2.5 The Influences of Friends' Recommendations on Social Media

The four previously mentioned themes explain the reasons for consumers preferring online reviews on shopping websites rather than friends' recommendations on social media. However, this does not mean that the friends' recommendations are not influential at all. Most of the interviewees mentioned that they would prefer friends' recommendations instead of anonymous reviews; but they resorted to anonymous information on online reviews as they did not see many comments on social media. In this regard, it can be understood that social media websites convey the sense of offline WOM to the Internet as they allow users to communicate with their friends; however, these communications on social media do not involve many reviews regarding products and services of brands. Interviewees stated that they obviously give importance to friends' recommendations if they come across with those comments on social media.

> I always read my friends' recommendations about products on social media if I come across them. Also I would put them in higher regard than anonymous online reviews, because I know my friends, I know who they are. But the

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thing is, you cannot find these reviews on social media. If I find them, yeah, I prefer them instead of consumer reviews. (ID: 5)

If there was a review website which contains my friends.' relatives,' acquaintances' reviews, I might have used it. But, on social media I don't see many comments shared by them. (ID: 4)

One interviewee (ID: 7) expressed his experience when purchasing a particular product. He stated how he applied his friend's suggestions yet also emphasised that these situations rarely occur with social media, a fact which is in accordance with other interviewees' opinions. Another interviewee (ID: 9) also drew attention to the priority of friends' recommendations in cases where they are available.

One of my friends had shared his experience about the wireless router that he used. Then, when I wanted to buy a wireless router, I directly called him to ask his opinions. He told me how he was satisfied with the product. In fact, he also told me that he bought one more product and sent his brother. So, since they were both happy with the product, I did not even look at the reviews, I directly purchased the product suggested by him. But this case didn't happen on social media. Obviously recommendations of my friends are important for me, but these things rarely happen on social media. (ID: 7)

Recommendations of my friends are really important for me. When they suggest something, I can buy the thing even without looking at any review; especially if they suggest something that they used. But when there is no suggestion from my friends, I obviously have to consider the online reviews. It's the same for every product, whatever I consider to buy. For example, when I want to book a hotel or something, I really care about the reviews. The scores given by the former customers are also very important for me. However, if one of my friends went to a place that I want to go, of course, I first consider his / her comments, because I trust them more. (ID: 9)

5.3.2.6 The Level of Friendship on Social Media

Some interviewees also highlighted the different levels of friendship on social media. They indicated that they did not consider all the people on their friends' lists to be real friends. Owing to the nature of social networking websites people can easily

become friends without the need to know each other very well. Interviewees clarified this issue by giving examples from their personal Facebook accounts. One of the interviewees said that she considered only 25 users (out of 1,000 – approximately) as her close friends; while another interviewee expressed that she also considered only 25 users (out of 150 – approximately) as her real friends. This situation affects the reliability of comments shared on social media. Based on the explanations of interviewees, it can be clearly seen that they intend to trust their close friends' comments; however, they do not consider all people in their social media accounts as their real friends. In fact, one interviewee (ID: 1) uses the phrase "semi-anonymous" in order to describe people on a friend list in social media (excluding some real friends). This is a very important finding which explains why eWOM on social media was found to be less influential than anticipated.

> The definition of friends on social media is open to discussion. Social media is so crazy now... For example, I have probably 1,000 or so friends on Facebook. I don't know a lot of them; and also I still have 300 friend requests. I am tired of declining; you see the problem I'm having? So out of the 1,000 friends on my Facebook, maybe only like 200 I really know, or let's say 250 I know. Also, out of these 250, how many of them are my close friends? Maybe 25. So, how would I consider all comments on social media? It might only be ok, if the person is in the close circle of friends. (ID: 10)

> The thing is with social media you don't always know the people; I mean Facebook for instance you have 150 friends, you know about 50 of them, like rather well, and the other 100 are just acquaintances. So, they might as well be anonymous in one sense. Let's be honest, your real friends, you can count on your fingertips. So, maybe out of the 50 you know 25 really well, and then 25 you speak to a bit more often and the rest of the people are just the people I somehow know. Like a friend, I just stop and say 'hi' when I see at school. But that doesn't mean that I'm going to trust their reviews over someone on Amazon.com who has written like a paragraph and a half, and has a detailed explanation. I can say the comments of that kind of friends are like semi-anonymous for me. (ID: 1)

5.3.3 Summary of the Section

This section has presented the results and findings of the second phase of this research. Initially, the results of the quantitative part were displayed. Demographic profile of the respondents, descriptive statistics of variables, and reliability assessment were demonstrated along with hypotheses testing and multiple regression analyses. The results show that all six hypotheses were rejected. Thereafter, the findings of the qualitative part were presented. Themes found through thematic analyses, which are information quantity, information readiness, detailed information, and dedicated information, were explained with quotations of interviewees. Also, interviewees' opinions about friends' recommendations and level of friendship on social media were highlighted. The following section presents the final outcomes of both contextual and comparative studies conducted in this research.

5.4 Joint Evaluation of Both the First and Second Phases

Figure 5.5 presents the joint evaluation of the results and findings achieved in both phases of this research. Thereafter, the following section concludes the chapter.

The influence of eWOM in Social Media on Consumers' Purchase Intentions

Phase 1:
A Contextual Study

RQ1: What are the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions?

Phase 2:
A Comparative Study

RQ2: Is eWOM between familiar people on social media or eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms more influential on consumers' purchase intentions?

Survey

eWOM information in social media was found influential on consumers' purchase intentions based on 6 determinants presented in the research model (IACM):

- Information Quality
- Information Credibility
- Needs of Information
- Attitude towards Information
- Information Usefulness
- Information Adoption

Part 1:
Reanalysis of the Survey Data

The influences of eWOM between familiar people on social media and eWOM between anonymous people on shopping websites were compared based on the 6 determinants found in the contextual study.

All hypotheses were rejected, and eWOM on shopping websites was found more influential on consumers' purchase intentions although it consists of anonymous reviews.

Part 2:
In-depth Interviews

Interview findings revealed 4 reasons which explain why consumers prefer eWOM on shopping websites more than eWOM on social media, although the eWOM on shopping websites is anonymous:

- Information Quantity
- Information Readiness
- Detailed Information
- Dedicated Information

Joint Evaluation:

- EWOM information in social media is influential on consumers' purchase intentions; and the IACM demonstrates the determinants of this influence.

- However, although the eWOM in social media occurs between familiar people, it is not as influential as eWOM in shopping websites because of the 4 reasons found through interviews.

Figure 5.5: Joint Evaluation of the Results and Findings Achieved in Both Phases

5.5 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, the results and findings of both contextual and comparative studies conducted in this research were presented. Initially, the results of the contextual study, which aims to explore the determinants of eWOM information social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions, were demonstrated. Then, the results and findings of the comparative study, which aims to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions, were presented. Thereafter, final outcomes of both contextual and comparative studies conducted in this research were evaluated.

The following chapter discusses these results and findings in the light of related literature.

CHAPTER 6:
DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of results and findings found in both the contextual and comparative studies conducted in this research. For this purpose, the chapter is divided into four main sections. The next section introduces the discussion of results found in the first phase of this research which aims to explore the determinants of eWOM information social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions. Thereafter, section three introduces a discussion of results and findings found in the second phase of this research which aims to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions. Finally, the last section concludes the chapter.

6.2 Discussion of Results Found in the First Phase

This study has examined the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions. The impact of eWOM on consumers' purchase intentions has long been known by researchers (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Chan and Ngai, 2011; Kumar and Benbasat, 2006; Park et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2010). In fact, the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions has also been known (See-To and Ho, 2014; Wang et al., 2012). However, this study explains the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions through its tested model, IACM (Erkan and Evans, 2016a). The IACM is developed by integrating a well-known model and a theory which are Sussman and Siegal's (2003) IAM and Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) TRA. Results indicate that all hypotheses between information quality, information credibility, needs of information, attitude towards information, information usefulness, information adoption and purchase intention were supported except the one between attitude towards information and information usefulness. This section discusses the results in detail.

6.2.1 Information Quality and Information Usefulness

This study has proposed that the quality of eWOM information is positively related to the usefulness of eWOM information on social media (H1). The empirical results of this study support the direct positive impact of information quality on information usefulness; therefore, H1 is accepted. This finding is not surprising, as it is suggested by previous researchers in the different research contexts (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; DeLone and McLean, 1992; Rieh, 2002; Sussman and Siegal, 2003). If the quality of information on social media is high and satisfying, consumers consider the information useful; and this leads them to look at products and services more closely (Cheung et al., 2008; Olshavsky, 1985). In fact, previous researchers have tested the impact of information quality on purchase intention in the context of online reviews; and found the quality of online reviews to be influential on purchase intention (Lee and Shin, 2014; Park et al., 2007). As this study uses SEM technique and tests the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions; this study also proves the aforementioned relationship in the context of social media.

6.2.2 Information Credibility and Information Usefulness

As a second hypothesis, this study has proposed that the credibility of eWOM information is positively related to the usefulness of eWOM information on social media. The empirical results of this study support the direct positive effect of information credibility on information usefulness; therefore, H2 is accepted. This result refers that consumers consider the information on social media useful, when they find it credible. Information credibility is regarded critical by previous researchers; it is considered as main factor in the consumers' decision making processes (Awad and Ragowsky, 2008; Wathen and Burkell, 2002). This result of the study is further supported by McKnight and Kacmar (2006) who have shown the impact of information credibility on information adoption and Prendergast et al. (2010) who has proved the effect of information credibility on consumers' purchase intentions. As this study uses SEM technique and tests the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions; this study also proves the aforementioned relationships in the context of social media.

6.2.3 Needs of Information and Information Usefulness

This study has also proposed that needs of eWOM information on social media has a significant positive influence on the usefulness of eWOM information (H3). The results show that needs of eWOM information is positively related to the usefulness of eWOM information on social media; H3 is accepted. As explained before, in order to find the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions; this study considers the behaviour of consumers towards eWOM information together with the characteristics of eWOM information. Therefore, the needs of eWOM information was added into the research model as an independent variable. Needs of information was adapted from the previous studies which use this notion in different research contexts as "advice seeking" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Wolny and Mueller, 2013), and "opinion seeking" (Chu and Kim, 2011). The results of hypotheses testing refers that consumers who needs eWOM information on social media, are more likely to find them useful and adoptable; and eventually it is found to be one of the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions.

6.2.4 Attitude towards Information and Information Usefulness

Attitude towards information is another variable which was added as consumer behaviour towards eWOM information. This study has proposed that attitude towards eWOM information on social media is positively related to the usefulness of eWOM information on social media (H4). This variable was adapted from the Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory, TRA. Consumers, who have positive attitudes towards eWOM information on social media, are more likely to find them useful and adoptable. However, the empirical results of this study do not support this relationship between the mentioned variables; H4, therefore, is rejected. One possible reason which may cause this result is the context of the study, social media. Due to the fact that people usually receive the eWOM information from their friends and acquaintances in social media, they may already think that the information will be useful. Thus, the aforementioned relationship might be affected; however, varying contexts may bring alternative results for this hypothesis.

6.2.5 Attitude towards Information and Purchase Intention

As a fifth hypothesis, this study has proposed that attitude towards eWOM information on social media is positively related to consumers' purchase intentions. The empirical results of this study support the direct positive effect of attitudes towards information on purchase intention; therefore, H5 is accepted. Consumers are more likely to have higher purchase intentions when they have positive attitudes towards eWOM information on social media. This result of the study is consistent with previous literature. The impact of the attitudes of consumers on behavioural intentions has been tested and validated by several theories. According to TRA (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), attitude is one of the main predictors of behavioural intention. In addition to the TRA, TPB (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) and TAM (Bagozzi et al., 1992; Davis, 1989) also highlights the relationship between attitude and behavioural intention. Therefore, this result of the study shows the positive relationship between attitude towards eWOM information on social media and purchase intention is in line with previous studies.

6.2.6 Information Usefulness and Information Adoption

This study has also proposed that usefulness of eWOM information is positively related to the adoption of eWOM information on social media (H6). As the empirical results of this study support the direct positive impact of information usefulness on information adoption, H6 is accepted. Consumers tend to engage with the information when they find it useful. Previous studies have also considered information usefulness as one of the predictors of information adoption (Davis, 1989; Sussman and Siegal, 2003) and purchase intention (Lee and Koo, 2015). Therefore, this result of the study shows the positive relationship between usefulness of eWOM information on social media and information adoption is consistent with previous studies. Particularly on social media, as people are exposed to huge amount of eWOM information (Chu and Kim, 2011), they might have greater intention to adopt when they find the eWOM information useful; and the result of H6 confirmed this argument.

6.2.7 Information Adoption and Purchase Intention

As a last hypothesis, this study has proposed that adoption of eWOM information on social media is positively related to consumers' purchase intentions (H7). The empirical results of this study support the direct positive effect of information adoption on purchase intention; therefore, H7 is accepted. Social media users encounter too much eWOM information and previous researchers have found that this information is influential on consumers' purchase intentions (Iyengar et al., 2009; See-To and Ho, 2014; Wallace et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012). However, not all eWOM information on social media has the same effect on consumers; some of them can have higher impact while others can have lower impact (Yang, 2012). This study, therefore, has argued that consumers who adopt the eWOM information they receive on social media, are more likely to have higher purchase intentions; and the result of H7 confirmed this argument. Previously, the possibility of this effect had been suggested by researchers (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Cheung et al., 2009); however, this study validated the mentioned relationship by empirically testing it.

6.2.8 The Evolution of the IACM

The abovementioned relationships in the IACM have been validated through structural equation modelling (SEM) with the results highlighting the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions. According to the model, the information quality, information credibility, needs of information, and attitude towards information were found as the antecedents of information usefulness which was found as the antecedent of information adoption. Purchase intention was found as the consequence of information adoption. However, before validating this final model, this study initially tested all the mentioned variables together as the antecedents of purchase intention. Figure 6.1 presents both the initial and final versions of the IACM. The progress is presented here since the development of the model is also considered as a contribution for the knowledge.

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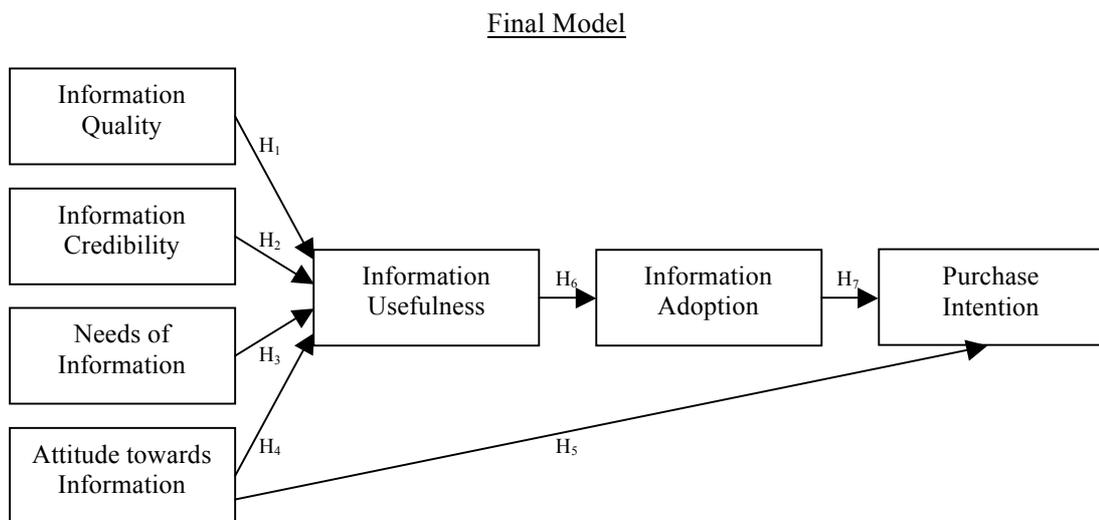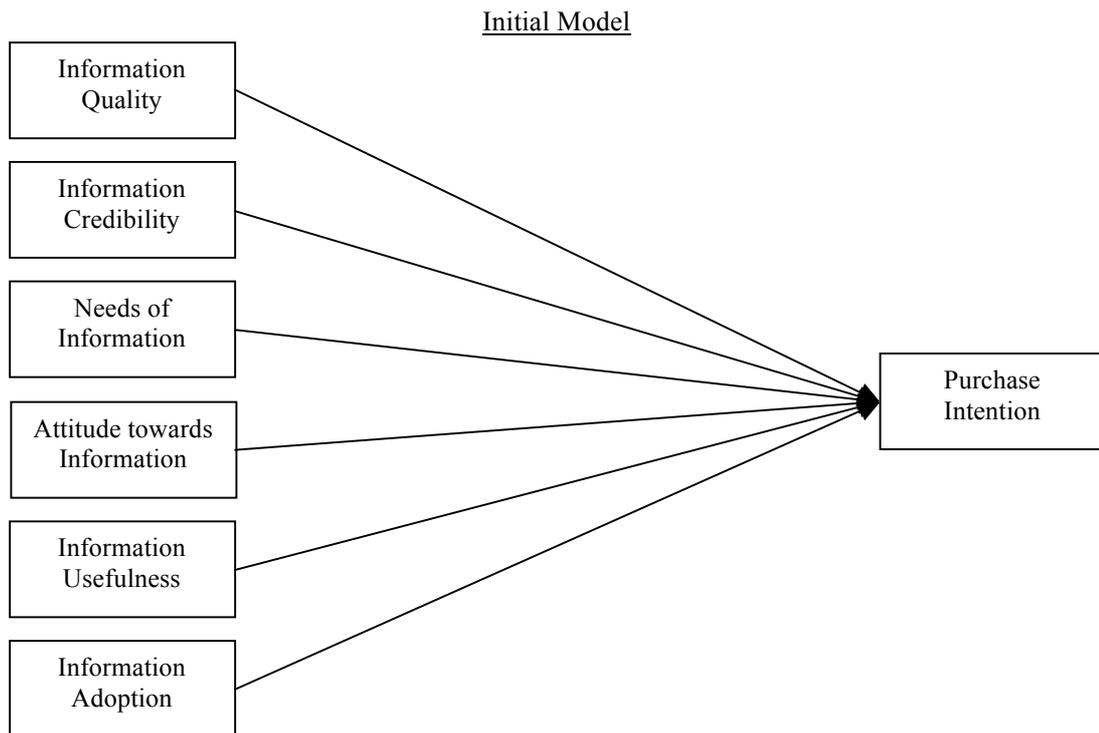
Figure 6.1: The Evolution of the IACM

6.2.9 Summary of the Section

In this section, the discussion of results of the first phase of this research was presented. In summary, all hypotheses between information quality, information credibility, needs of information, attitude towards information, information usefulness, information adoption and purchase intention were supported except the

one between attitude towards information and information usefulness. Both the results of accepted hypotheses and the rejected one were discussed and supported with previous literature. The following section discusses the results and findings of the second phase of this research.

6.3 Discussion of Results and Findings Found in the Second Phase

This study examined whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on shopping websites was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions. For this purpose, the impacts of eWOM on these platforms were compared based on the six determinants of eWOM information which influence consumers' purchase intentions, found in the first phase of this research. Previous studies have tested the impact of eWOM on social media (Iyengar et al., 2009; See-To and Ho, 2014; Wallace et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012) and the impact of eWOM on shopping websites (through reviews) (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Gu et al., 2012; Li and Zhan, 2011; Park et al., 2007) separately; and they have both been found influential on consumers' purchase intentions. However, the influences of these two different platforms had not been compared yet although there is one major difference between them in terms of eWOM. Online reviews on shopping websites mostly allow eWOM to occur between anonymous people, while social media enables eWOM to occur between people who already know each other (Kozinets et al., 2010; Moran and Muzellec, 2014). For this reason, this study expected a significant difference between the influences of eWOM on these platforms (Erkan and Evans, 2016b); and proposed six hypotheses.

6.3.1 Results of the Quantitative Part

Indeed, the differences between the influence of eWOM on social media and shopping websites have clearly emerged and this study has found significant results. However, contrary to hypotheses of this study, eWOM on social media was not found to be more influential than eWOM on shopping websites; all the hypotheses were rejected. On the other hand, the multiple regression results show that eWOM on shopping websites was found more influential on consumers' purchase intentions than eWOM on social media. One of the critical parts of the results is the clarity of

the outcomes. EWOM on shopping websites was found to be more effective in terms of all the components tested in this study: information quality, information credibility, needs of information, attitude towards information, information usefulness, and information adoption. Although some previous studies anticipate the eWOM between familiar people as more influential, as this study hypothesised, (Chu and Choi, 2011; Chu and Kim, 2011; Park et al., 2007); these results are in line with the findings of Yeap et al.'s (2014) study which conclude the online reviews as the most preferred eWOM source. As the results of all hypotheses are consistent between each other, they clearly indicate that there should be some reasons which make eWOM on shopping websites more influential than eWOM on social media. In order to discover these possible reasons and uncover the results, semi-structured interviews were conducted in the second part of this study.

6.3.2 Findings of the Qualitative Part

Semi-structured interviews have investigated the reasons which lead consumers to prefer anonymous reviews on shopping websites rather than friends' recommendations on social media. After thematic analyses, four main themes arose from the collected data: information quantity, information readiness, detailed information, and dedicated information. Information quantity was found as one of the explicit reasons which enable eWOM on shopping websites to be more advantageous and ultimately more influential on consumers. This finding is in accordance with previous studies which reveal the influence of 'number of reviews' on purchase intention (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Park and Kim, 2008; Park and Lee, 2008; Xiaorong et al., 2011). Furthermore, as most of the interviewees indicated, the information quantity plays a very critical role to cover the anonymity issue concerning eWOM on shopping websites. On the other hand, information readiness was found as another reason which makes anonymous reviews preferable for consumers. The term 'information readiness' was previously used in different research contexts (Mutula and van Brakel, 2006). However, in this study, it is being used within the eWOM context. Online reviews on shopping websites are always ready to apply when consumers need information about products. Since the social media websites do not provide this convenience in terms of reaching eWOM

information, the eWOM information on shopping websites are preferred by consumers.

Furthermore, consumers find the eWOM information on shopping websites more satisfying, because they consider that online reviews provide more detailed information than the friends' recommendations on social media. This finding can be linked with the previous research which found the effect of 'length of reviews' on purchase intention (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Park and Lee, 2008) and perceived information usefulness (Willemsen et al., 2011). However, the mentioned studies measure the 'length of reviews' only with the number of the words due to their quantitative approach while we refer to a more comprehensive meaning through 'detailed information'; this can be better understood by quotations of interviewees (i.e. comparison of products, positive and negative sides etc.) Finally, dedicated information was found as another reason having important roles on eWOM platforms. Consumers find the eWOM information on online reviews as more dedicated; and thus, they prefer them more than eWOM information on social media. Consumers also consider the intention of people who write the eWOM information; and they tend to use the information when they feel the intention of writer as 'concern for others'. 'Concern for others' previously was regarded as one of the motives which lead consumers to write online reviews (Engel et al., 1995; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Jeong and Jang, 2011); however, this study found that it is also very important for consumers who read the reviews.

The aforementioned four themes appeared through thematic analysis to explain why consumers prefer online reviews on shopping websites more than friends' recommendations on social media. However, this does not mean that the friends' recommendations are not influential. As stated by the most of the interviewees, people also apply to anonymous eWOM information on online reviews; since (1) they do not come across with lots of comments about products on social media, (2) and they do not count all people on their friends' lists as a friend. Consumers consider their close friends' recommendations on social media in case they exist. This means that the eWOM information on social media is also influential on consumers; however, it is not as influential as eWOM information on online reviews. This finding is in line with the results found in the quantitative part of this study. Results of multiple regression analyses show that friends' recommendations on

social media are effective on consumers' purchase intentions; however, they are not as effective as anonymous reviews on shopping websites. The findings of the qualitative part of the study have brought an enlightening approach and provided a better understanding for the results found in the quantitative part of this study.

6.3.3 Summary of the Section

In this section, the discussion of results and findings of the second phase of this research was presented. In particular, both the results of the quantitative part and the findings of the qualitative part were discussed. In summary, all the hypotheses claim superiority of eWOM information on social media over eWOM information on shopping websites were rejected; findings through semi-structured interviews uncovered the rejected hypotheses and explained why eWOM information on online reviews are preferred although they are anonymous. Both the results of hypotheses and findings of interviews were discussed and supported with previous literature. The following section concludes the chapter.

6.4 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, the results and findings of both contextual and comparative studies conducted in this research were discussed. Initially, the results of the contextual study, which aims to explore the determinants of eWOM information social media which influences consumers' purchase intentions, were considered in the light of related literature. Thereafter, the results and findings of the comparative study, which aims to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions, were discussed through considering previous literature.

The next chapter presents the conclusion of this research along with the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and future research directions.

CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis by providing an overview of the research. For this purpose, the next section revisits the research aim and objectives; and discusses the achievement of each objective within the thesis. The third section then outlines the main research findings based on the research questions. Thereafter, section four presents the theoretical and practical contributions of the research. Finally, research limitations and future research directions are highlighted in the last section of the chapter.

7.2 Meeting the Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this thesis was identified in Chapter 1 as to examine the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions. In order to achieve this aim, four research objectives were outlined. Table 7.1 indicates the chapters where the research objectives were achieved.

Table 7.1: Chapters where the Research Objectives were Achieved

Objectives	Chapters
Objective 1	Chapter 2
Objective 2	Chapter 3
Objective 3	Chapter 4 and 5
Objective 4	Chapter 6
Objective 5	Chapter 7

7.2.1 Objective 1

The first objective was to review literature based upon eWOM behaviour on social media, eWOM behaviour on other platforms, and the influence of eWOM on purchase intention, including the antecedents of purchase intention.

This research critically reviewed the existing eWOM literature and the findings were presented in Chapter 2. Initially, the evolution of eWOM was introduced and both the advantages and disadvantages were presented. Thereafter, the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention was examined along with the antecedents of purchase intention. Finally, in the latter half of the chapter, eWOM on social media and other online platforms were explored in the light of previous studies.

7.2.2 Objective 2

The second objective was to develop theoretical models to explain the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions; and to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions.

In order to find the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions, the first phase of this research has developed a theoretical model along with seven measurable hypotheses. The model, IACM, was developed based on the integration of IAM and the related components of TRA. The importance of employed theories and proposed hypotheses were explained in the Section 3.2 of Chapter 3.

Moreover, to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or the eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms was more influential on consumers' purchase intentions, the second phase of this research developed six more hypotheses. The importance and relevance of proposed hypotheses were explained in the Section 3.3 of Chapter 3.

7.2.3 Objective 3

The third objective was to empirically assess the relationships hypothesised in the theoretical models in order to answer research questions.

The methodology section of this thesis, Chapter 4, presented the chosen research paradigm, research approach, research strategy, and data collection method of the research along with the related justifications. The results and findings were then

presented in Chapter 5. More specifically, the results of the tested theoretical model in the contextual study were demonstrated in Section 5.2 including the results of preliminary data analysis, descriptive analysis, reliability and validity tests, CFA, and SEM; while the results of tested hypotheses in the comparative study were presented in Section 5.3 together with the findings reached through thematic analysis of interviews.

7.2.4 Objective 4

The fourth objective was to discuss the results and findings and position them within the existing eWOM literature.

The results and findings obtained in this research were discussed in Chapter 6 through considering previous studies. Outcomes of both contextual and comparative studies were supported with related literature. In particular, the results of the first phase of this research were discussed in Section 6.2, where the results and findings of the second phase were discussed in Section 6.3.

7.2.5 Objective 5

The fifth objective was to draw theoretical contributions and managerial implications for academics and practitioners in regard to the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions.

The theoretical and practical implications of both studies conducted in this research were presented in Chapter 7 (Section 7.4). In addition, the final section of Chapter 7 (Section 7.5) provides recommendations for future research.

7.3 Summary of Research Findings

The first question of this research was: What are the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions?

The first phase of this research proposed a theoretical model in order to find the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions. The proposed model was validated through a survey of 384

social media users in the UK. Based on the first research question, the main findings of this research are as follows:

- This study found that information quality, information credibility, needs of information, attitude towards information, information usefulness, and information adoption are the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions.

- The determinants show that the influence of eWOM information not only depends on characteristics of eWOM information but also consumers' behaviour towards eWOM information. They both have an important role on purchase intention; they therefore should be evaluated together while considering the influence of eWOM information on consumers' purchase intentions.

- The quality of eWOM information, credibility of eWOM information, and needs of eWOM information are found to have a direct positive influence on the usefulness of eWOM information; where no relationship is found between attitude toward eWOM information and information usefulness.

- Usefulness of eWOM information is found influential on adoption of eWOM information. Adoption of eWOM information and attitude towards eWOM information are found to have a direct positive influence on consumers' purchase intentions.

- The research model of this study, which was developed based on the integration of IAM and the related components of TRA, was validated through structural equation modelling; and it is named as Information Acceptance Model (IACM).

The second question of this research was: Is eWOM between familiar people on social media or eWOM between anonymous people on other online platforms more influential on consumers' purchase intentions?

The second phase of this research compared the influences of eWOM on social media and eWOM on shopping websites based on the six determinants of eWOM information which influence consumers' purchase intentions, found in the first phase: Information Quality, Information Credibility, Needs of Information, Attitude towards Information, Information Usefulness, and Information Adoption. Thereafter, to

provide a better understanding of results, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted. Based on the second research question, the main findings of this research are as follows:

- This study found that eWOM information on social media is influential on consumers' purchase intentions. However, it is not as influential as eWOM information on shopping websites.

- EWOM information on shopping websites was found to be more influential in terms of all the six determinants used for comparison: information quality, information credibility, needs of information, attitude towards information, information usefulness, and information adoption.

- This study also found why anonymous reviews are more influential than friends' recommendations. Information quantity, information readiness, detailed information, and dedicated information are the reasons which make eWOM information on shopping websites superior although they are anonymous.

- Consumers also apply anonymous eWOM information on online reviews since they do not come across with many comments from their friends on social media about products and services of brands.

- Consumers do not count all people on their friends' lists as a friend. Therefore, most of the comments on social media about brands are considered as semi-anonymous.

7.4 Research Contributions

The aim of this research was to examine the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions. To do so, the research was conducted in two phases; and eWOM on social media was examined through (1) a contextual and (2) a comparative study. Consequently, the contributions of this research can be introduced at theoretical and practical levels.

7.4.1 Theoretical Level

The major contribution of the contextual study that it has developed a comprehensive theoretical model examining the determinants of eWOM information on social media

which influences consumers' purchase intentions. The model was developed based on the integration of IAM and related components of TRA. The IAM explains the characteristics of the eWOM information (Sussman and Siegal, 2003), while the related components of TRA expresses the behaviour of consumers towards eWOM information (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). However, the model offered in this study, namely Information Acceptance Model (IACM) (Erkan and Evans, 2016a), offers a more comprehensive approach as a consequence of considering the behaviour of consumers together with the characteristics of information within the same model. The IACM, thus, brings a new approach to information adoption by extending IAM and provides new insights to researchers who study Information Systems (IS). In addition, the model highlights the information adoption process as an antecedent of behavioural intention, which is a very important finding for the related literature. Future studies can build new models through considering the relationship between information adoption process and behavioural intention.

Furthermore, this study contributes to future research by empirically testing an argument of recent eWOM studies (Knoll, 2015) which suggests the joint evaluation of characteristics of eWOM information and consumers' behaviour towards eWOM information. Results validated in this study confirm the proposed argument and that future studies therefore can start with a more comprehensive perspective by knowing the importance of consumers' behaviours towards information as well as the characteristics of information. Finally, this study provides a greater understanding of eWOM within social media by highlighting the determinants of eWOM information on social media influencing consumers' purchase intentions. Validated determinants are important for both researchers in the same field, and researchers who are studying purchase intention within different research contexts.

On the other hand, the comparative study of this research contributes to the eWOM literature through elucidating an uncertainty. Some previous researchers considered the anonymity issue to be beneficial for eWOM (Chatterjee, 2001; Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006) while many others did not agree with this opinion and expected the opposite result. The latter group of researchers anticipated the eWOM on social media to be more influential since it occurs between people who already know each other (Chu and Choi, 2011; Moran and Muzellec, 2014; Park et al., 2007). This issue had not yet been empirically tested since social media websites are relatively new

eWOM platforms. However, this study enlightens the mentioned discussion with its empirical approach (Erkan and Evans, 2016b). The results are very important for both groups of researchers. In particular, researchers who neglect eWOM on platforms other than social media can reconsider the anonymity issue and this can bring further insightful results through the use of extra studies. Furthermore, this study provides new constructs for future research through its qualitative findings. The findings reached through in-depth interviews explaining why consumers prefer anonymous online reviews, can either be tested as components of new theories and models or they can be tested as an inclusion of existing theories and models. Both types have potential to provide valuable results for the literature.

Ultimately, both the contextual and comparative studies contribute to the related literature since there are limited studies focusing on eWOM on social media (Cheung and Thadani, 2012).

7.4.2 Practical Level

From a practical perspective, this research provides marketers with a frame of reference to understand the influence of eWOM in social media on consumers' purchase intentions. Both the contextual and the comparative studies in this research offer valuable insights for marketers.

The first phase of this research can provide significant managerial implications as it explains the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intentions. Social media websites are important for marketers owing to the large numbers of users they have; and moreover, these websites are considered very appropriate platforms for eWOM (Canhoto and Clark, 2013). Therefore, the determinants provided by this study allow marketers to understand the dynamics of eWOM on social media; marketers thus can develop better marketing strategies.

Conversely, the second phase of this research shows that eWOM information on shopping websites are more influential on consumers than eWOM information on social media. This finding is very important for marketers who aim to employ eWOM marketing as they can spend more time with eWOM on shopping websites. Additionally, this study highlights the aspects of eWOM information considered by

consumers; marketers, who pay regard to consumers' such expectations, can develop better eWOM marketing strategies.

7.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this research provides a considerable amount of theoretical and practical contributions, the following limitations can be addressed in future research.

This research has adopted a non-probability sampling technique known as convenience sampling in order to collect the data. It is therefore conducted with participants who are university students. Although the age group of university students constitutes the majority of social media users, they may not precisely reflect the whole population. Convenience sampling technique has a limitation in respect of generalising the results of a small sample to the large population.

Another limitation of this research is considering all social media websites together, instead of specifically focusing on one website such as Facebook or Twitter. The results may vary according to the website. Future research therefore could examine the eWOM on one specific social media website. In addition, a comparison of different social media websites in the context of eWOM can bring new theoretical and practical insights. Also, in the second phase of this research, shopping websites were selected instead of other anonymous eWOM platforms; since finding users of shopping websites is more convenient than blogs, consumer reviews websites, and discussion forums. Further studies could compare social media with other anonymous eWOM platforms.

The IACM, the research model of the contextual study, was developed based on the integration of IAM and related components of TRA. Future research could develop IACM through adding more variables or could test the current model within the different research contexts. Finally, the key themes which arose from the semi-structured interviews refer to consumers' expectations about eWOM information. Further studies could test these findings by implementing them into existing models and theories as a part of new components; thus, new theoretical and managerial insights can be obtained.

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APPENDICES

Dear Participants,

My name is Ismail Erkan and I am a PhD student at Brunel University, London. I am conducting a study examining the impact of conversations about products in social media on consumers' purchase intentions. You are kindly invited to participate in this research study by completing the attached questionnaire.

It is an anonymous questionnaire whereby all responses will remain confidential and analysed at an aggregate, not individual level. The collected data will be used for academic purposes only and has been approved by the Brunel Business School Ethics Committee.

The approximate time to complete this questionnaire is 10 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the questionnaire at any time with no obligations. However, I really appreciate your participation.

Thank you for your cooperation, and for any queries or further information about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Ismail Erkan
Brunel Business School
Brunel University, London, UK
Email: ismail.erkan@brunel.ac.uk

Section 1:

- Are you a university student in the UK?

  Yes ☐   No ☐   (If No, you don't need to continue... Thank You...)

- What is your current level of education?

  Bachelor's ☐   Master's ☐   PhD ☐

- What is your gender?

  Male ☐   Female ☐   Other ☐

- What is your age?

  18 - 22 ☐   23 - 27 ☐   28 - 32 ☐   33 - 37 ☐   38 - 42 ☐   43 or above ☐

- How often do you use social media?

  Everyday ☐   4 – 5 days per week ☐   Once or twice a week ☐   Very rare ☐   Never ☐

- How often do you use online shopping websites?

  More than once a month ☐   Once a month ☐   Very rare ☐   Never ☐

- How often do you read online customer reviews before making the purchase?

  Always ☐   Frequently ☐   Sometimes ☐   Never ☐

- How long have you been using the Internet?

  Less than 1 year ☐   1 to 3 years ☐   4 to 6 years ☐   More than 6 years ☐

Section 2:

The information about products which are...	shared by my friends in **Social Media**					shared as customer reviews on **Shopping Websites**				
I think they have sufficient reasons supporting the opinions.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I think they are objective.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I think they are understandable.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I think they are clear.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
In general, I think the quality of them is high.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

	shared by my friends in **Social Media**					shared as customer reviews on **Shopping Websites**				
I think they are convincing.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I think they are strong.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I think they are credible.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I think they are accurate.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

	shared by my friends in **Social Media**					shared as customer reviews on **Shopping Websites**				
I like to apply them when I consider new products.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
If I have little experience with a product, I often use them.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I usually consult them to choose best alternative for me.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I frequently gather them before making a purchase.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

	Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.				
Strongly Disagree **1**	**Disagree** **2**	**Neutral** **3**	**Agree** **4**	**Strongly Agree** **5**	

	shared by my friends in **Social Media**					shared as customer reviews on **Shopping Websites**				
I always read them when I buy a product.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
They are helpful for my decision making when I buy a product.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
They make me confident in purchasing product.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
If I do not read them when I buy a product, I worry about my decision.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
They impose a burden on me when I buy a product.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
They irritate me when I buy a product.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

	shared by my friends in **Social Media**					shared as customer reviews on **Shopping Websites**				
I think they are generally useful.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I think they are generally informative.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

	shared by my friends in **Social Media**					shared as customer reviews on **Shopping Websites**				
They contribute to my knowledge about the product.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
They make easier for me to make purchase decision.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
They enhance my effectiveness in making purchase decision.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
They motivate me to make purchase decision.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the number that indicates your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Section 3:

After considering **positive** information about a product which is...	shared by my friends in **Social Media**					shared as customer reviews on **Shopping Websites**				
It is very likely that I will buy the product.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I will purchase the product next time I need a product.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I will definitely try the product.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I will recommend the product to my friends.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

After considering **negative** information about a product which is…	shared by my friends in **Social Media**					shared as customer reviews on **Shopping Websites**				
It is very likely that I will buy the product.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I will purchase the product next time I need a product.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I will definitely try the product.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
I will recommend the product to my friends.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Open Codes: Positive & Negative Sides, Being Detailed, Personality, Being Dedicated, Close Friends, Number of the Reviews, Expertise, Price

Interviewer 10, F, 26

I would say Amazon reviews, because it is more. Like you can see up to 300 reviews on a product, on Amazon. But with friends' reviews, it is just one product and it is just one or two friends. Talking about one product. It is not really tangible. So, if I want to buy a product, what gives me that confidence is that First, I look at the likes like 5 stars, how many stars, if it is 4 and half stars. (Then) 4 and half stars by how many people? If 5 people give 4 and half stars, its not tangible. But if 300 people, you know, are giving me 4 and a half stars, I know: This Is A Lot. So that means, something must be good about this product. So it is about numbers for me. The more people like the product, the better it is.

So I would go with... Amazon, like customer reviews, because more people are talking about it and there is a range of more products, I can see more people talking about it. But my friends would only talk about a few products that they like, and they have bought, which I can still buy based on their recommendations, but yeah, I'll probably still go online and do my research [laughs], and my research will boil down to a bunch of strangers again on the internet [laughs].

How many I would read? I would read up to 50.

Yes, before I spend my money to buy something I have to be sure it's what it... do you know why, when I order online I hate having to return, exchange, it's too stressful, so because of that I read, the reviews give me, it's like I can feel the product when I read the review, you know, some people will say, yes, this cup is really nice but the handle just to inform you I have a small hand and the handle is quite big for me and it really helps me. 'Cause like a pair of jeans I wanted to buy, a lady was very specific with her review, she said, I'm 5 4 and these jeans is just the perfect length for me, I'm 5 4, on the website the model is 6 feet 2 and they've worn her this pair of jeans, you're not sure is it going to look exactly the same way on me,

no, but the customer reviewing said, I'm 5 4 and, you know, and I'm a size 14, which is my size, I'm 5 4 and I'm a size 14, and she said, you should go a size higher if you're picking these jeans out because the jeans is quite a small fit because of the style, that was how I picked the jeans and it was perfect for me 'cause someone else had written it out so clearly, but I had to read up to 20 something reviews to get to that one, so yeah I read as many as possible.

Sometimes I get crazy, you know, I read up to 50 if the product is more than likely £100, I would take my time, but if it's like the jeans, no, I'd say 20, and once I see someone that gives me something as close as possible to the truth, I stop reading. So on average I would say 15 to 20.

Even though I don't know the person, the person writing it is not doing it for... they're not getting paid or anything, they're not doing it for any reason so that's why I have to read it a lot. The only reason why I'm choosing reviewers of products or whatever is because you see more reviews on more things and all of that, which friends I can physically actually talk to you, oh my god, this earring where did you get it and then they will tell me, and then it depends, do I like the earring [laughs], maybe it looks good on her but not on me, maybe I just like it on the person so if they give a review on the product, oh this earring is so nice, sometimes I don't trust my friends, I'm still going to go check the stuff out, but yeah I listen to recommendations from my friends but how many products do I buy that my friends fancy that they buy, yeah, if my friends give a review on social media that oh my god, I know I've bought something 'cause my friend bought it, it's a kitchen utensil 'cause I like cooking and stuff so it's something in the kitchen and she's like, it's really nice you should get one, so I got one for myself and I didn't regret it but it's because she's told me she's used it, it's good, I've bought it. But that's the only one or two products I've bought based on her recommendations, most of the other things I've bought from online reviews. I think that's the problem, that's the thing, but yeah if my friend recommends something yes I would look into it, but yeah.

It's not very often and I think... the number is high, it's there already, and these people, some people will write based on their experience, like maybe they use it and then it blows up or something, they come immediately with anger and they write, some people write out of excitement, oh my god, I didn't know this thing would be

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so effective, you know, they come on social media and they're so excited, you can see what they're writing, like you can almost hear them talk, some people are so explicit, you know, they would clearly state that I bought this. There was one review I read which was really long which is what I like what Amazon does now, if someone likes... if there is the highest like on particular review they put it at the top. So the person said they bought this product, they didn't write the review until seven weeks after using the product because they wanted to be sure the product was working properly and they wanted to use it over the period of seven weeks so that they can write a good review, my friends don't do that. And then another thing, I think it's because of the pool of people, you know, if 100 people are saying, buy this computer, it gives my friend saying buy this computer, think about it, some of us have friends with bad taste, I'm going to be honest, some of us have friends with really bad taste, you know, they're going to tell you, oh my god this phone is the bomb, you buy it and it's like you [laughs]... and you start to regret it, like I shouldn't have, I should have read reviews online [laughs]. So that's another thing, so sometimes you have friends with bad taste, sometimes you have friends that don't like the same things you like, so they'll probably be giving reviews on things that you don't really fancy.

If now I'm going to buy this particular cup, it's because I like the shape of the cup, but maybe amongst ten of my friends I'm the weird one that likes this shape of this cup which is why I will now go on Amazon and look for this particular shape, where none of my friends fancy this shape, so when I go on Amazon to look for this shape it means it's only people that like this shape of cup that will have clicked on it to try and buy it. Let's put all of that aside now, after when I've now tried to choose to buy this shape of cup, 200 other people that have chosen this shape and have bought it are now giving reviews and if you join all the 200 of them together the main of that is that, the highest requesting is four star, come on. You get what I mean. If 100 people say, give this cup four star, I will buy the cup.

Someone has written.

Not really. Yes, but [sighs], yes and no for Facebook. Some of my friends post on the internet is because they're selling the products. You see some of my friends that post they're selling the product, some of them are YouTubers and the company has given

them the product free to review [laughs], so there is a bias to some of my friends writing, even when they are detailed I'm still going to go on Amazon to read those strangers that write out of free will [laughs].

Or the negative, you're right, one review.

Don't buy this, some people won't just do it on social media to make communicate they had a bad experience.

Exactly, and that's what I do, that's why I read up to 20 because if I have 18 positive and two negative I'm buying that thing, I'm going to take it that those two negative they just got unlucky and I hope I won't be unlucky, I'll only be lucky [laughs]. But then I mean if there's 18 positive and two negative out of the 20 it means, yeah, some of them would even write a negative and then they will say, however, I got a refund and my refund came in quickly, or I returned it and they gave me a new one that as working properly.

But there's emotions on these websites, this person is not reading them, there is emotions as well.

I've read some reviews on Amazon with people that are pissed, and you know, there was one product I wanted to buy but then I read one person's review, oh, Amazon buy the product, you know you want to buy a cup, and that one person reviews the cup and you're like, okay, maybe I shouldn't get a cup, I thought I shouldn't drink water, I should drink from a bottle [both laugh], this person was so sad, you know, and the person was like, I'm advising you now if you love yourself don't buy this product. Let me tell you what happened, so many people had written some negative reviews and I was still waiting for one good one, you know when you get lucky and you just see one good one and you're like, mm, that's the one I'll buy this, and I was going, I saw one or two good ones, I was going, I saw this one. The person now wrote, for you to have gotten to my review you probably have ignored all the negative reviews above me, and I'm warning you now don't even read more, please don't buy this product, close this page [laughs] and go and look for a cup somewhere else, by the time I read that I didn't buy that, you know, I knew the person who wrote it thought that... you can't be more emotional than that. I also wanted to ask you something, in this context, the definition of friends on social media.

People in your friends?

Yeah, my friend made me buy a hand mixer, but I still didn't buy the exact one she'd bought, she made me buy hand mixer, I saw what she made with it, she put it on Instagram and she's like, you know, it's some of our traditional meals that we would pound, which is a lot of work, but she had been able to, was able to use a hand mixer, food processor and she made it really easily, like the way our grandmothers maybe teach us.

I saw it, and I went online, on Amazon and read reviews and thought like...

I'd bought like for my price range the best product I could find because that's another thing, you know, probably your friend puts something and she can't afford to buy, I'm going to use the cup again, £50 range, you want the same, you want to get the same product but cheaper, so you go online, find you know, something close, probably not the same product but something close to that. Because the same thing happened with my friends, okay, I gave them a direct feedback on a product, it's called Baby Foot, it's if you have cracked feet it's very good but it's expensive, it's about £28 or something, so when I told them they said, they're not going to buy, my friend said they're not going to spend more then £15 on this thing. Shouldn't mind, no, went online, started looking for the China version, that'll be cheaper, check check check on Boots website to see if they had another version, eventually he found one on Boots that was £15 and he bought it, it's the same thing, it did the same thing, obviously mine was more expensive, it worked better but he got what he wanted for his price range, but I gave him a review on a particular product, he didn't buy the exact product, he bought something in his price range, just like someone has given me ideas on products or reviews on a product and I've bought the higher version of it because I really liked it, the highest one, sometimes it goes that one, I don't know if it's a unique situation, but yeah [laughs].

I think so, because people go on social media to do other things, post pictures, although now I mean if you think about it social media are doing much more, that the businesses are now using and all of that, so yes the primary purpose is to logon and do social things [laughs], but social media is now part of our life, just the same way before you buy a newspaper on the street and now I actually go on social media for news, so it's not impossible that you'd go there for reviews, but it's also now it's not

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the primary focus. That's why no matter what happens on social media I'm still going to go back to Amazon and read reviews, on, you know, so just a particular product on social media, I'm still going to go and read reviews on the product online.

Yes, even if a personal friend. Like my sister actually, because that's why I said what's the definition of friends on social media, it could just be... social media is so crazy now, on Facebook I have, I don't know, probably 1,000 something friends, I don't know a lot of them, I still have over 300 friend requests, I'm tired of declining, it's getting to 500 now, you see the problem I'm having, so out of the 1,000 friends on my Facebook maybe only like 200 I really know, I know, or let's say 250 I know, out of the 250 how many are my close friends, maybe 25.

In the social media, yes, so if one of those, my acquaintances I would call them, give a review of a product, oh my god, I used these glasses, these frames are the best, I'm still going to do my own research, accept someone... that's why I said it depends on the definition of friends, close circle of friends, because if you come to the office now and you tell me about a product that I need, if I say, oh I've been thinking of buying a phone, and you give me, you know, ideas that this phone is good, it's this price range, oh that was my price range, and out there you guys go buy the phones together, but social media has created this disconnect with human contact, you know, so you, I don't know, because of that, that's why I can't really say, okay, based on what this person is saying, because I daren't believe my friends, they're just my friends on social media. And then my intimate friends, is their opinion enough, is their opinion strong enough, if that's one person's opinion, that one friend on social media, is that one person's opinion enough for me to make a decision to buy a particular product, so they can instigate, like my friend, she was a good friend of mine, they can instigate me looking into, oh I should get a food mixer or something, then I've asked her by researching, which one is the best [laughs], but they're not going to make me buy a particular product, except for my friends that I see out of social media. Because of the definition of friends on social media.

Some of my friends on social media?

Not so much. The thing is on my social media now there's some people I follow do different things, some people that talk about good skin, how to take care of your skin, some people talk about... like I follow a lot of food bloggers, they're doing a lot with

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Nigerian food, so they always say things that our parents, our grandparents used to pluck with their hands or they pound or they, you know, they're like, have you tried using a hand mixer to do this, we shouldn't be stressing ourselves, you know, so I follow them a lot and there's some times they talk about things like that and then I go buy it, I go look for the one I can afford or read reviews and buy what I'm comfortable.

Not that much, because of the, yeah, just a few people I follow when talking to. And then one last thing I wanted to say, which I might have said partially, is just I want to put... I don't know if this will make sense, but I want to put the whole, I'm looking for the right choice of words, buying of the products, purchasing the products, I want... maybe it's me, maybe I may be controlling, but I want the responsibility to be on me, I want to feel like I made the decision myself, I don't want to feel like someone cajoled me to make that decision, someone forced me, because some friends can be like, buy it, buy it, it's good, I use it, it's good, maybe it's good for you, maybe because your friend is a bit slimmer than you the blouse fits her better, and then you buy it and it looks [laughs], so I want to feel like this decision I made by myself, I was in control of it, I did not let anybody influence my judgement of the product, how can I do that, by reading random people's posts, not my friends [laughs], so when I read these strangers what they say, out of all of their reviews I can now make a decision, do I want to buy this or not, it's a risk I'll put on myself. If I buy it, now imagine these two scenarios, I read someone on social media write something, I bought it, it doesn't work right or it's not as nice as they made it sound or they over hyped it, then I'm like, can you imagine, I bought this thing because this person said, it's not even as nice as they talked, this is a mess, it's a waste of my money, so if I took my time, did a review, all that responsibility is on me, whatever happens I will blame myself and then I wouldn't feel stupid that I put all the responsibility of buying a particular product on another person, 'cause I was having this conversation with my friend over the weekend, she bought a make-up palette, an eye shadow thingy, why, there's been so much reviews on that particular palette online, the naked palette, for the product is like MAC make-ups and I've seen a lot of reviews but I've never been confident enough to buy it, yet, I'm like, is this thing really as good as they say, you know, so I saw her, I was like, oh my god, they've been advertising this thing online, how is it, and she's like don't waste your money,

she's like don't waste your money, it's not good, I regret watching those people's reviews, you know, I didn't buy it, I bought something totally different, I seen reviews on the make-up palette I'm using and the eye shadow palette that I'm using [laughs], I haven't seen like random reviews. Obviously people that have reviewed this specifically they say it's good and all that but it's not really a rave on social media, this naked one is on social media, oh my god, it's so nice, they're all using it on their eyes and it looks nice on them, and then she's like maybe because most of the people reviewing it were white, we're darker so we need brighter shades for our make-up and so on, she's like maybe it's because most of them are not... even the black ones are light skinned, maybe that's why it doesn't work for us and which is what I'm saying, what is working for one person might not work for another person. That's why when you read the random reviews 200 people, one person out of those 200 people will be closer to you in liking, that was how I bought my jeans, somebody just described my height, my size, everything, and then these jeans are perfect if you are, I'm this size, I'm this height, you know, and I like my jeans this way, exactly how I wanted it, and that was like... 'cause usually I like to try my trousers on, it's different with ladies, some things wouldn't fit the way, so yeah, two things, the responsibility of buying it I want to be on me, you know, you have that feeling, oh this person made me buy this, now I don't like it, anyway don't mind me, I just talk about that [laughs].