

Role of Motivation and Gratification Factors in Electronic Word of Mouth: Effects on
Consumer Purchase Intentions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Internet penetration in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the popularity of social networking websites expose Saudi consumers to electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Although the relationship between eWOM and purchase intentions has been a focus for multiple studies in the past, no research has considered the collectivist nature of the KSA. The current study creates a conceptual framework using uses and gratifications theory and social exchange theory to differentiate between motivations (self-enhancement, social comparison and helping others) and gratifications (knowledge enhancement, social interaction and entertainment). Additionally, the current study aims to explore the relationship between eWOM and purchase intentions to identify effective/ineffective motivations and gratifications, explore the effects of these factors on purchase intentions in collectivist culture, and generate managerial and theoretical recommendations for stakeholders. The methodology employs a mixed-methods design that combines quantitative surveys and qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews, with sampling techniques—nonprobability convenience sampling and purposive sampling, respectively. The quantitative methodology entails the use of descriptive analysis—structural equation modelling (SEM). The qualitative part employs thematic analysis to gain insights into respondents' ideas about eWOM and purchase intentions, alongside latent variables, which include motivations and gratifications.

The result unveils that self-enhancement, social comparison and social interaction are important factors to Saudi social media users, while helping others, knowledge enhancement and entertainment face barriers that require additional academic investigation. Thus, theoretical implications include a focus on the proposed conceptual framework, theorisation of barriers to some eWOM factors and theorisation of spiteful and constructive eWOM feedback, with practical recommendations suggesting that the collectivist society of the KSA responds most effectively to self-enhancement, social comparison and social interaction in eWOM campaigns. The current study generates primary evidence collected from online users in the KSA which, in turn, sets the foundation for strategic planning of marketing activities in Middle Eastern countries. The study addresses the gap in the theoretical

knowledge by providing data to support the viability and effectiveness of uses and gratifications theory and social exchange theoretical assumptions in the marketing domain in the twenty-first century.

Student Declaration

Doctor of Philosophy Declaration

“I, Faisal Alsamaani, declare that the PhD thesis entitled Role of Motivation and Gratification Factors in Electronic Word of Mouth: Effects on Consumer Purchase Intentions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is no more than 80,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work”.

“I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University’s Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures.”

Signature: 

Date: 19/08/2021

Dedication

I dedicate my work to my family who have been one of the driving forces inspiring me to reach new heights in my academic and professional pursuits. Their wonderful and continuous motivation boosted my passion for my studies. Without them to give me emotional support and motivation, my journey would have been stressful with almost insurmountable obstacles. However, the presence of my parents and siblings in my life has strengthened my perseverance and motivated the efforts that I invested in this project.

I express my deepest gratitude to my mother, Hailah, who has offered me her nurturing support and love. She was my first and most enthusiastic supporter since my early years as a pupil at school. Her trust in me inspired me to focus on earning degrees that would push me towards professional and personal self-actualisation. She has always believed in my abilities and talents and, therefore, I have strived to match or exceed her expectations. Thus, I am privileged to name her as one of the main inspirations that pushed me towards new limits and successes.

Moreover, this dedication would have been incomplete without mentioning my father, Mohammed. He has continually emphasised the importance of decision-making and problem-solving skills, so I have always learned to rely on my inner resources without shunning the opportunity to learn from others. My father stressed the value of education for me and, therefore, I made every effort possible as I tackled the multiple tasks necessary for the completion of my degree and this academic work specifically.

In addition, I dedicate the dissertation to my siblings because my brothers and sisters are a reminder for me about the wholesome nature of our family that unites us in our goal-oriented journeys and focus on self-development. I am delighted when my brothers and sisters reach new heights in their lives. I want here to specifically express my gratitude to my older brother, Turki, for his support and encouragement throughout my time at university. I hope that my work offers them inspiration to pursue their individual goals.

Ultimately, this dedication focuses on the people closest to me and I must mention my friends and peers. Interactions with other people who understand the importance of research have motivated me to make a difference in my respective field and share a view of the dynamic nature of the world.

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List of Abbreviations

ADLS	angle distribution of loading subspaces
AVE	average variance extracted
CFA	confirmation factor analysis
CFI	comparative fit index
DF	degree of freedom
eWOM	electronic word of mouth
GDP	gross domestic product
ICT	information and communication technology
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
NFI	normed fit index
OTA	online travel agency
RMSEA	root mean square error of approximation
SEM	structural equation modelling
TAM	technology acceptance model
TPB	theory of planned behaviour
WOM	word of mouth

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides intensive background information on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and in particular, on the transformative process that the Saudi government initiated in the form of Vision 2030. Further, it establishes the research objectives and research questions, which clarify the scope and boundaries of the study. The chapter establishes and highlights the contribution to knowledge and statement of significance—the study develops a new theoretical orientation combining two theories: social exchange theory and uses and gratification theory. Additionally, theoretical and practical implications of the study are presented.

1.2 Background

The KSA is a developing country located in the Middle East with an economy dependent on the production and export of oil. Despite its developing status, the KSA is the largest economy in the Middle East and Northern Africa region because the country accounts for 38% of gross domestic product (GDP) of these regions (Park & Javed, 2020). According to the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA), the dominance of the oil sector in the KSA accounted for 45.6% of GDP, 83.9% of exporting total value and 84.2% of government revenues in 2015 and 2016 (Alkhathlan, Alkhateeb, Mahmood, & Bindabel, 2020). However, the imminent depletion of resources requires the Saudi government and nation to resort to economy diversification, as outlined in the ambitious plan of Vision 2030 announced by the government in 2016 (Habibi, 2019). As a collectivist country, the KSA presents researchers with a thought-provoking case to examine online relationships based on national trust and collaboration. The shift in economic and business focuses creates a foundation for extensive marketing studies that have been deficient for the unique business setting of the KSA.

With an emphasis on the integration of information technologies and the development of other sectors of the economy, including retail, finance and transport, the KSA represents an under-researched case for marketing studies, as indicated by the following statistics. Kraidy (2021) asserted that the KSA demonstrated some of

the highest connectivity and social media use characteristics on the global level; mobile and internet penetration neared 100% as of 2018, as reported by the General Authority for Statistics. Kraidy (2021) added that over 10 million Saudi users, or one-third of the entire population, were Twitter users. The top social network platform in the KSA is YouTube; 71% of KSAns use the platform, while Facebook, Instagram and Twitter represent other popular websites (Statista, 2017). The Statistical Analysis and Decision Support Center (2020) revealed that 98.4% of male Saudis and 97.6% of female Saudis aged 15–35 years participate in social networks or professional networks online. Small and medium-sized (SMEs) enterprises particularly should use social media for the development of business and achievement of corporate objectives.

The high internet and social media connectivity in the KSA set prerequisites for SMEs to use electronic strategies of marketing to their advantage. Al Turais (2020) pointed out that SMEs represent around 90% of all businesses in the country, while social media use has emerged as an effective approach to their development. Combined with strong economic development, upper-level household income and high consumption rates, electronic media use is a powerful marketing tool for shaping purchase decisions and intentions in the KSA (Jadwa Investment, 2017). The paucity of empirical research conducted in the context of the KSA reveals a gap in the existing knowledge and necessitates further research to deepen the current understanding of how electronic word of mouth (eWOM) shapes the purchase behaviour of consumers. This study demonstrates that eWOM is a highly effective communication strategy because it is conducted at the interpersonal level.

The advent of the internet and social media has revolutionised virtually every business process in the contemporary world. The application of technology, including information and communication technology (ICT), also aligns with the Saudi Vision 2030 set to diversify the economy and enhance the KSA's position in multiple global markets (Alshuaibi, 2017). In such circumstances, eWOM serves as a cost-efficient marketing strategy available to start-ups and well-established businesses alike. As Awad and Fatah (2015) observed, eWOM has the potential to promote purchase intentions. There is, however, a paucity of empirical literature exploring the impact of eWOM via social media on consumer behaviour among Saudi students (Rathore &

Panwar, 2016). The deficiency of academic knowledge about eWOM and its prerequisites in the KSA calls for the current study. Specifically, this study strives to expand the knowledge of motivators and gratifications that encourage Saudi users to read eWOM communications.

To achieve the most comprehensive results, this study employs a mixed-methods research design. Mixed-methods research is relevant to the present academic endeavour because no previous studies have addressed the interactions of motivations and gratifications with eWOM from the perspective of forming purchase intentions in the KSA. For this reason, a study with two components, quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, illuminates the complex topic with guidance from two theories: uses and gratifications theory and social exchange theory. The use of mixed methods guarantees that the study offers optimal advantage to scholars and practitioners to uncover and explore both hard statistics and rich textual information. Against this backdrop, the current study provides empirical evidence that Saudi marketing practitioners and researchers can use to boost and sustain purchase intentions.

1.3 The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Profile

1.3.1 The economy of Saudi Arabia

The economy of the KSA predetermines business and marketing options available to entrepreneurs and companies. Therefore, an overview of the national economy adds to the discourse. The country has depended heavily on petroleum-based products as the main source of national income, but the gradual exhaustion of oil reserves has encouraged KSA to diversify its economy, providing more opportunities for private sector expansion. Specifically, Alkhathlan and Javid (2015) explained that petroleum resources contributed to the economic growth of the country and, subsequently, to the increase in income per capita. Sultan and Haque (2018) identified a strong positive correlation between oil exports and economic growth in the case of KSA. Simultaneously, Blazquez, Manzano, Hunt and Pierru (2020) reported that the KSA was a leader in oil consumption with its 5.4% per annum in comparison with a global average of 1.5% per annum in the period 2000–2017, which encouraged the government to increase gasoline and electricity prices on multiple occasions. Alkhateeb, Sultan and Mahmood (2017) confirmed that the country

remains the largest producer and exporter of petroleum-based products, but this leadership role has prevented KSA from developing and gaining competitive advantage in other fields. This limitation, however, has prompted changes in the governmental decision to diversify the economy.

The overreliance on oil products for the economy of the country is a threat to KSA, which has motivated the government to embrace a new strategy to achieve a diversified economy with many well-developed sectors. Khorsheed (2015) reported that the extreme dependence of KSA on oil industries has motivated the leadership of the Kingdom to transition to a knowledge-based economy that focuses on innovation, development and human resources. Alkhateeb et al. (2017) agreed that the country requires diversification in different sectors to ensure continuous national prosperity, while Alkhathlan et al. (2020) pointed out that the KSA should depend on diversification on both micro and macro levels.

The realisation that KSA must diversify its sources of income provides a foundation for the development of the private sector, which, in turn, depends on relevant marketing efforts. Khorsheed (2015) claimed that the Saudi market faces challenges in the private sector because of a lack of opportunities for entrepreneurs and firms. Alkhateeb et al. (2017) added that diversification would decrease unemployment. Simultaneously, the SAMA reported that the contribution of the non-oil private sector to GDP elevated from 32.25% in 1985 to 39.54% in 2018 (Haque, 2020). Although these data reveal a relatively small change, future reports would be illuminating about the current diversification plan and its consequences.

Ultimately, the literature agrees that, despite its great economic success, the country might suffer from its overreliance on oil. A potential solution includes the holistic approach to upholding non-oil sectors and investing in the private sector. This strategy entails Saudi SMEs growing and employing different marketing strategies to gain and maintain a competitive advantage. For this reason, the topic of eWOM, its antecedents and purchase intentions are relevant to the Saudi economy. The knowledge of eWOM engagement by Saudi social media users would enable SMEs to energise business processes and contribute to the economic growth necessitated by the national realities of shifting focus from oil to non-oil business projects.

1.3.2 The society of Saudi Arabia

Moreover, the society of KSA plays a significant role in the topic because the population affects different aspects of life, including culture, economy and business. A knowledge of the Saudi population offers insights into methods of interacting with potential customers and persuading them to purchase products, as well as information about strategies that encourage consumers to support products and brands online. Khorsheed (2015) stated that the country has a large population of immigrants working in different spheres, whereas many Saudi people are unemployed. The younger population is especially susceptible to unemployment, specifically 6% of males and 35% of females. Simultaneously, the illiteracy rate has decreased dramatically for the young population; the rate of 3.7% in 2007 dropped to 0.5% in 2017 (Statistical Analysis and Decision Support Center, 2020). This characteristic has importance because the low illiteracy rate enables the population to read and create eWOM effectively.

In addition, KSA experiences a high population growth at an annual rate of 2.9% (Khorsheed, 2015). KSA is the second-largest sender of international remittances because of the number of migrants who represent a substantial portion of the labour force. Snudden (2019) reported that migrants comprise 38% of the entire Saudi population and constitute 58% of the labour force. The unemployment rate of migrants is only 0.7%, whereas the unemployment rate of Saudis is 11.9%. Snudden (2019) explained that unemployment rates have been decreasing for migrants, with this change being economically significant for them. Hathroubi (2019) elaborated that the unemployment rate for Saudis increased from 11.5% in 2016 to 12.7% in 2017, while 22% of young adults with a university diploma were unemployed, which affected the social and economic situation in the country. Apart from unemployment, urbanisation is another definitive feature of the changes that Saudi society witnesses.

In particular, urbanisation has been a common phenomenon for many countries in the past decades, but KSA has undergone especially large changes in this respect. Belloumi and Alshehry (2016) asserted that the urbanisation rate has been increasing since the 1960s, reaching 82% in 2010, whereas, comparatively, the global rate was 51.5% in the same year. The United Nations global urbanisation prospect report of 2018 projected the urbanisation levels in the KSA to become 86% by 2030

and 90% by 2050 (Khan, 2020). The movement of people towards cities creates prerequisites for the development of business. Khorsheed (2015) agreed that urban clusters create entrepreneurial hubs with a great number of residents who have a high demand for products and services in light industries, healthcare, tourism and transportation. The urban population of KSA increased from 1.272 million in 1960 to 24.354 million in 2014, and the subsequent growth rate was higher than in other countries (Belloumi & Alshehry, 2016). This element of Saudi society exerts an influence on other aspects of the country.

Other traits also distinguish Saudi society from global communities. Alhazmi and Nyland (2015) asserted that the sociocultural context of the country is complex. Before the oil discovery, KSA was a poor, tribalist country and the remnants of tribalism continue to affect Saudi communities. Saudi society accepts the inseparable marriage between religion and politics that define people's worldviews. Alhazmi and Nyland (2015) concluded that Saudi society is diverse and dynamic because of the constant changes occurring in the country, which are supported by the government.

The understanding of demographics and society of the KSA has value for research because different populations might respond to eWOM in different ways. For example, the vast majority of young individuals participate in social media use (Statistical Analysis and Decision Support Center, 2020), which makes this age group particularly interesting to explore regarding its preferences in eWOM use. The trends of urbanisation are similarly relevant to the research purpose because these practices drive business growth, which, in turn, depends on eWOM, among other marketing strategies.

1.3.3 Technology and internet use

Further, technology and internet use are of vital importance to this discussion because of the reliance on marketing to spread the word about products and brands through innovative practices. Khorsheed (2015) emphasised the importance of innovation and mentioned the role of technology in urban sectors. The development of technology is part of the agenda under Vision 2030 (Alshuaibi, 2017). Information and other technologies will help KSA to improve innovation and competitiveness to boost the economy and increase revenues from oil and non-oil sectors. Xanthidis,

Alali and Koutzampasopoulou (2016) reported that the rapid growth in information technology use is true for the global population and the Arab population alike. Specifically, Arab countries, including KSA, recognised the potential of information technologies in the mid-1990s as instruments of economic and sociocultural development. Digital communication infrastructures have been adopted in the country to facilitate interactions.

Although institutions, including academic establishments, reserved the initial use of information technology, the proliferation of the internet targeted the public sphere as well. Alshahrani (2016) specified that King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals was the first Saudi entity to use the internet in a very limited way owing to a slow connection in 1993, whereas the Saudi population made the acquaintance with this technology much later, unlike users in other developing and developed countries. The introduction of the internet for the public took place in 1999, but the population quickly embraced the opportunity, and the area grew exponentially in terms of connectivity (Alshahrani, 2016). The internet penetration rate in KSA was 49% in 2012 (Xanthidis et al., 2016), but this level rapidly neared 100% in 2018 (Kraidy, 2021). The expansion of the internet offers multiple opportunities for regular people and companies, including a greater focus on eWOM communication.

Technology and internet use may prove transformative for businesses because of the optimisation they offer. The ability to communicate with diverse Saudi audiences online also creates new solutions for businesses. AlBar and Hoque (2017) wrote that information and communication technologies have significantly bridged the gap between urban and rural companies, as well as businesses operating in developed and developing countries. Understanding the importance of information and communication technologies has encouraged the Saudi government to support and invest in the development of this infrastructure (AlBar & Hoque, 2017). Additionally, Youssef, Youssef, Anadol and Zahrani (2017) claimed that Saudi companies have embraced the opportunity to align their services with online banking. Therefore, the country has witnessed the introduction and development of many uses of information technology.

Technology and internet use are major factors that affect the performance of eWOM in multiple industries of the Saudi economy. The stability and quality of

technologies that connect Saudi users predetermine their enjoyment from social media use and eWOM. Thus, the continuous development of innovative technologies and internet opportunities affects eWOM and its ability to shape purchase intentions.

1.4 Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision

The significant dependence of KSA on oil prompted the government to develop the Saudi 2030 Vision that encapsulates the efforts to energise diverse dimensions of the economy. Mohammed bin Salman, Deputy Crown Prince at the time, announced this plan in April 2016 (Habibi, 2019). Vision 2030 focuses on the improvement of the country's position in the economic market with the understanding that oil resources are gradually nearing depletion. Mitchell and Alfuraih (2018) stated that the government aims to create a knowledge-based economy to reach the potential of the KSA in multiple industries, while the document outlines long-term macro goals that entail collective motivation and collaboration. A study by Amirat and Zaidi (2020) explored the potential for GDP growth using the components of the knowledge-based economy: employment, education, innovation, ICT and human capital. The research concluded that the Saudi government should combine the benefits of demand-side policies with supply-side policies to develop an effective knowledge-based economy that would decrease the country's overreliance on oil products and embrace the increase of job opportunities and technology development.

The report published by the government explicated that the major visionary goals focus on three main themes (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016). Vision 2030 relates to multiple fields, including, but not limited to, health care (Elsheikh, Alqurashi, Wahba, & Hodhod, 2018), nursing (Al-Dossary, 2018) and education (Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2018). In brief, the theme of a vibrant society embraces cultural and entertainment activities, while the theme of a thriving economy addresses economic needs and the theme of an ambitious nation is preoccupied with the matters of governance (Habibi, 2019). Therefore, Vision 2030 offers a comprehensive framework for economy diversification, which relates to the increase in opportunities to use the internet and, consequently, eWOM to enhance the Saudi potential. Moreover, Vision 2030 is built on three specific pillars that provide a foundation for planning, strategising and acting.

Specifically, the first pillar of Vision 2030 recognises that the KSA represents the heart of the Arab and Islamic domains. This pillar demonstrates the Saudi gratitude to the gift of oil that Allah the Almighty granted the land and the people who inhabit the Kingdom (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016). The government uses inspiration from the country being “the Land of the Two Holy Mosques” and “the direction of the Kaaba (Qibla)” that Muslims use as a direction for prayer (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016, p. 5). Habibi (2019) connected the first pillar with the vision of a vibrant society and explicated that this pillar calls for investment in culture and entertainment, including domestic and international tourism. This statement is corroborated by reports that the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage has entered multiple agreements with other organisations to support the cultural heritage and touristic endeavours (Ibrahim et al., 2021). This element of Vision 2030 contributes to the development of important goals for the country to develop.

The second pillar presents the vision for the KSA to become an international investment centre. The Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Chairman of the Council of Economic and Development Affairs, claimed that the country had the potential to become an investment powerhouse because of compelling investment capacities crucial to the strengthening and diversifying of the economy and its revenues (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016). Habibi (2019) connected the second pillar to the theme of a thriving economy that will be achieved through an array of economic reforms that focus on privatisation, the expansion of the private sector from 40% to 60%, non-oil fiscal revenues with the help of changed taxation practices, the improvement of the legal and business environment to attract foreign investors and foreign talent alike, and educational reforms preparing Saudi students to tackle a variety of professional jobs, with the target to boost Saudi GDP from 20% to 35%.

Ultimately, the third pillar demonstrates the country’s acute interest in the revision of the global strategy. The government recognises the importance of transforming the unique strategic location of the KSA to embrace the role of a global hub that interlinks Asia, Europe and Africa (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016). The same pillar acknowledges the abundance of Saudi natural resources, aside from oil reserves and the potential of future generations. Habibi (2019) explained that the third

pillar is associated with the vision of an ambitious nation, as the government endeavours to address the issues of governance, transparency, corruption, waste reduction and excessive expenditures by the government.

Vision 2030 prepares the country for massive changes, while the ambitious objectives correspond with the need to use ICT, including the internet and eWOM. Alshuaibi (2017) confirmed that information technologies are crucial to the development of an effective business setting that improves business operations and energises business-to-business interactions. For this reason, multiple Vision 2030 objectives depend on the effective use of eWOM.

For example, to enhance the needs of a vibrant society, the government plans to “increase household spending on cultural and entertainment activities inside the Kingdom from the current level of 2.9% to 6%” (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016, p.25). In this pursuit, eWOM plays an important role because eWOM communications contribute to the evaluation and selection of tourist destinations, including those related to cultural heritage (Sedlak, Stojanović, Ćirić, & Bobera, 2019). In a similar vein, the vibrant society is thought to be attained with the “increase of the ratio of individuals exercising at least once a week from 13% of population to 40%” (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016, p.25). The use of eWOM is important to spread the knowledge of exercising, as well as businesses dealing with sports equipment and other products relevant to individual physical health.

Additionally, multiple goals linked to a thriving economy have connection to eWOM. For example, the government plans to “increase SME contribution to GDP from 20% to 35%” (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016, p.39). The energising of eWOM practices would provide SMEs with an opportunity to grow and improve GDP. Some other goals focus on the increase of “the private sector’s contribution from 40% to 65% of GDP” and “the share of non-oil exports in non-oil GDP from 16% to 50%” (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016, p.53 and p.61). The use of eWOM helps non-oil businesses from the private sector create relationships with potential and existing customers. As for the goals related to an ambitious nation, the government strives to “raise the non-profit sector’s contribution to GDP from less than 1% to 5%” (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2016, p.75). The application of eWOM campaigns could

similarly improve the coverage of non-profit issues and the dissemination of relevant information.

1.5 Objectives

The research aims to evaluate the impact of motivations and gratification on eWOM and subsequent purchase intentions among consumers in the KSA. These are critical issues for the effective planning of marketing initiatives and reliance on social networks in facilitating two-way communication with current and potential consumers. The study enhances knowledge of how eWOMs are used as focal points with respect to major business processes (e.g., consumer loyalty and product development).

The objectives of this study are:

1. to explore the connections between eWOM and purchase intentions
2. to identify effective and ineffective motivations and gratifications involved in sharing and reading eWOM
3. to examine the link between social media eWOM and customer purchasing intentions
4. to determine the role of motivations and gratifications in the formation of purchase intentions in a collectivist society
5. to provide theoretical contributions and managerial recommendations for researchers and practitioners on the potential influence of positive and negative eWOM on consumers' behaviour in the KSA.

1.6 Research Questions

The formulation of research questions presents this study with guidance to identify relevant topics to address them in the literature search and, consequently, in the development of study instruments. Therefore, the proposed research questions take a comprehensive approach to examining the complex relationships between eWOM, its motivating/gratifying factors and purchase intentions. The research questions in this study are:

1. How does eWOM affect consumer purchase intentions in the KSA?

2. What are the motivations and gratifications behind sharing and reading eWOM among users of social media networks in the KSA?
3. How do positive and negative eWOM motivate or discourage consumer purchase intentions?
4. How has globalisation affected attitudes to eWOM, motivations and gratifications in the homogeneous, collectivist culture of the KSA?

1.7 Contribution to Knowledge and Statement of Significance

1.7.1 Contribution to knowledge

The proposed study contributes to the knowledge of consumer behaviour at practical and theoretical levels. Specifically, the research deepens the understanding of how eWOM shapes purchase decisions in the KSA, where the use of social media networks is significant. The findings of the study provide a deeper theoretical understanding of social interactions within the context of electronic communications and the marketing domain, thereby filling a gap in the empirical knowledge regarding how eWOM shapes purchase behaviour in markets characterised by intensive use of social media networks. Practitioners are likely to find the study results useful to encourage Saudi consumers to resort to eWOM in the development of purchase decisions. However, this study also has theoretical implications that, as anticipated, address scholarly questions about the role of eWOM in modern digitalised society.

In fact, the current research builds on two theoretical frameworks: (a) theory of uses and gratifications, pioneered by Blumler and McQuail in the 1960s with reference to communication research; and (b) social exchange theory, which is the cumulative conceptual framework based upon the ideas of sociologists Homans, Blau, Thibaut and Kelly (Ruccio, 2008). The study yields empirical evidence about eWOM in the Middle Eastern social environment and strengthens previous studies with similar theoretical backgrounds and conceptualisations. Specific outcomes are expected to emphasise the contribution that the study makes to eWOM knowledge.

First, the research leads to the justification of empirical evidence about the role of social media platforms in eWOM engagement. The research is needed to collect and analyse information applicable specifically for the cultural context of the

KSA because a plethora of past findings focused on other countries. The KSA differs from Western countries in the high level of collectivism and individualism, respectively (Robertson, Yaghmour, & Kawther, 2015), so the research provides an insight into the Saudi collectivism-oriented attitude to eWOM on social media.

Second, the study yields specific recommendations for companies and marketing professionals regarding strategies to establish and sustain long-term, sales-focused relationships with consumers in KSA. The research conclusions, using the data, generate specific recommendations for marketing specialists to introduce positive changes to their use of eWOM. This contribution has relevance to the KSA at the backdrop of national efforts to diversify and enhance the economy under the framework of Vision 2030.

Third, the findings improve the effectiveness of marketing campaigns in the region and lead to increased sales if social media networks are actively integrated into campaigns and if the findings confirm the impact of eWOM on purchase intentions. Owing to a lack of studies that focus on marketing strategies prevalent in KSA, the study fills in the existent gaps in the scholarly and practitioner knowledge. The use of appropriate methodology ensures a comprehensive and useful contribution to knowledge. The research is also significant for consumers of products in the KSA who tend to rely on social media networks when making purchase decisions.

Last, the study combines uses and gratifications theory and social exchange theory to gain a new conceptual network that acknowledges the use of both motivators and gratifications of social media users. This conceptual decision has theoretical implications because motivators and gratification alike gain attention in research. Through this lens, the study contributes to extant theoretical knowledge by providing the scholarly community with the conceptualisation that distinguishes motivators from gratifications and elucidates their functionality in shaping purchase intentions.

1.7.2 Statement of significance

This research is significant because it provides new insights into the factors that drive the use of eWOM in social media and, accordingly, allows organisations to increase sales and sustain purchase intentions. The new knowledge about motivators

and gratifications behind eWOM and purchase intentions enhances the performance of marketing practitioners who require knowledge about business processes in the digitalised world dependent on social media use. Further, an increase in smartphone use among twenty-first century consumers drives competitive organisations to maximise the benefits of connectivity by investing in eWOM. Previous studies examining eWOM's role in purchase intentions have confirmed the positive correlation between the variables, suggesting that eWOM is a powerful tool in marketing communication and purchase decisions (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Rialti, Zollo, Pellegrini, & Ciappei, 2017). However, these studies offered no findings about behavioural aspects of eWOM engagement. Some studies also addressed the correlation between eWOM and purchase intentions in the context of the KSA (Alansari, Velikova, & Jai, 2018; Almana & Mirza, 2013). Nevertheless, previous research does not combine uses and gratifications theory with social exchange theory while focusing on the collectivist nature of the Saudi society.

Importantly, previous studies relied on secondary research or focused on a narrow market or industry, whereas this study explores the role of eWOM in the purchase decisions of consumers interested in different industries and markets. It is anticipated that the study will provide new insights about purchase intentions generated on the basis of eWOM in social media. The study is distinguished from the previous research because the scholarly knowledge lacks the information about motivation and gratification factors encouraging Saudi customers to read and share eWOM, as well as to form purchase intentions. The Saudi gravitation towards collectivism generates useful findings that demonstrate Saudi behaviour in the era of globalisation. The motivations and gratifications in the Saudi context differ from the experiences of customers in other countries because of the comprehensive cultural leaning to collectivism and the combination of capitalism and communism as a political ideology (Robertson et al., 2015). It is important to explore the influence of networking globalisation on the KSA because it is unclear whether the homogeneity of the country affects motivations and gratifications.

The research might offer insight into eWOM from the perspective of the global marketing field but the utmost significance of the findings relates to the KSA. Given that the study aims to fill the gaps related to Saudi customers and SMEs using

the eWOM strategy, the results pertain specifically to the Saudi context. Additionally, other countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council with similar strategic goals and business realities might find the study valuable for the development of modern marketing plans.

1.8 Definitions

The research project operates with a set of specific definitions associated with relevant marketing topics. The following definitions pertain specifically to this study:

- Traditional word of mouth (WOM) refers to face-to-face communication among potential or actual customers who discuss companies, brands, and products (Grubor, Leković, & Tomić, 2019).
- Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) refers to electronic communication among potential or actual customers who discuss companies, brands, and products in one-to-one and one-to-many interactions. Electronic communication may occur at corporate websites, blogs, review websites, and social media (Grubor et al, 2019).
- Social media eWOM refers to eWOM that occurs specifically on social media websites, including but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok (Grubor et al, 2019).
- An eWOM platform refers to any internet page or website that creates conditions for internet users to engage in eWOM generation (Khwaja & Zaman, 2020).
- eWOM content refers to articles, reviews, blogs, and posts featuring text, images, and/or videos about a company, brand, or product (Roy, Datta, & Basu, 2017).

1.9 Thesis Structure

Chapter 1: This chapter establishes the general background of the country profile of KSA, research objectives and questions, as well as contribution to knowledge and statement of significance.

Chapter 2: The literature is set out and synthesised to discuss the issues related to eWOM and purchase intentions because it is crucial to overview the extant knowledge of the related topics.

Chapter 3: This chapter highlights the two theories used in the current study (social exchange theory and uses and gratification theory) and the usability of the theories in consumer behaviour in general and eWOM in particular.

Chapter 4: This chapter discusses the research methodology, beginning with the research philosophy, and describes the procedures and rationale of the use of a mixed-methods design.

Chapter 5: This chapter presents the result and findings of the primarily collected data of both phases for the motivation and gratification factors. The analysis comprises a detailed statistical assessment of the data gathered using survey questionnaires and in-depth information using semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 6: This chapter provides the result discussion and interpretation of both phases, quantitative and qualitative. Also, summarises the hypotheses results and links them to scholarly literature.

Chapter 7: This chapter concludes the study with the discussion of the objective and research questions. Also, theoretical and practical implications, future research and limitations are presented.

1.10 Chapter Summary

The current study confirms that eWOM serves as a highly effective communication strategy that potentially targets the vast majority of the Saudi population because of substantial connectivity and interest in social media use, especially among young individuals. eWOM shapes purchase intentions by persuading potential and existing consumers to purchase certain products or services. Although many studies have addressed the topic of eWOM and purchase intentions, no studies have tried to identify Saudi differences in the attitude to eWOM from the perspective of motivators and gratifications through the lens of uses and gratifications theory and social exchange theory. The mixed-methods approach offers the

theoretical and hypothetical basis for responding to multiple research questions that address knowledge gaps in the use of eWOM. Particularly, this approach is necessitated by the transformative process that the Saudi government initiated as Vision 2030.

The study produces a new theoretical orientation combining the two theories. Because no previous studies have applied both the uses and gratifications theory and social exchange approach, this study makes a significant contribution to conceptualisation that addresses eWOM, its factors and purchase intentions. In addition to the proposed use of a new conceptual framework, the study broadens the practical applicability of the two theories in marketing management, thereby empowering companies with primary evidence.

The new interpretation of the theories along with the conceptual framework focusing on social media networks within the marketing discourse provides a compelling understanding of purchase intentions among consumers who are active users of social media websites. The findings can be applied in practice, suggesting the most effective avenues for marketing activities in online environments, not only in the KSA, but also in the wider Middle Eastern region. The results of the current research contain specific recommendations for Saudi practitioners to understand the attitudes of the clientele, while recommendations help businesses succeed in their development in the framework of Vision 2030 diversification. SMEs and scholars require information about the effects of globalisation on the perception of eWOM in collectivist countries, such as the KSA; the research anticipates that eWOM will have a great impact on Saudi customers because of the strong sense of collectivism.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Much literature has been created and synthesised to discuss the issues related to eWOM and purchase intentions. Therefore, it is crucial to overview the existent knowledge about the related topics. This chapter consists of multiple sections pertaining to different dimensions of the topic. Specifically, it is necessary to discuss the two types of word of mouth, including traditional word of mouth (WOM) and eWOM. Both methods have strengths and limitations for practitioners to consider in the development of strategies related to WOM and/or eWOM. The chapter also pays attention to academic knowledge of motivations behind customer engagement with eWOM, including self-enhancement, social comparison and helping others, whereas gratifications derived from eWOM experiences encompass knowledge enhancement, entertainment and social interaction. The review of purchase intentions includes a synthesis of relevant findings of their connection to eWOM and possible determinants of such intentions. Finally, the overview of literature concentrates on the role of social media platforms in marketing and eWOM because KSA has many active users of social networking websites. The gaps in the literature are identified to justify the conduct of this study.

2.2 Thoratical Framework

While Chapter 3 details the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding the research project, the literature review also acknowledges the importance of the two theories employed in the study. In fact, social exchange theory and uses and gratifications theory play a significant role in the identification of the relevant concepts that the literature review encompasses. Social exchange theory has value to the research because of its focus on the advantages that individuals realise from social exchanges for certain costs as part of an informal cost-benefit analysis (Chia, Hsu, Lin, & Tseng, 2021; Nunkoo, 2016). Moreover, uses and gratifications theory provides a theoretical background for the identification of important concepts because the model examines people's motivations for spending time on the media that helps them gratify some of their needs and which varies from one person to another

(Hossain, Kim, & Jahan, 2019; Pelletier et al., 2020). Based on the information theorised in the two frameworks, the research project classifies self-enhancement, social comparison and helping others as motivators. Meanwhile, knowledge enhancement, entertainment and social interactions are classified as gratifications.

2.3 Role of Word of Mouth and Electronic Word of Mouth

2.3.1 Word of mouth communication and electronic word of mouth communication

Before the advancement of the internet and social media, marketers depended on traditional methods to generate a buzz. Specifically, WOM was one of the significant instruments used to improve the image of the company and attract new customers. The academic literature contains sufficient information to establish the value of traditional WOM in the past and the present. Traditional WOM occurs in face-to-face conversations, which provides a platform for customers to share their experiences with products and brands. Despite the opportunities that social networking sites provide for different people, Eisingerich, Chun, Liu, Jia and Bell (2015) stated that people prefer traditional WOM over social media eWOM because the former is associated with fewer social risks as a result of customers choosing with whom they share their purchasing experiences. As for the recipients of information, they value traditional WOM conversations because they perceive the sharing by others of their purchasing or service experiences as reliable (Ring, Tkaczynski, & Dolnicar, 2016). These different peculiarities of WOM signify that traditional WOM has benefits that encourage both parties—creators and recipients of WOM—to engage in it.

As information communication between two or more private parties, WOM may occur in different contexts and locations. WOM occurs among friends, family members, colleagues and strangers. Therefore, companies can rarely control and observe the creation of traditional WOM and its effects on purchasing decisions. However, Susilowati and Sugandini (2018) asserted that recipients of information associate traditional WOM with a high perceived quality. Fine, Gironda and Petrescu (2017) claimed that traditional WOM focuses on an exchange of information rather than the mere creation of a message; therefore, an amicable conversation can either

encourage a person to buy a product or dissuade a person from purchasing it. In other words, the cases of traditional WOM might involve detailed conversations that provide potential customers with sufficient information to decide on goods or services. Importantly, the literature showcases the lack of recent research about traditional WOM because its effect has been decreasing since the introduction and popularisation of social media.

Despite the limitations that marketers perceive in face-to-face WOM, this mode of communication still has value for practitioners from a theoretical perspective. In particular, Oraedu, Izogo, Nnabuko and Ogba (2020) clarified that traditional WOM has high prevalence but low reach owing to the importance of the physical proximity between a current customer and potential customer. If two or more individuals communicate about a product, recommendations voiced in the conversation can be either solicited or unsolicited, while instant questions can also be formulated and answered. Although strangers might be involved in such interactions, WOM normally occurs in settings with trust because people who know each other discuss their purchases and impressions from their buying experiences. Therefore, relationship quality represents one of the antecedents that enable WOM as a marketing phenomenon.

Some researchers have found that relationship quality between the interacting parties rests on social identity. For example, González-Soriano, Feldman and Rodríguez-Camacho (2020) asserted that social identity acts as one of the antecedents of WOM. As explained by Oraedu et al. (2020), proximity is indeed important to WOM contexts, but González-Soriano et al. (2020) added that this proximity helps individuals gauge the mimics and gestures of people around them to evaluate the quality and persuasiveness of WOM communication directed at them. These qualities shape social identity that encourages or discourages individuals in their acceptance of WOM messages in conversations. Understandably, textually based forms of eWOM cannot provide the opportunity for users to assess the mimics and gestures of eWOM creators, but eWOM has its own value in marketing efforts today.

Scholars are generally unanimous in their assertions about the importance of eWOM for marketing in modern contexts. Whereas WOM occurs in different physical contexts, eWOM uses digitalisation of data to allow customers to share their

opinions about goods and services on social media websites. Susilowati and Sugandini (2018) explained that eWOM targets enormous markets with the help of internet marketing and new methods of capturing, analysing and employing social media communications related to products. Previous studies have shown that customers perceive eWOM as a leading factor in shaping their relationships with brands and a trustworthy source of recommendations (Fine et al., 2017). Whereas traditional WOM includes friendly conversations between people, eWOM encompasses expansive campaigns that allow businesses to communicate with people and encourage them to create a buzz about a company, brand or product.

Moreover, academics and practitioners have found that businesses can use the effects of eWOM to their advantage. For example, Moran and Muzellec (2017) emphasised that eWOM is instrumental in raising awareness about a company and drawing more customers to it because controlled eWOM campaigns often reward creators of the buzz. Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini and Manzari (2012) explained that eWOM is useful not only for the acquisition of new customers, but also for the retention of loyal ones. However, the fact that different people can share their opinions on social networking websites means that the recipients of information do not always know the motives behind the eWOM messages, and, therefore, may doubt the credibility of such campaigns. This ambiguity suggests that some people do not respond well to eWOM, and, as a result, their purchasing intentions may be different from those of the people who find eWOM trustworthy. The conflict between the assertion that people trust eWOM, in Fine et al. (2017), and the assertion that people question eWOM's credibility, in Moran and Muzellec (2017), provide a platform for further analysis and discussion.

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) has been popular for the exploration of the role of eWOM in marketing and society. Di Virgilio and Antonelli (2018) found this model useful because the TPB functions rely on the assumption that individuals' intention to engage in a certain behaviour is influenced by their attitudes towards this behaviour, as well as by subjective norms and behavioural control. Di Virgilio and Antonelli (2018) used this framework because the model had proved beneficial for understanding how computer technologies affected individuals, while research on consumer behaviour has also taken the TBP to advantage. Moreover, Joo,

Seok and Nam (2020) demonstrated a proper use of this model in relation to eWOM used in rural tourism. The authors explained that the model was crucial to understanding the decision-making in many fields. The TBP acknowledges the complicated process in which individuals engage when they make purchase and other decisions. Joo et al. (2020) is relevant to this current research given that the authors asserted that the digitisation of WOM amplified the effects of this communication because attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control sustained changes.

Further, the technology acceptance model (TAM) has played a role in the generation of new knowledge about eWOM, which requires acknowledgement for current and future research efforts. Malik and Hadi (2019) specified that the model addresses the ability of users to accept and embrace an information technology, which they applied in their study on inspirational messages of eWOM. The TAM mostly addresses questions related to perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use that predetermine how people embrace technologies, including the opportunities offered by eWOM (Erkan & Evans, 2016). The relevance of this model rests on its successful application in the fields of internet use, social media, online banking, e-learning and e-government. For this reason, its use in research has created prerequisites to discuss eWOM, but a limited explanatory power prevents this model from being used further in research. Despite this shortcoming, the TAM has been significant in explaining how people adopt eWOM because of the ease of use and usefulness of the technology. The insights already gained through the TAM and other relevant theories create a platform for the present research.

Another important line of research in the extant literature is the drive to understand why customers engage in eWOM, especially within the context that some of them view it as socially risky (Eisingerich et al., 2015). Sometimes users engage in eWOM without an easily discernible reason or reward, which highlights the importance of this question. Rossmann, Ranjan and Sugathan (2016) unveiled that the eWOM generation has both emotional and functional dimensions because customers would like to connect with other users through sharing their experiences and build an information base that will be helpful to the community. In other words, eWOM allows

people to be information sharers and information builders, with the two roles encouraging people to create a buzz.

The increasing popularity of social media and the internet has contributed to the development of eWOM as a marketing technique in recent years. The most recent research confirms that eWOM persists as a relevant area of academic investigation. In fact, Pyle, Smith and Chevtchouk (2021) acknowledged the complexity of eWOM marketplace because of the number and variety of elements, like reviewers, reviews, moderators and other human and non-human elements affecting the situation. It is remarkable that eWOM has marked a shift from bidirectional conversations prevalent in conventional WOM to unidirectional messages that may not necessitate a response but potentially can affect other people's attitudes and the intention to buy a product. These elements influence the level of trust that individuals demonstrate in their eWOM engagement.

Previous research indeed offers some information about trust developed on social media from the perspective of eWOM. Shen (2021) specified that some customers develop trust in eWOM messages when celebrities endorse a brand or product, but this evidence originates from a study that focuses on Instagram users only. Still, this finding demonstrates that trust might be based on differences factors, including the power of influencers' voices. Although conventional WOM offers the best conditions for assessing the quality of communication, eWOM also predisposes users to evaluating cues, like information quality, to establish if they can trust an eWOM message (Pyle et al., 2021). This finding contributes to the general body of knowledge about eWOM on social media. The basic information provides for further discussions of the advantages and disadvantages of the different types of WOM.

2.3.2 Strengths and limitations of WOM and eWOM

Despite the overwhelming focus on eWOM, traditional WOM continues to exist and have an impact on marketing and information sharing. Like any marketing technique, traditional WOM has both strengths and limitations that marketing specialists must consider in the development of strategies to create a buzz about a brand or product. Primarily, scholars view traditional WOM as the least risky for customers (Eisingerich et al., 2015). Since customers have social fears about sharing

their points of view, they are likely to engage in traditional WOM in friendly conversations. In this type of communication, the recipients of information are aware of the non-commercial character of people sharing their purchase and user experiences (Gvili & Levy, 2016). Thus, the intentions of the buzz creators are rarely questioned because it is often certain for the recipients of information that communicators gain nothing from sharing their experiences. Gvili and Levy (2016) also elaborated that traditional WOM was found to be more effective than advertising and direct personal sales because of its credibility and flexibility. These strengths of WOM communication ensure that marketers do not discard the value of a traditional buzz creation. Gvili and Levy (2016) explored the importance of ensuring credibility through different WOM channels because different channels have diverging qualities that affect the use of eWOM. Specifically, Gvili and Levy (2016) demonstrated that users' attitudes to different types of eWOM communication varied, depending on the digital media channel, which range from text messaging and online comment boards to emails and blogs. Channels that support brief exchanges of information require users to spend less time on the construction and refinement of information that they present in those channels, but platforms that support more extensive communication contribute to the formation of bigger eWOM messages, which affects perceived credibility. Unlike eWOM, the credibility of which is subject to scrupulous attention and suspicion, traditional WOM includes trust and trustworthiness as one of its strong points.

Particularly, the prerequisite of face-to-face WOM occurring mostly among friends or family members improves the credibility of traditional communication. The development of trust is possible because of relationship quality (Oraedu et al., 2020). As a result, the relationship quality among friends or family members is normally higher than the relationship quality among strangers. This tendency ensures that WOM encourages individuals to trust recommendations. The conventional view of WOM focuses on non-commercial communication devoid of biased opinions (Fernández-Miguélez, Díaz-Puche, Campos-Soria, & Galán-Valdivieso, 2020). Fernández-Miguélez et al. (2020) revealed that SMEs, like local restaurants, particularly depend on trustworthy WOM communication. However, the strengths of WOM do not negate the existence of limitations of this type of traditional marketing communication.

Traditional WOM interactions are impossible to observe, analyse or control in non-research settings. In general, traditional marketing allows few opportunities for companies to interact with customers (Das & Lall, 2016). Because of the lack of company–customer communication in traditional WOM, a company can suffer from negative WOM (Das & Lall, 2016). In other words, it is impossible to apologise customers or correct them, thereby making amends for other customers to observe. This limitation of traditional WOM places it as an inadvertently inefficient tool for most enterprises to consider in their strategies. Berman (2016) asserted that WOM experiences a decrease in its efficiency when recipients of information become aware that a creator of WOM engages in it for commercial purposes. In other words, traditional WOM has to continue without interventions from companies to be successful. This limitation means that, despite its cost-efficiency, the method prevents companies from using traditional WOM to their advantage.

Other limitations pertain to its poor efficiency in terms of multiple indicators. Fernández-Miguélez et al. (2020) stated that WOM is spread slowly, with many restrictions, to few people. In other words, marketing professionals are unlikely to benefit greatly from WOM in the era of social media because WOM conversations occur between only few people during a specific time frame. When a conversation ends, no records are kept about recommendations that could have positive influences on other people's purchase intentions. This stance was corroborated by Oraedu et al. (2020), who stated that WOM is characterised by low reach. Similar ideas were observed and discussed by Pyle et al. (2021), who explained that WOM conversations are bidirectional; although they include back-and-forth discussions, these interactions are still limited to few people. With these limitations in mind, many researchers have detected the positive side of eWOM, which has partially replaced face-to-face WOM as a marketing technique in many industries.

Moreover, the mass of research focuses on the efficacy of eWOM, as well as issues that this method creates for marketers. This information is crucial because it offers reasons for the consideration of this technique to generate a buzz about brands and products, whereas the knowledge of the limitations of eWOM prepares practitioners to mitigate them. To begin, strengths of eWOM include its cost-efficiency and huge reach because although eWOM-based campaigns often cost little

or even nothing, millions of users are exposed to such messages via the internet and multiple platforms that allow people to share and exchange opinions. The seminal article by Gruen, Osmonbekov and Czaplewski (2006) claimed that one of the main advantages of eWOM is its availability because users can participate in the exchange of ideas at any place and at any time. The accessibility of eWOM opportunities makes the method beneficial for companies and customers alike. Reimer and Benkenstein (2016) insisted that the relatively low expenses and the high credibility in comparison with advertising are the strengths of this technique.

Research lays a foundation to discuss specifically the lasting positive effects of eWOM. The benefits of this communication focus on its ability to be archived (Oraedu et al., 2020). Whereas WOM-focused conversations are fleeting, eWOM feedback has the potential to remain part of the narrative about a product or brand for years, unless the post is deleted. Oraedu et al. (2020) added that eWOM offers anonymity on many occasions that might encourage individuals to discuss their experiences. However, this advantage of eWOM is limited to eWOM conversations that occur on brand or corporate websites rather than social media posts because social media predisposes individuals to reveal their identities. Simultaneously, eWOM is known for its strengths that serve as limitations.

For example, the accessibility of eWOM platforms and their credibility are simultaneously strengths and limitations of this type of communication. According to Gruen et al. (2006), eWOM offers accessibility, which allows people to create multiple messages and generate a greater buzz. Nevertheless, such a buzz may encapsulate a negative attitude of customers. H. S. Shin, Hanssens and il Kim (2016) demonstrated that a negative buzz has a substantial negative impact on leading brands. This situation requires companies to develop public responses that would save the reputation of a product or brand.

Public response serves as a vital element to restrict the potential negative impact of eWOM on companies affected by negative buzz. Bhandari, Rodgers and Pan (2021) illustrated that the public forms an opinion about a company by considering its replies to negative feedback, while public response has greater value than negative comments. This knowledge aligns with the findings of Srivastava and Sivaramakrishnan (2020), who claimed that neutral customers tend to believe

negative reviews more than they believe positive ones. In such cases, companies can remedy the situation by responding to negative feedback with respect. Therefore, the uncontrollable nature of WOM translates to the use of eWOM because companies can rarely control the process of eWOM generation and quickly mitigate the damages in the case of expansive negative eWOM feedback that may harm corporate reputation.

Similarly, the advantage of the supposed credibility of eWOM can also function against the needs of a company or brand. Although Reimer and Benkenstein (2016) stated that customer-to-customer online communication upholds the credibility of eWOM, Moran and Muzellec (2017) asserted that marketers' endeavours to manipulate eWOM have decreased its credibility in recent developments. Thus, there is no consensus among researchers about the strengths and limitations of eWOM because sometimes a single concept can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. The changing nature of eWOM, social media and the intentions to exploit related technologies suggest that further attempts to understand the different details of eWOM are necessary.

2.4 Motivations for Consumer Engagement with eWOM Communication

Certain motivational factors encourage customers to share their opinions about products, brands and companies, despite the risks that this activity bears. The literature contains plenty of information about different motivations that encourage people to create eWOM. The social exchange theory introduced in the field of social psychology informs the analysis of the functioning of motivating factors. This approach provides for the combination of social and psychological expertise to arrive at effective conclusions. Using the conceptual framework of this study, this subsection overviews the findings of self-enhancement, social comparison and helping others related to self-needs, social needs and self-intentions, respectively.

2.4.1 Self-enhancement

The differentiation between self-needs, social needs and self-intentions lays a foundation for explaining why people engage in eWOM. Alexandrov, Lilly and Babakus (2013) stated that people engage in social interactions to satisfy self-needs,

one of which is self-enhancement, which the authors claimed to be instrumental in creating motivation for people to generate WOM, including electronic communication. The authors used the social exchange theory because the approach informs the process in which customers exchange their opinions about products to gain personal or social benefits. Moreover, Alexandrov et al. (2013) specified that self-enhancement usually encourages people to create positive WOM. Self-enhancement occurs because people want to feel good about themselves and want to gain positive evaluations from others (Alexandrov et al., 2013). In their seminal study, Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004) added to this definition, confirming that this motivation factor provides users with a chance to attract attention, manifest knowledge, suggest status and demonstrate perceived superiority. In other words, self-enhancement allows people to enhance their self-image through WOM and eWOM; most scholars agree that this motivational factor is crucial for the generation of eWOM messages.

Different studies focusing on self-enhancement complement each other with slightly different findings. For example, Alexandrov et al. (2013) contributed to the academic knowledge about the relationship between self-enhancement and eWOM by stating that satisfaction with a product encourages people to enhance their self-image by sharing positive emotions that elevate society owing to positive experience, and as a factor, self-enhancement leads to positive and frequent eWOM. Taylor, Strutton and Thompson (2012) claimed that people use eWOM to support a symbolic meaning of a product aligned with self-concepts. The more symbolic value a product has, the more likely a person is to generate positive eWOM to self-enhance. Wien and Olsen (2014) asserted that self-enhancement is a psychological motive of an individualistic user. These findings agree with the results of the seminal article by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), who claimed that self-enhancement is a motive to express positive feelings and encourage people to frequent a platform and write comments more often.

Previous studies on self-enhancement confirmed the correlation between this variable and eWOM. In particular, Ismagilova, Rana, Slade and Dwivedi (2020) suggested that people tend to believe better about themselves when they share information online. The factors contributing to self-enhancement through the creation of eWOM include extraversion, personal image effects, self-presentation and self-

expression (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Ultimately, the research on self-enhancement leads to the idea that individuals have the inner desire to increase the positivity of their own self-concept; this desire is satisfied through creating and sharing eWOM, regardless of its positive or negative essence. This finding is also true for the traditional WOM (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Creating and spreading eWOM, users of social media achieve better image of the self and inner recognition with the assumption that other users (readers of eWOM) appreciate the efforts spent by the individual to share information about products and services.

As a motivator, self-enhancement drives customers to behave in a certain way. Hansen and Lee (2013) recognised a great number of factors influencing eWOM behaviours of users, but the authors also claimed that the intrinsic benefits of engaging in eWOM are self-motivated. In other words, self-enhancement manages to provide users with an intrinsic force to generate eWOM. Bronner and De Hoog (2011) agreed that self-enhancement belongs to personal motivational factors. Simultaneously, theory and research illustrate that many dimensions of the personal need to self-enhance emerge when people engage in eWOM and other communication-driven behaviours.

In the study on the influence of consumer motivation to spreading eWOM, Purba and Darmawati (2021) referred to self-enhancement as a positive type of motivation. Researchers placed self-enhancement into the same set of variables in line with altruism, economic gains and enjoyment. According to the findings, self-enhancement generates the same effects as the desire to express positive feelings and concern for others, whether other potential customers or the company. Basically, the research report by Purba and Darmawati (2021) provided evidence that self-enhancement is the psychological benefit gained by the creators of eWOM because it satisfies the fundamental need for self-actualisation and social recognition. Self-enhancement is accompanied by the expression of positive feelings through sharing positive experiences with products and services. From an ethical perspective, this finding leads to the conclusion that people have inner pressure to spread the word about their positive experience to empower other individuals living through the same experiences to achieve satisfaction with the purchase decision or choice of the service. From a psychological perspective, the self-enhancement motivation for eWOM

creation extends towards the desire to think of the self as a better person, as a person who can help others altruistically and as an expert on the subject matter. The creation of eWOM, therefore, becomes the path towards reconfirming personal significance and admitting the accumulation of knowledge by sharing it with others, either through social media or any other path. As the outcome, the motivation to create and share eWOM increases proportionately with the inner need for self-development.

The variable of self-enhancement is positively correlated with the emotions experienced by creators and receivers of eWOM. Vargo, Gangadharbatla and Hopp (2019) showed that people, regardless of being authors or receivers of eWOM, tend to have a positivity bias about their selves. It implies that most individuals are more likely to create positive eWOM if any personal details should be provided. This phenomenon illustrates that people strive for self-enhancement among peers and friends when sharing information online about experience with products, services, companies and brands. Self-enhancement is also achieved through negative eWOM, when individuals choose public websites and social media platform to vent vengeance if their experience was not positive and their inner self endured suffering in terms of the perceived self-worthiness (Vargo et al., 2019). Vargo et al. (2019) generated the evidence to support the observation that eWOM with personal experience tends to be much more positive. Moreover, receivers of eWOM with personal details tend to trust the reviews more. Venting, for example, has the prevalence of only 10%, suggesting that people prefer avoiding presenting the self in a negative light.

Another important issue revealed in literature on self-enhancement and eWOM is the association the individuals hope to create with brands and companies. Vargo et al. (2019) claimed that positivity bias motivates creators of positive eWOM to maintain a positive self-concept and self-image, especially if eWOM is read by friends and social media contacts. Consequently, creators of eWOM are also motivated to boost their identity and enhance personal image by sharing positive eWOM about the brands with which they want to be associated. The common characteristics of eWOM based on self-enhancement motivation include the references to joy, trust and anticipation, even if the experience was negative. Criticism in such instances is less negative and followed by the justification and excessive

emphasis on positives. The overly positive eWOM and exaggerated benefits reinforce social status and lead to self-enhancement in social circles.

As Okazaki (2009) stated, individuals resort to mobile gadgets to exchange information and meet self-actualisation needs focused on self-development. Okazaki (2009) specified that such self-enhancement needs could be cognitive, affective, integrative, interactional or escapist. Whereas cognitive needs relate to people's ability to understand something, affective needs emphasise the emotional component of communicational experiences online. Integrative needs focus on the ability of people to self-enhance by ensuring their confidence or credibility.

Moreover, Romero and Ruiz-Equihua (2020) confirmed that self-enhancement is the influential factor for content creation for both traditional WOM and eWOM. Romero and Ruiz-Equihua (2020) combined the self-enhancement and relationship quality into a single study, suggesting that self-enhancement is correlated with awareness/perception of the self as an expert. The eWOM creating behaviour is, therefore, the need to enhance personal perception of the self as a smart shopper who made the right choice. Consequently, when eWOM creation is motivated by the self-enhancement variable, the eWOM content tends to be more positive because of the attention gain and reinforcement of the image of an expert. In addition to positive content, eWOM motivated by self-enhancement is more likely to be extensive and rich in details (Romero & Ruiz-Equihua, 2020). Self-enhancement motivation also encourages creators of eWOM to engage with content sharing through online communities devoted to products or companies, posting experiences on more than one online platform, and desire to gain more recognition from as many people as possible. Yet, Romero and Ruiz-Equihua (2020) noted that the mediating role of self-enhancement is stronger for eWOM compared with traditional WOM because the online environment creates the opportunity to reach a much broader audience and, therefore, establish the status of an expert in the opinion of more receivers of eWOM.

Social exchange theory has multiple assumptions important for knowledge gained in marketing research that focuses on questions of prestige and self-enhancement. In particular, this framework offers a combination of perspectives that acknowledge the influence of social, psychological and societal factors (Falkenreck, 2010). Both material and non-material products enable individuals to signal to others

their high social status. Simultaneously, Zawadzka (2018) corroborated this evidence by specifying that people find self-enhancement opportunities as those connected to their desire for wealth and prestige. In this view, social exchange theory contributes to the understanding of why individuals view exchanges as factors affecting stability and change alike.

As for interactional needs, this self-enhancement motivator enables people to strengthen their connection to other users. The motivating factor of self-enhancement has been acknowledged as a significant element for companies to use to encourage positive comments from customers. Yen and Tang (2015) argued that self-enhancement must be distinguished from the factor of feeling positive emotions derived from sharing because people like to present themselves as intelligent shoppers, whereas positive emotions are a different dimension of the eWOM experience. Killian, Fahy and O'Loughlin (2016) showed that customers with higher levels of individualism are more likely to share positive eWOM than customers with lower levels of individualism on the basis of self-enhancement. Thus, there are many additional details to self-enhancement that make this motivator essential to the research. For the current research, the self-enhancement element applies to the study of motivation, in seeking and sharing eWOM as reinforcement for purchase intentions.

2.4.2 Social comparison

Further, social needs in general and in a social comparison, in particular, affect customers' decisions and actions related to eWOM. Social needs must be satisfied for customers to gain satisfaction from their actions on the internet (Alexandrov et al., 2013). Social comparison is one of the social needs because people tend to compare themselves with others, although the satisfaction of these needs often comes through eWOM. Alexandrov et al. (2013) stated that social comparison affects both positive and negative eWOM. There is strikingly little academic information on social comparison in relation to this type of communication, which suggests that further research is necessary to understand its role in the creation of the motivation to participate in eWOM. In a recent study, Tussyadiah, Kausar and Soesilo (2018) accentuated that people might have an intrinsic desire to explore outside objects to

assess their own opinions and capabilities. Therefore, by searching for the opinions of other people, individuals compare their own judgements with those of others.

Belarmino and Koh (2018) explored the importance of the social comparison variable in shaping the engagement of users with eWOM. Although the social comparison is part of the equity theory, it is highly applicable to the uses and gratifications approach because it explores the inherent motivation to create and read eWOM as part of the psychologically satisfying process. Comparing personal experience with those shared by other customers, creators of eWOM differentiate the self or strive for belonging. While reading eWOM after the purchase or service use, individuals may even change their opinion in either a positive or negative direction in the result of social comparison with perceptions and views shared through eWOM by other people. Interestingly, Belarmino and Koh (2018) illustrated that people who are motivated by social benefits (not affected by the social comparison variable) tend to write reviews directly on the websites owned by the suppliers of service or products, whereas users with high level of social comparison motivation prefer third-party sites for the purpose of creating eWOM.

The satisfaction of the internal need to compare the self with others encourages users to share their experiences on the internet. Individuals may expect that their sharing of information on social networks allows them to satisfy the need for comparison (Alexandrov et al., 2013). The researchers elaborated that the presence of other people triggers this need, whereas the internet serves as a vast base for users to make their opinions known to many other individuals who frequent various platforms. Tussyadiah et al. (2018) added to this information, stating that users generally select a specific person or a reference group to which they compare themselves. Whereas Alexandrov et al. (2013) asserted that social comparison is an internal drive, Tussyadiah et al. (2018) disagreed, positing that social comparison originates from the responses of others as reference groups. Whether external or internal, social comparison is a significant motivator for people to generate eWOM.

The topic of social comparison similarly relates to the selective attention that users pay to different situations. Daugherty and Hoffman (2014) contributed to research by stating that WOM has developed from one-to-one interpersonal communication to one-to-one marketing-influenced communication. Therefore, the

need to compare the self has transformed. Since users require opinion leaders, the role of influencers and self-comparison with the said influencers has become significant. Poulis, Rizomyliotis and Konstantoulaki (2019) stated that influencers have become popular among companies and their marketing professionals because influencer marketing contributes to high levels of interaction and the ability of messages to go viral.

The variable of social comparison was frequently explored and evaluated by the researchers in the context of influencers and lifestyles of celebrities and other influencers. Dhanesh and Duthler (2019) concluded that social comparison is achieved through eWOM and referrals shared by influencers because their followers strive to achieve the same lifestyle. As the outcome, eWOM created by influencers is more likely to be followed for brands and products even if influencers do not directly recommend or advise a certain brand or service. In this case, the visual eWOM is strong enough to motivate a purchase intention among followers. Dhanesh and Duthler (2019) concluded that influencers are committed to self-presentation on social media platforms; this presentation requires them to pay close attention to their public image. With deep influence, celebrities have the power to manipulate the preferences and purchase decisions of their followers. The social comparison is embedded with the desire of the consumers of eWOM to bridge the gap between the celebrities and themselves by purchasing the same items and services or following the recommendations.

Similar findings were also reported by Dwivedi et al. (2021); however, researchers shifted the discussion on social comparison towards the evaluation of trust and mistrust. According to Dwivedi et al. (2021), eWOM created and shared by influencers is perceived as both useful and biased. This finding suggests that users of eWOM generated on social media by popular individuals do not always have trust in the credibility of the recommendation and the impact is selective, depending on the usability of recommendations on individual needs of readers of eWOM. Dwivedi et al. (2021) presented the evaluation of consumer experiences with advertising run through Instagram and concluded that users paid attention to usefulness, entertainment and lack of irritation. In the case of social comparison capitalised through eWOM on social media, the barrier of the source credibility is removed only

for users who have favourable attitudes towards the celebrity (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Consequently, a favourable attitude adds to the perceived credibility, the desire to satisfy the social comparison need and the purchase intention as the outcome of eWOM exposure. If the source of eWOM is perceived as an expert, the trustworthiness of the referral is automatically established. With influencers who achieve significant impact through eWOM owing to the social comparison paradigm, the information helpfulness is the most significant factor (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

In other words, influencers instigate social comparison needs of individuals who pay attention to select messages of opinion leaders. This information enhances the position that this research takes because social comparison is elucidated by modern realities, like influencer presence and consequences for eWOM. Lee, Kim and Kim (2012) agreed that self-observation used in online interactions reflects consumers' engagement in eWOM because users rely on self-efficacy and social outcomes alike. The study unveiled that consumers are more interdependent than independent, which is significant to the study and the concept of social comparison because people construct their online and eWOM identities by judging how they would be part of the collective group on social media.

One of the dominant views on social comparison as the motivation for engagement with eWOM is the idea that individuals tend to compare their own beliefs and experiences with those of others (Patil, Booshan, & Fernandes, 2020). Age is one of the essential variables in social comparison theory, partially attributed to the need among younger generations and teenagers to self-establish personal identity in comparison with peers, becoming either a follower or a leader in a social circle. Patil et al. (2020) reported the findings according to which the representatives of Generation Z engage in social comparison through learning by themselves. Consequently, eWOM for Generation Z creators and consumers is perceived through brand consciousness (prior knowledge about the product and company) and quality of the eWOM message itself. If both factors reinforce each other, the purchase intention tends to increase. If either quality of eWOM is not good enough or the prior knowledge contradicts the assessment provided through eWOM message, the purchase intention is not firm for Generation Z representatives. In addition, Patil et al. (2020) urged that Generation Z members are less influenced by the group of people

surrounding them because self-learning occurs independently rather than as the result of peer pressure or dominant views. Generation Z receivers of eWOM are less likely to be influenced by eWOM created by social media users they do not know in person.

In addition to the age variable, the social comparison gained the attention of researchers studying both pre-purchase decisions and post-purchase evaluations. Traditionally, eWOM receiving occurs at the stage of pre-purchase, when information-seeking behaviour is accompanied with social comparison motivation. The post-purchase behaviour implies the eWOM giving, when a buyer shares personal perceptions of the quality of the product and service, comparing personal experience with those of other creators of eWOM for the same product or service. Liu, Jayawardhena, Osburg and Babu (2019) provided evidence claiming that social comparison is an influential variable in both types of behaviours: pre-purchase and post-purchase, when eWOM shapes the brand perception. The correlation is mediated by the eWOM credibility with reference to the platform on which it is shared and accessed, consistency between personal views and those shared by others, and interaction with other users of eWOM (Liu, Tran, Postma, Buydens, & Jansen, 2019). Moreover, the post-purchase exposure to eWOM created by others also shapes the type and scope of eWOM provided by the actual user of service or buyer of the product. When eWOM is consumed after the purchase, the social comparison behaviour may alter the content of eWOM.

Some people satisfy the need for social comparison because of the importance of gaining guidelines from others. Liu and Keng (2014) stressed that people's uncertainty about the validity of their opinions encourages them to seek other people's opinions that can guide how they should think. This psychological perspective focuses on the cognitive dissonance that people experience after comparing themselves with others. Whereas Alexandrov et al. (2013) built on previous research, suggesting that negative experiences push users to offer deceptive eWOM, Liu and Keng (2014) argued that social comparison prevents users from writing untruthful messages because of the cognitive dissonance that they experience in the creation of untruthful media in a simultaneous process of social comparison. For the purpose of the current research, social comparison may be the factor shaping

purchase intentions, where eWOM serves as the variable encouraging the formation of decision-making in the purchase process.

2.4.3 Helping others

The final motivator to consider in the current research is helping others, which some scholars label as altruism. Alexandrov et al. (2013) stated that helping others is a self-intention that drives eWOM, although Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) contended that altruism drives positive and negative WOM differently. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explained that helping others with altruistic purposes means that a user does not expect a reward in return. Yang (2017) agreed that the enjoyment from helping others originates from psychological needs of people. In other words, this concept is interesting for analysis and discussion because some instances of eWOM provide people with an opportunity to help others selflessly by generating reviews and comments that help individuals select a quality product or brand. Conversely, the self-intention of helping others may drive negative eWOM because customers provide negative feedback to dissuade people from using a product of low quality and to prevent them from experiencing similar negative effects.

The domain of helping others is expansive because of the different situations that altruism uses to encourage people to engage in eWOM. Alexandrov et al. (2013) claimed that concern for others predetermines the frequency of eWOM. Therefore, people possessing altruistic qualities are likely to engage in online communication regarding various products on a regular basis. Notably, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) added to the marketing discourse by proposing that helping a company can also serve as a motivator to create positive WOM because, through positive feedback, customers express gratitude for a pleasing experience with goods or services. Thus, helping others should not leave out the intention to appreciate businesses and their efforts to please customers.

In addition to altruism and related motivations, the research on eWOM inspired by the desire to help others integrated the phenomena of the behavioural patterns that present feedback as the desire to help companies become better (Vermeer, Araujo, Bernritter, & van Noort, 2019). When the helping others motivation is based on the inner need to stimulate or suggest improvements, eWOM

gains constructive meaning both from satisfied and dissatisfied consumers. Vermeer et al. (2019) classified this form of eWOM as positive, negative or neutral eWOM based on satisfaction, dissatisfaction and general comment, respectively. Negative eWOM may include dissatisfaction in the form of a complaint about poor customer service, defective product or lack of availability, for example. The motivation of eWOM creators is to identify the problem area that a company should address to become better and more efficient in serving the needs of other consumers. Positive eWOM may focus on the acknowledgement of high quality, exceeded expectations and other compliments on company's success in presenting a product or providing a service (Vermeer et al., 2019). The helping motivation in such cases relates to the desire of the eWOM author to thank the company. Neutral eWOM does not imply either satisfaction or dissatisfaction and is typically created in a form of a question, comment or general suggestion. The helping others motivation in creating eWOM is not characterised by the like or dislike of a certain brand, tends to be based on personal experience with a product or service and does not seek restoration, justice or self-expression. Helping others, according to Vermeer et al. (2019), is not always altruistic either and instead is best described as rational evaluation and objective criticism.

Nasr, Burton and Gruber (2018) shifted the attention towards the issue of human appreciation as part of the motivation to share feedback. According to researchers, the concept of appreciation plays one of the central roles in social relationships, both in traditional settings and in online environments. Appreciation represents the reciprocity of human behaviours, helps reduce stress and increases positive emotions. In the context of motivation to write and read eWOM, appreciation can be of external or internal nature. Internal appreciation refers to self-appreciation, when a person feels more important or valuable to the community by sharing information about personal experience with a product, service, place or a company. External appreciation is facilitated through social media and review platforms, on which users can support and thank the eWOM creator for sharing information through likes, comments or thumbs up (Nasr et al., 2018). Consequently, the variable of helpfulness is two-sided and relates not only to sharing helpful information but also to increasing personal worthiness by giving back to the community.

Similarly, Nasr et al. (2018) further provided the evidence that service encounters motivate users to create eWOM as a way to be helpful to companies. In response to a positive service encounter, the relationships between a customer and a company gain the urge for reciprocity and create the inner need for a customer to pay back the company by leaving a review or eWOM. According to Nasr et al. (2018), the motivation to leave a review is not mediated by positive or negative experience, even though the variable of helping others occurs mostly for positive pre-purchase and post-purchase situations. When the experience is negative, the motivation to help the company emerges in rare cases, particularly if a customer had a positive experience in the past and views the negative encounter as a mistake rather than the characterisation of the quality of service provided by the company as a whole.

Along with rational criticism and the motivation to help companies by focusing on positives and pointing out the weaknesses, eWOM creators are motivated by the importance of gratitude to leave positive feedback. Samadara and Fanggidae (2020) in their study on helping others and gratitude hypothesised that eWOM is motivated either by the desire to express appreciation towards a company, a feeling of goodwill and the tendency for a person to do something good for others just because of the personality trait. Positive eWOM motivated by gratitude intrinsically pushes a person to return the favour, which is illustrated with the overall satisfaction with a product or service, and expressed in the form of a recommendation shared through social media. Samadara and Fanggidae (2020) differentiated between gratitude and reciprocity, suggesting that the latter is the appreciation of the perceived benefits and the former is the motivator. Positive eWOM, therefore, becomes the form of a behavioural gratitude. Samadara and Fanggidae (2020) established the correlation between positive WOM/eWOM and gratitude. When people are satisfied with the product or service, the motivation to share positive eWOM is created, whereas the feeling of gratitude further inspires individuals to disseminate their eWOM among others. Even if eWOM is not created, the feeling of gratitude fosters the intention to do so.

Helping others through eWOM reflects the attitudes that some people have to online interactions. Rossmann et al. (2016) confirmed that consumers prefer helping others, while they participate in information sharing and information building. It is

understandable that information sharing contributes to altruism because sharing helps consumers effectively make purchase decisions. Information building involves users collaborating and exchanging messages to reach truthful information about services and products. Moreover, the same study contributed to knowledge by demonstrating how brands benefit from the conceptualisation of comments and likes. In the seminal article by Hung and Li (2007), it is evident that helping others rests on the drive for users to enhance their social relations and to self-reflect about experiences that can be shared via social media. Human reflexivity leads users to engage in eWOM that may have helpful qualities for other potential customers.

Nonetheless, Magno, Cassia, Bonfanti and Vigolo (2018) provided evidence to suggest that helping others motivation is frequently accompanied by egoistic goals for self-satisfaction and enhanced reputation in online community. In other words, the helping others variable is not dominant in all situations leading to the creation of eWOM, both positive and negative. Magno et al. (2018) confirmed that both altruistic motivations (helping others) and egoistic triggers (self-satisfaction) are equally important on considering the creation and consumption of eWOM. The altruistic motivation refers to the desire to help other customers make a more informed decision regarding a product or service and the desire to help a company, firm or service provider to appeal to more consumers and make higher profits. Egoistic motives may include the inner desire to relive the experience, to wreak revenge or ruin the reputation. These factors influence the frequency of writing online reviews among users and consumers of products and services, and are closely correlated with the self-intention variable.

The desire to help others as the motivation to create and share eWOM can be based on negative or positive emotions. Exploring the issue of negative eWOM, Syahid and Setyanto (2020) found that negative emotions have a positive effect on the intention to create negative eWOM. Yet, according to researchers, even when the emotions are negative, the creators of eWOM are motivated by altruism if the goal is to help other readers to make a better choice. In other words, a person who has negative experiences with the product or service wants to warn others through negative eWOM, ultimately positively affecting their welfare. Syahid and Setyanto (2020) placed the variable of altruism into the discussion on knowledge-sharing

behaviour because the creators of eWOM do not seek any reward other than the satisfaction of the inner desire to help others. In cases when negative eWOM is written with the objective to hurt the reputation of a company rather than to help others, the altruistic motivation becomes negative. Syahid and Setyanto (2020) added that users creating and sharing eWOM experience a feeling of excitement by helping others. The helping motivation generates satisfaction and pleasure on an intrinsic level. The exposure to helpful eWOM leads to the purchase intention, which in turn reinforces the helping others motivation for the authors of eWOM, if the behavioural choice is evaluated by the outcome. The same patterns are true for the self-need to help others, which is the psychological need to be helpful and useful to the community.

Simultaneously, some evidence exists about the connection between this self-intention and self-need. Taylor et al. (2012) averred that people use displays of altruism to improve their self-enhancement because the manifestation of kind and helpful qualities makes people feel good about themselves. A demonstration of altruism in eWOM enhances a certain personality feature and shapes how users view themselves or how others view them. Reimer and Benkenstein (2016) disagreed with this stance, suggesting that people have altruistic motives because they possess the qualities of empathy and helpfulness to safeguard the wellbeing of others. Killian et al. (2016) claimed that truly altruistic messages, guided by the need to help both customers and companies, may contain the most faithful and unbiased feedback. However, it can be argued that all online behaviour is based on self-interest rather than altruism (Killian et al., 2016). The discrepancies in the views of this self-intention provide compelling ground to explore and discuss its occurrence in eWOM-related settings in general and with reference to purchase intentions in particular.

2.5 Gratifications for Consumer Engagement with eWOM Communication

Apart from motivators, gratifications can also be reasons for people's decisions to engage in eWOM. The conceptual framework of this study focuses on three gratifications that may explain why users generate this content. Knowledge enhancement, entertainment, and social interactions are the major types of

gratifications available to internet users who find eWOM an attractive source to address these needs.

2.5.1 Knowledge enhancement

Knowledge enhancement plays an important role as gratification of the need for new knowledge. The messages of eWOM communication might provide additional information about products, brands and tendencies and this knowledge could help users gratify their needs. Rossmann et al. (2016) stated that knowledge contribution is viewed positively by online community members; hence, many users strive for knowledge enhancement and appreciate when their peers share their experiences with a product or brand. Apart from the appreciation from other users, knowledge contributions could be effective for companies. Fine et al. (2017) noted that companies can self-improve when they know how to manage feedback, treating it as a source of knowledge. Consequently, knowledge enhancement occurs for both customers and businesses when users generate eWOM.

Dolan, Conduit, Fahy and Goodman (2016) emphasised that individuals use the internet primarily to seek information about different topics of interest, including products and brands; a search for feedback about goods and services is one way to gratify the need for knowledge. This element of gratification encourages users to participate in online brand communities, in which they can learn both from companies and other users. Knowledge enhancement motivates people to use social media. Gruen et al. (2006) affirmed that customer-to-customer interactions often involve an exchange of know-how, as users provide each other with instructions about the best uses of a product. The claims of Moran and Muzellec (2017) aligned with this stance because know-how on social media enables communication between people with different levels of knowledge about a product or brand. The exchange of know-how can definitely touch upon the subject of knowledge enhancement because people gratify the need for knowledge about different issues pertaining to a product from those who have used it. Although a company's advertisements may be homogenous in their presentation of a product, customers' know-how adds to the information about the product.

While knowledge enhancement can be the independent factor in creating the need to receive eWOM and seek reviews and recommendation online or offline, several studies have investigated self-enhancement in combination with the motivation to help others. In particular, Obrenovic et al. (2020) combined the theories of planned behaviour, social exchange and the big five personality traits to explain the rationale to share knowledge with others voluntarily. According to research, the motivation to share knowledge with others is closely aligned with two factors: exposure to the helpful eWOM during the pre-purchase decision-making that helped to make the purchase and lack of the informative eWOM and the inner desire to share the knowledge for the purpose of enhancing the informational quality on products or brands. While Obrenovic et al. (2020) was conducted in an organisational setting with the objective to explore the behavioural patterns of knowledge sharing and knowledge enhance at workplace, the findings are applicable to the analysis of motivations for eWOM sharing. Knowledge sharing results in enhancement of overall outcomes, creativity and flexibility. In reference to purchase intention, knowledge enhancement achieved through eWOM, both in creating and receiving, is accompanied by the same benefits and advantages.

Knowledge enhancement has many layers that affect the pursuit of gratification. Abrantes, Seabra, Lages and Jayawardhena (2013) shared that the more users interact within an online community or forum, the more likely they are to create eWOM messages that would demonstrate their knowledge and improve their image as experts about particular products. Knowledge enhancement is observed when participants engage in eWOM to validate their common knowledge. Abrantes et al. (2013) also explained that unique knowledge is best received from users with whom a person has weak ties. This information is important because it provides an explanation to question why some consumers are interested in eWOM created by strangers. The current research will pursue knowledge about eWOM from strangers to enrich what is already known. Knowledge enhancement also works best for customers who have an opportunity to develop trust (Fu, Bin, Xie, Liuli, & Yu, 2011). This finding demonstrates the interconnected nature of trust and knowledge enhancement. Individualism and collectivism also influence the credibility of information, as the element of knowledge enhancement shared and received in eWOM (Luo, Wu, Shi, & Xu, 2014). This is important for the research because focusing specifically on KSA

shows how collectivist cultures use credibility of the source for the purpose of knowledge enhancement in eWOM engagement.

The satisfaction of this type of gratification anticipates the continuous use of social media to generate and consume eWOM. Carlson, Rahman, Voola and De Vries (2018) acknowledged that learning and enhancing skills are a crucial outcome of brand community involvement among customers. Social media platforms are particularly useful for this ambition because knowledgeable product users can respond to additional questions about a product, which encourages people to remain active participants in social media platforms (Carlson et al., 2018). This characteristic means that even mere questions, without positive or negative feedback, generate eWOM and a buzz that many companies seek for their offerings. Simultaneously, psychological studies illustrate that negative information is disseminated faster and is more influential in decision-making (Hornik, Satchi, Cesareo, & Pastore, 2015). Thus, negative eWOM may have a greater influence than positive eWOM when people try to enhance their knowledge about products and brands. In line with the objectives of the current study, knowledge enhancement may have an influential impact on purchase intention, when potential buyers seek reviews of a product or service.

Thus, knowledge enhancement consists of two equally important dimensions: knowledge seeking and knowledge sharing. The relationship between the two behaviours creates and fulfils the demand for knowledge that individuals on social media either want to obtain or provide. Ismagilova et al. (2020) explained that both knowledge seeking and knowledge sharing depend on norms in society or the community, which might include internet communities on social media. Norms are antecedents of normative influence that Ismagilova et al. (2020) identified as the influence of other people. Moreover, these effects represent the ability of individuals to meet the expectations of others, while this predisposition might shape a person's opinions and value systems. These outcomes affect knowledge sharing and knowledge seeking because users share information that might emphasise their alignment with others, while they also seek information that helps them affirm their norms and values. Information influence helps individuals detect instances of useful information that might help them buy a product.

Some researchers assume that customers interested in a specific industry might rely on the gratification of knowledge enhancement the most. For example, Qian, Law and Fan (2020) identified tourism, and especially cultural tourism, as an industry characterised by significant interest and knowledge-seeking behaviours because potential customers make a substantial investment into their travelling experiences that they would like to repay. Similar results relate to online communities that provide users with information about technology (Sun, Mao, & Yin, 2020). Certain products and brands might encourage individuals to gratify their knowledge needs and engage in knowledge-seeking behaviours to guarantee that the final product bought matches a customer's demands.

Knowledge acquisition in online community might demonstrate gender differences. Sun et al. (2020) found that male users tend to have less attentiveness than do women when they peruse online community posts. Findings confirm that men process information in a different way, scanning the available information quickly, while women tend to read everything in detail. Such gender differences might also occur in eWOM communications and the ability of both genders to gratify the need for knowledge enhancement. The same study demonstrated that female users are affected by negative emotion more than male users are. This finding shows that negative emotions might decrease knowledge-seeking behaviours (Sun et al., 2020).

Knowledge enhancement is associated with the motivation of helping each other. Bazi, Hajli, Hajli, Shanmugam and Lin (2019) explicated that social media and online communities contribute to the creation of spaces that help individuals co-create a narrative about products and brands. In such a common space, users assist each other in gathering information and enhancing knowledge that subsequently informs them about purchase-making decisions. Knowledge enhancement is often associated with the reduction of uncertainty (Yasin, Porcu, Abusharbeh, & Liébana-Cabanillas, 2020). Users have a need to communicate with others to enrich their knowledge and make an informed choice using a variety of opinions and experiences that others share. Therefore, knowledge enhancement has value as a gratification that influences eWOM practices.

2.5.2 Entertainment

The search for fun and entertaining experiences also determines customers' participation in eWOM. The gratification of the desire for entertainment encourages people to generate eWOM messages. Carlson et al. (2018) asserted that entertainment derived from online interactions with a brand's social media presence leads to the intention of eWOM, brand support, feedback and participation in surveys, including disclosure of personal data for the company to use. The sense of fun that people gain from the creation of eWOM can be employed by brands and businesses to encourage people to engage in this type of communication even more. Dolan et al. (2016) agreed that entertaining content serves a significant purpose in exciting and engaging customers through hedonism, escapism, aesthetics and emotional release. In other words, the positive emotions that users can gain from interactions on social media pages of brands are drivers for them to generate eWOM that can potentially lead to other instances of entertainment. Thus, many companies try to engage customers and encourage them to be active on brand pages.

Yet, Kitirattarkarn, Araujo and Neijens (2019) highlighted that the entertainment aspect of eWOM in particular and fun in general are closely dependent on the cultural differences of individualist and collectivist cultures. In particular, people living in individualist cultures tend to experience entertainment if the content of eWOM is useful and informative, whereas people living in collectivist cultures place greater emphasis on the indirect characteristics of messages, such as use of figurative language or interesting details. The resulting engagement with eWOM is, therefore, driven not only by the functional values of eWOM, but also by the emotional and social appeals created by that product. Kitirattarkarn et al. (2019) further added that the values attached to eWOM by representatives of different types of cultures tend to affect the consequent engagement with brands, including purchase intention and purchase decisions. Specifically, eWOM related to brands triggers more affective responses if it is sufficiently entertaining and facilitates positive identity of the creator and consumer.

Along with the entertaining element of eWOM affecting the perception and behavioural choices of consumers, particular attention should be devoted to the intensity and intimacy of the relationship between the creator and receiver of eWOM.

In this regard, Kitirattarkarn et al. (2019) noted that eWOM shared by a friend is usually perceived as less irritating and more entertaining compared with the reaction to the same eWOM shared by a stranger. The former case illustrates that relationship between content creator and receiver mediates the perception of the entertaining feature, leading to a more positive attitude towards brand and stronger purchase intention in the future. In referral messages or product-specific recommendations, eWOM shared by a close friend has a much stronger influence on purchase intention, entertaining value of the message and the perceived usability and trustworthiness of the feedback.

The pleasing emotions associated with brand pages contribute to the formation of a positive attitude towards the brand of the platform that they frequent. Dolan et al. (2016) claimed that entertaining experiences on company websites encourage users to return to the website and to create brand-related content online. The presence of an entertaining element in the online presence of a company is a definite way to help customers gratify their need for fun experiences that can involve engagement with eWOM communication. Gvili and Levy (2016) explicated that the entertainment element decreases perceived intrusiveness of social media and encourages people to view both their own participation and that of other community members positively. With the risks and anxieties that permeate the internet and social networking platforms, it is understandable that entertainment could alleviate customers' fears.

Similar conclusions were also reported in Thomas and Kanje (2021), according to whom entertaining eWOM content motivates users to visit corporate websites and social media pages even without the intention to make a purchase. In other words, the variable of entertainment in eWOM affects both the motivation to create and read eWOM about products and services and mediates the behavioural patterns of eWOM receivers in terms of creating the rationale to learn more about a brand or company. Applying this assumption to tourism sector, Thomas and Kanje (2021) discovered that eWOM behaviours are positive correlated with the entertainment motivation. eWOM giving and reading behaviours are, in addition, correlated with social integration, which is correlated with altruistic motivation. Yet, for tourism-related eWOM, such as hotel reviews, Thomas and Kanje (2021) found that the entertainment motivation is the key factor shaping social media eWOM. This

finding rejected the dominant view of eWOM seeking behaviour for the informational motives.

According to Thomas and Kanje (2021), the entertainment motivation is rooted in the gratification pertaining to escaping or being diverted from routine. The entertainment gratification also presents the avenue for emotional release and relaxation. For other seekers of eWOM, the process of locating and reading different eWOM may bring enjoyment or even produce a sexual arousal (Thomas & Kanje, 2021). The additional factors reinforcing the entertainment gratification include membership in the virtual community, where members share the same interests or preferences, social networking with others and the general consumption of user-generated content as a way to pass time. Thomas and Kanje (2021) confirmed the hypothesis that the entertainment motivation is significantly important in shaping eWOM seeking, giving and passing among social media users.

The connection between eWOM and entertainment originates from the entertainment value of social media in general. Hsu, Chih and Liou (2016) specified that increasingly popular social websites are an instrument of entertainment for different populations within society; therefore, companies must follow general patterns to engage customers and encourage them to generate a buzz. Additionally, the entertaining and informational purposes of social media complement each other. Gvili and Levy (2016) claimed that these dimensions are distinct factors in eWOM, but their combination explains online customer behaviour because entertainment and knowledge enhancement interact, contributing to purchase intentions.

With reference to entertainment gratification, Shobri, Putit and Suki (2021) emphasised that this factor is characterised by passive participation of the users of social media. Further, the entrainment realm relates to the information absorption attitude. When the rationale for eWOM consumption is based on educational realms, consumers of eWOM are expected to be more active participants, proactively searching for specific data and engaging with the virtual community. The entertainment gratification does not imply the intention to make a purchase and may lack the immersion element. The consumption of eWOM with entertainment gratification may be unrelated to any specific product or service but rather be based on feelings of fun, pleasure and relaxation (Shobri et al., 2021). Researchers

compared the consumption of eWOM for the entertaining purposes with other leisure activities, such as listening to music. The entertainment gratification does not offer enhancement of knowledge or skills, even though this gratification may also occur on the secondary level. In the case of consumption of visual eWOM, gratification may be associated with esthetical enjoyment. For example, reviewing the design elements of certain products or surfing through the pictures of destinations brings esthetical satisfaction. Shobri et al. (2021) added that the entertainment gratification of eWOM consumption is part of the experience economy, namely the escapism experience, which provides the avenue to escape from routine. In some cases, entertainment and educational gratifications are combined when consumers of eWOM pursue the objective of gaining more information and self-enhance their knowledge base.

Similarly, Zhou, Yan, Yan and Shen (2019) shed light on the correlation between eWOM behaviour of individuals and the entertainment motivation as part of the gratification, claiming that the websites devoted to reviews tend to be richer in informative quality and convenience of consuming eWOM, whereas social media pages are more focused on entertainment, interaction, sharing ideas and expressing the self. The sociability and emotionality of eWOM on social media adds to the entertaining gratification of both giving and seeking behaviours with regard to eWOM. Whereas the review-focused websites, especially in tourism sector, are filled with promotion and review reminders, social media has less emphasis on service and more on entertainment. Reflecting on the entertainment gratification with reference to eWOM, Zhou et al. (2019) made an important conclusion that age is the significant variable to consider. Younger creators and receivers of eWOM are more concerned with the entertainment gratification, which implies the presence of more influential motivation to engage in sharing and creating eWOM on social media. Older generations of consumers are more likely to refer to the websites specialising in reviews because the informational quality of eWOM is prioritised above the entertainment gratification.

The age-related deviation in the significance of the entrainment variable in eWOM seeking, creating and receiving behaviour was also established in the research by Xanthakou and Antoniadis (2019). Collecting data through observation, researchers found that at least 21.5% of users pay attention to the element of

entertainment in eWOM. Xanthakou and Antoniadis (2019) categorised them as entertainment seekers. Moreover, the additional 30% of users on Facebook are also interested in the entertaining feature of eWOM, being basic entertainment seekers. These findings indicate that more than half of all users of social media are motivated to consume content if it has entertaining characteristics. The participation and engagement of users with eWOM on social media is, therefore, correlated with the entertainment gratification. Companies aiming to build long-term relationships with their consumers and fan base should evaluate their marketing messages and provide the tools for creative eWOM because this variable predetermines the behavioural patterns of online communities.

2.5.3 Social interaction

Apart from knowledge enhancement and entertainment, social interaction is the final gratification to be explored. Dolan et al. (2016) asserted that this type of gratification corresponds to relational content because individuals have a need for integration and social benefits derived from communication. As a result, internet and social media platforms provide people with a sense of belonging and connect them with diverse populations, including family, friends, peers and strangers. Websites offer people support and opportunities to share experiences and feelings. Dolan et al. (2016) claimed that this relational content pleases users because their voices are heard, recognised and publicised, while they connect with different audiences. Alexandrov et al. (2013) clarified that social interactions trigger the social need of social comparison and the social intention of helping others. Social interactions are crucial to many people, which means that companies can use this factor to encourage people to participate in eWOM communication.

The sense of belonging found in social interactions in online communities helps in the shaping of effective eWOM. Specifically, Hsu et al. (2016) recommended that page administrators encourage the creation of content by community members while simultaneously offering official information that increases the credibility of the general community knowledge about a product, brand or company. In other words, allowing customers to be sole creators of eWOM may decrease the credibility of the message, whereas a moderate interference with official information mitigates the issue of faithfulness. Carlson et al. (2018) stated that close social interactions in

online communities allow people to improve the depth, breadth and efficacy of mutual knowledge exchange associated with excitement. Based on this claim, it is possible to synthesise the information to state that the gratifications discussed in this paper are interconnected because social interactions contribute to the satisfaction of the other two types, knowledge enhancement and entertainment.

The importance of the informative value of social interaction was addressed in Hussain, Song, and Niu (2020). The researchers noted that users of social media and consumers of eWOM appreciate the social interaction more if the information is perceived as useful. The usefulness of the social interaction influences the adoption of information among readers of eWOM. Hussain et al. (2020) claimed that the mediated relationship between eWOM and social interaction is affected by the depth and scope of the information provided by creators of eWOM. If information is perceived as useful, the social interaction will be more active, leading to the quick adoption of information. If information is perceived as biased or not useful, the content of eWOM will not trigger purchase intentions or further actions accompanied by active social interaction. Receivers of eWOM consider social interaction as an important factor if the information is not only of interest, but also contains useful data, regardless of its further use either for the purchase-related decision or simply for the interaction with other users. eWOM-related social interaction is, therefore, is the product of information adoption as part of the research on behavioural intention development (Hussain et al., 2020). This attribute of gratifications for engagement with eWOM communication is traditionally covered in literature from the standpoint of entertainment and interaction with others. Conversely, the research by Hussain, Huang, Ilyas, and Niu (2020) shifted the discussion towards the usability of such data in terms of informational value. It leads to the conclusion that users engage in interaction only if they find this process informative for themselves.

Unlike Hussain et al. (2020), who explored the information value in social interaction, González-Soriano et al. (2020) hypothesised that social identity of creators and receivers of eWOM is the product of social identity effects. Investigating the attributes of social capital and capital presence in eWOM creation process, researchers concluded that traditional WOM is more influenced by the social identity of message creators compared with eWOM messages. Unlike traditional WOM, in

which the physical presence of individuals is included, eWOM makes it more difficult to establish social identity. According to González-Soriano et al. (2020), social interaction is more powerful in shaping perceptions of individuals engaging in communication through traditional WOM. Specifically, the face-to-face interaction on product characteristics was found to have significant impact on purchase intention, which in turn was accompanied by the mutually satisfying social interaction. In the online environment, eWOM-fostered social interaction is burdened with a different set of gratifications because social identity is established through virtual presence and reactions to new information are unknown in most of the cases. González-Soriano et al. (2020) concluded that eWOM does not provide a sense of intimacy and immediacy. Therefore, researchers claimed that traditional WOM offers stronger gratification in terms of social interaction, whereas eWOM should target the generation of trust and formation of virtual social identity in the result of the engagement with eWOM. Yet, for both types of WOM, the social interaction is included in the analysis.

The uses and gratifications theory suggests that social interaction function is part of the gratifying motivation. Whiting and Williams (2013) suggested that social interaction is one of the stimuli that encourages users of social media to engage in the creation and consumption of eWOM. Reviewing products, services, brands and companies through social media facilitates the perceived social interaction among individuals. Whiting and Williams (2013) added that social interaction gratification affects the motivation and duration of social media use. By sharing or reading online reviews, users of social media have an opportunity to meet people who share the same interests, to learn more about the current trends and preferences of other consumers, and achieve the interpersonal utility and companionship through eWOM creation and consumption processes.

Further, Pihlaja, Saarijärvi, Spence and Yrjölä (2017) confirmed that users prefer social media interaction with the purpose to avoid corporate intrusion. While creating eWOM for corporate websites, users have lower trust because their reviews are moderated. Social media and other platform grant more freedom, not only to share true thoughts about the products and services, but also to foster interaction with other users, share concerns and voice opinions. The social interaction objective is also

reinforced with the desire to gain helpful information for purchase decision-making. The internet has already become an important part of interaction among consumers, so the evaluation of eWOM requires a more critical approach, which in turn reduces the trustworthiness of the opinions shared online. Pihlaja et al. (2017) urged that social interaction is perceived as more desirable by consumers if source credibility is established, the review is helpful, various opinions are included and interaction continues.

Pihlaja et al. (2017) further elucidated that the formation of the groups devoted to the discussion of products and brands illustrates the importance of the social interaction element of eWOM creation and consumption. Social ties, even if they are established in virtual environment and are exclusive focused on a single brand, play one of the decisive roles in increasing the motivation to engage with eWOM, with and without a purchase intention. The more importance is attributed to the social interaction variable, the more frequent eWOM engagement tends to be. The rationale to exchange information about the product or service is not the only benefit of eWOM that users of social media pursue. Yet, with anonymous eWOM, the quality and importance of social interaction tends to decrease (Pihlaja et al., 2017).

2.6 Purchase Intentions

Several studies have examined the impact of eWOM on purchase intentions. For example, Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) claimed that there is a statistically significant link between social eWOM and purchase intentions. Erkan and Evans (2016) reported that the quality of information shared by online users plays a decisive role in facilitating behavioural change and purchase decisions. Similarly, Lever, Mulvey and Elliot (2017) reported the potential influence of eWOM on the travel plans of tourists and noted that positive and negative feedback and comments posted by other users had a direct impact on changes in travel plans and altering purchase intentions and decisions among users. In addition, the researchers employed SEM to analyse the data, which implies that they combined both the techniques of regression and factor analysis (Ismagilova, Dwivedi, Slade, & Williams, 2017; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Their findings showed that positive eWOM influences purchase intentions, chiefly because the marketing channel increases product knowledge, perceived value and quality.

Further, Alhidari, Iyer and Paswan (2015) confirmed that purchase intentions and eWOM are correlated. The researchers explore three key antecedents—risk-taking tendency, involvement and self-reliance—as the factors shaping purchase intentions through exposure to eWOM on social media. The results of the investigation suggested a positive correlation between eWOM and purchase intention in terms of reducing the risk-related concerns of consumers. Alhidari et al. (2015) did not find the importance of relationship between self-reliance and purchase intention. Researchers explained the lack of empirical support for this observation by suggesting the self-reliant users of social media read eWOM to enhance their knowledge but the information they gain through social media does not directly affect their purchase intentions because the decisions on products and services are made through internal thinking processes rather than as the result of exploring the views of others.

Moreover, previous findings about purchase intentions play an important role in the development of this research. Dehghani and Tumer (2015) reported that users' involvement in brand communities on social media enables other group members to influence their brand perceptions and purchase intentions. Negative eWOM has the power to decrease the desire to buy, whereas positive eWOM might persuade an individual to buy a product. The core of the question in this research rests on the importance of eWOM for the creation of purchase intentions.

2.6.1 eWOM and purchase intentions

The connection between purchase intentions and eWOM has been of interest to researchers and practitioners alike because marketers and companies would like to use eWOM communication as a tool to encourage people to form intentions to buy their products. Hsu et al. (2016) claimed that purchase intentions are the outcomes of eWOM, which means that this type of online communication indeed encourages people to consider buying a certain product. Because of this claim, most companies view eWOM as a viable tool to improve brand image and motivate people to purchase goods or services, while also actively sharing experiences with the use of these products. However, Gruen et al. (2006) pointed out that the exchange of know-how in online communities affects the perception of the product value but fails to affect repurchase intentions. This finding pertains to repurchasing specifically, but this information is still important to consider in the discussion of eWOM and purchase

intentions. Other studies admit the positive correlation between the two concepts; for example, Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) stated that positive eWOM has a significant effect on the formation of purchase intentions related to electronics products.

The influence of eWOM on purchase intention has been widely studied and evaluated. However, the correlation between spiteful reviews and purchase intention has not gained proper attention among scholars. Nicoli and Papadopoulou (2017) suggested that negative eWOM tends to have a rather little or no impact on purchase intentions. In other words, the presence of such reviews does not necessarily shape the intention to purchase a product or use the service. While the study by Nicoli and Papadopoulou (2017) was conducted on the TripAdvisor website and focused exclusively on the hotel industry, the findings generated through their exploratory case study provided evidence that social media can be instrumental in managing reputation. In the case of spiteful reviews, the response from a product seller or service provider can be sufficient to devalue the significance of negative comments and feedback. In a broader context, it implies that any form of eWOM is instrumental in fostering purchase intention; however, spiteful reviews require more attention by sellers and providers, even though such reviews do not directly influence purchase intention.

Similarly, Bhandari et al. (2021) investigated whether negative eWOM had any effects on brand attitude and subsequent purchase intentions. In agreement with Nicoli and Papadopoulou (2017), who noted that negative eWOM does not necessarily discourage purchase intentions, Bhandari et al. (2021) agreed that the brand feedback had an impact on brand attitude and purchase intention, even though the correlation was established more for the reviewer-controlled issues. In other words, eWOM has direct impact on purchase intention in those cases when the identified negative aspects of the experience are not under the company's control. In such cases, the negative eWOM may stimulate or have no effect on purchase intention if the problem cannot be solved by the company and is rather the outcome of a reviewer's misunderstanding, improper use or exaggerated expectations. Moreover, Bhandari et al. (2021) did not find evidence to support the idea that eWOM shared on social media platform controlled by the company had any negative effect on brand attitude. Simultaneously, the findings revealed that negative eWOM requires

intervention by the company, such as an apology, an explanation or simply a comment, as the strategy to minimise the potential negative effect on purchase intention among potential customers. Negative eWOM had no impact on purchase intention among loyal consumers. The study by Bhandari et al. (2021) confirmed the correlation between eWOM and purchase intention and elucidated that the type of social media and engagement of the company into the interaction with the unsatisfied customers is essential in supporting purchase intentions.

eWOM on social media, as a platform for creating and disseminating information, is firmly rooted in research into behavioural patterns among consumers. In particular, Teng, Khong, Goh and Chong (2014) confirmed that users tend to have greater trust in the validity of eWOM shared on social media. eWOM on social media is perceived as being more credible, trustworthy, useful and reliable because of the online social ties among users. When eWOM is shared on social media, users can check the profile of the author of the eWOM, connect with the author for additional information and share the review with others. The sense of community and interconnectedness on social media elevates the trustworthiness of eWOM, increasing its perceived value and credibility and shaping purchase intentions (Teng et al., 2014).

The perceived quality of eWOM was found to be positively correlated with the type of eWOM. Danniswara, Sandhyaduhita and Munajat (2020), in particular, provided empirical evidence to support the claim that eWOM referrals frequently play the key role in facilitating not only purchase intentions, but also the actual purchases among users of such social network as Instagram. Collecting data through questionnaires administered on 350 respondents, researchers focused on information quality, brand satisfaction and purchase intention among consumers of eWOM on Instagram. The findings confirmed that eWOM referrals are perceived as high-quality information, whereas celebrity endorsement has an immediate significant impact on brand perception, implying that such eWOM referrals, especially if created by celebrities or individuals with high social importance, are perceived as influential factors stimulating purchase intentions.

As noted in Section 2.3.2. on social comparison motivation, the age variable plays one of the important roles in discussion on eWOM. Specifically, Generation Z gained much attention from researchers with reference to eWOM and purchase

intentions. In their study, Tabassum, Khwaja and Zaman (2020) posed the question of whether the narrative advertisement and eWOM can shape purchase intentions among Generation Z representatives. The research found that Generation Z consumers are persuaded by this form of information sharing. Specifically, researchers concluded that Generation Z is affected by eWOM. It increases their brand memory and they become more loyal to the chosen companies. Explaining the importance of age as the factor of interest in studies on eWOM and purchase intentions, Tabassum et al. (2020) noted that the attention span of individuals in this age group is much narrower compared with other groups. Consequently, the scope of attention eWOM and advertisements receive is lower, which suggests that Generation Z is less affected by eWOM. Yet, when the purchase decision is being made, Generation Z representatives tend to trust the information they encounter in reviews and rely on opinions shared by others to make a final decision. Exposure to eWOM without the primary purchase intention is less impactful on purchase intention though. This finding not only supports the positive correlation between eWOM and purchase intention, but also suggests that age predetermines the behavioural and psychological patterns of certain age groups in eWOM seeking decisions.

2.6.2 Determinants of purchase intention

Practitioners and researchers can understand how to use eWOM to generate purchase intentions when they are aware of the determinants of this concept. Ling, Siong, Hock and Kian (2010) took the following approach to identify determinants of purchase intentions; their study focused on online trust, web experience, eWOM and brand familiarity as determinants. However, other scholars may view determinants of purchase intentions from a different perspective. For example, Sa'ait, Kanyan and Nazrin (2016) contended that the relevance, accuracy, timeliness and comprehensiveness of e-WOM are important factors to consider in the exploration of purchase intentions and their development. The determinants of purchase intentions can be connected to eWOM factors.

Therefore, the study by Ling et al. (2010) serves a particular purpose in exploring the topic because they acknowledged that eWOM on its own can be an antecedent of a purchase intention. Online trust between companies and customers predetermines purchase intentions because customer satisfaction contributes to the

creation of trust (Ling et al., 2010). Bhandari and Rodgers (2018) agreed that positive feedback on online platforms indeed generates trust and purchase intentions, but negative feedback can have detrimental effects on these elements. Moreover, Ling et al. (2010) specified that the quality of web experience predetermines purchase intentions because a high-quality online presence of a company assists people in making purchasing decisions. Isa, Salleh and Aziz (2017) confirmed that usability, interactivity, aesthetics, digital experience, customer reviews and site commitment add to the positive web experiences that affect purchasing behaviour of customers.

Exploring the determinants of purchase intention, Lou and Kim (2019) provided the evidence, according to which the entertainment element of eWOM is one of the most significant factors shaping purchase intention among younger generation of consumers. The entertaining rather than informative posts keep the focus of adolescents and young adults, ultimately leading to the purchase intention, especially if eWOM and referrals are provided by celebrities. Lou and Kim (2019) discussed that the power of influence of celebrities is alarmingly significant among younger consumers, cultivating the intent to purchase the promoted or referred to products, even if those products are of poor quality, not needed or are too expensive. Engagement with entertaining eWOM created and shared by celebrities and influencers further stimulates the purchase intention and actual purchase behaviour for the purpose of boosting self-esteem, feeling accepted in the specific social group and following mainstream trends. The influence of celebrities on older generations of consumers is not as significant and does not affect purchase intention (Lou & Kim, 2019).

As for eWOM being a major determinant of purchase intention, Ling et al. (2010) built on previous studies, suggesting that eWOM is trusted by different people, which means that customers are likely to form intentions to buy upon reading reviews of goods or services. Isa et al. (2017) asserted that customer reviews and positive eWOM, especially, are crucial to positive experiences online and the subsequent formation of the intention to buy. Last, Ling et al. (2010) distinguished brand familiarity as a determinant of purchase intentions because familiarity with a brand can affect customers' decisions and behaviours. In other words, the more of a buzz that is generated, the more brand familiarity is likely to occur. Simultaneously,

Casado-Díaz, Pérez-Naranjo and Sellers-Rubio (2017) claimed that customers are unlikely to change their opinions about familiar brands. This information can be useful in attempts to change a brand image through eWOM.

The opposite results were reported by Dulek and Aydin (2020), who found that eWOM alone had no impact on purchase intention, whereas brand loyalty was reinforced with exposure to positive eWOM along with the resulting purchase intention. In other words, eWOM is the determinant of purchase intention if the reader of eWOM is either familiar with the brand or is loyal to a certain product sold by a company. Further, eWOM and social media have their own impact on brand loyalty and purchase intention. Collecting data from 275 students, Dulek and Aydin (2020) concluded that social media marketing fostered positive changes in brand loyalty and increased eWOM motivation. In other words, loyal consumers of brands who were exposed to marketing messages were more likely to engage in eWOM creation and, most importantly, develop purchase intention. Loyal consumers tend to generate positive eWOM because of their overall satisfaction with the brand, so they communicate their experience with a brand in a way that stimulates purchase intention in readers of eWOM. Interestingly, Dulek and Aydin (2020) did not validate the idea that eWOM had a positive effect on brand loyalty. This implies that exposure to eWOM does not shape brand loyalty, whereas eWOM through social media and marketing messages motivates loyal consumers to make a purchase. Thus, loyalty can be one of the determinants of purchase intentions. However, in the context of eWOM, loyalty has a positive effect on eWOM behaviour, which in turn means that both determinants are important.

In addition to brand loyalty and eWOM as the determinants of purchase intention, Rahman, Abir, Yazdani, Hamid and Al Mamun (2020) suggested that trust plays a central role in both giving and receiving engagement with eWOM and subsequent purchase intention. If readers of eWOM have a low level of trust because the website quality is not sufficient, reviews are not balanced (all positive or all negative), or the personal experience with the product/service does not match the dominant opinion shared by others. Such a form of eWOM is rather unlikely to affect purchase intention. With a high level of trust, eWOM exposure may have an impact on purchase intention and either motivate or discourage the reader to consider buying

a product or service. Rahman et al. (2020) suggested that trust and eWOM are both equally important in shaping purchase intention. Moreover, Rahman et al. (2020) confirmed that brand image has the mediating effect on eWOM and trust. If brand image is high, eWOM is likely to be more positive, whereas trust in eWOM will increase. Rahman et al. (2020) suggested that companies should rely on eWOM as part of their marketing approach to stimulate sales and trigger customer purchase intention, among new and regular clients. Reflecting on the reported findings, trust is a broad concept that may refer to brand image, website quality, prior experience with the brand and propensity to trust eWOM as such. Yet, the research firmly established that trust is one of the important determinants of purchase intentions with relation to eWOM.

2.7 Social Media Platforms

Understandably, social media platforms are a relevant point in the exploration of the interconnectedness of eWOM and purchase intentions in KSA. Makki and Chang (2015) reported that the figure for people with computer and internet access reached 65.8% of the Saudi population; this number is still growing. Saudi people are embracing the benefits of using the internet and social media, which is transformative for the overall efforts of Saudi companies in using eWOM.

2.7.1 Social media in marketing

Social media, in general, has been in use in the field of marketing by its practitioners. Ashley and Tuten (2015) affirmed that social media offers a variety of channels to encourage people to participate in different activities that help companies in their communication with target audiences. Companies create social media campaigns to increase brand awareness and generate an additional buzz that helps them gain a competitive advantage over rival businesses. Further, Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch (2017) stated that companies should use social media to build relationships with different stakeholders, whereas simply pushing information on customers may be of limited use in terms of the benefits of social media. The use of social media in the field of marketing is complex, which might simultaneously mean that its use is complex in the generation of eWOM.

2.7.2 eWOM and social media

Although official websites of companies can serve as a platform for the creation and dissemination of eWOM, social media websites are the most prominent tools for customers seeking to voice their opinions. Social media networks provide opportunities for brands to create pages for their products, whereas people use these pages to leave reviews, comments and questions, which all contribute to the creation of a buzz. Godey et al. (2016) claimed that social media platforms are ideal tools for the dissemination of eWOM. Gvili and Levy (2018) discovered that social networks with high bonding experiences, like Facebook, require eWOM messages to have high credibility for them to be taken seriously. In other words, some social media platforms encourage people to believe their close contacts more than they do strangers. Erkan and Evans (2018) claimed that eWOM on social media depends on information quality, information credibility, information usefulness and information adoption because these criteria make people believe reviews on shopping websites more than reviews on social media. The review of studies on social media presented by Dwivedi et al. (2018) illustrated that the social media transforms the way information is communicated and shared among users on private, public and institutional levels. Users of social media rely on online platforms to share advice and information with their local community, including the recommendations on products and services and negative experiences with certain companies and their offers. Even though Erkan and Evans (2018) suggested that people tend to trust shopping websites more in terms of the quality of reviews, Dwivedi et al. (2018) expanded the idea that any form of a review on any platform has its own value for different type of users of social media. Finally, Godey et al. (2016) added to the discourse, stating that customers are divided by their behaviours—opinion seeking, opinion giving and opinion passing. These differentiations add to the knowledge about social media's role in the spread of eWOM.

The relationship between eWOM and social media was covered by Kakirala and Singh (2020). Researchers discovered that eWOM on social media may shape the attitude towards the destination (in tourism sector), the product or the service. The findings indicated that eWOM on social media predetermines the level of trust and satisfaction among potential consumers before they make their choice to use the

service. Consequently, the more consumers engage with eWOM on social media, the more interested or disinterested they become in a product or service. Kakirala and Singh (2020) devoted particular attention to the issue of the medium through which eWOM is generated and consumed by users. According to their research, online review boards and blogs are characterised by more inherent value because of the limited or absent control over the content by the product or service provider. Unlike corporate websites or social media pages created and maintained by companies, independent social media platforms offer more freedom and, therefore, are more trustworthy. Moreover, Kakirala and Singh (2020) suggested that providers of services and products should engage with independent online review boards to interact with their current and potential consumers as well as to identify the root factors shaping satisfaction or dissatisfaction among users of social media. Social media, as the avenue for exchange of information and creation/consumption of eWOM, gives a sense of virality to virtual communication. Kakirala and Singh (2020) concluded that eWOM influences not only the behavioural patterns and attitudes of the users, but also the advertising strategies employed by companies.

Along with studying social media as the main source of eWOM, Akram et al. (2020) investigated the relationships between the characteristics of social media and the attitude of the users towards eWOM both among creators and receivers. While the dominant social media are well known and have a high rate of engagement among users, the eWOM platform as the communication channel shapes the ways consumers interact and perceive the usability and quality of eWOM. Consumers are less likely to engage in eWOM on social media platforms with few users and limited functions. If the social media offers an opportunity to share images, notes, videos or give overall ratings and recommendations, the channel is more likely to appeal to creators of eWOM motivated by social comparison, helping others or self-enhancement as well as to consumers of eWOM interested in social interaction, knowledge enhancement or social interaction. While evaluating the quality of a social media website, users (creators and receivers of eWOM) pay attention to the quality of the website. Akram et al. (2020) noted that the higher quality of the website is positively correlated with the perception of the quality of eWOM as a whole. Moreover, the positive perception of eWOM based on the evaluation of the website or platform influences the intention to participate in online media. This conclusion implies that that social media plays

one of the central roles in fostering the creation and engagement with eWOM, which in turn further affects motivations and gratifications.

2.8 The Role of Culture

Culture plays an indispensable part in the formation of marketing techniques, online communication and other customer behaviours (Alcántara-Pilar, 2015). The role of culture should be considered when discussing the design of marketing strategies and methods, especially when such a diverse population as the Saudi community is involved. Primarily, the country depends on its culture because KSA does not resemble traditional societies; its culture heavily depends on religion and politics, with these areas closely entwined. Moreover, KSA belongs to those countries that score highly on collectivism, which also affects the relationship between culture and marketing. The research by Belk (2017) emphasised the importance of noting not only the regional cultural differences in shaping marketing messages and behaviours of consumers, but also in exploring the idea of consumption communities or so-called brand tribes. Belk (2017) suggested that consumer subcultures are divided by a number of characteristics, including loyalty to certain brands, trust towards national celebrities, popularity of review websites and the tendency to leave eWOM as the socially advisable choice. Sharing of feedback with online community can be viewed as socially inappropriate if feedback is negative in meaning, whereas it is part of other cultures to be more motivated to spread negative eWOM because of the inner pressure to release stress and dissatisfaction with the product or service. Belk (2017) suggested that the nature and preferences of communities play a decisive role in shaping the motivation to create and read eWOM as well as the perception of the usability and trustworthiness of such reviews among current and potential consumers.

2.8.1 Culture and eWOM motivation

Practitioners and scholars pay attention to the intricacies of culture to understand what motivates people to participate in eWOM. Psychology and cultural anthropology offer insights into the topic. For example, the study by A. Mishra, Maheswarappa, Maity and Samu (2018) rested on psychological perspectives that illuminate customer socialisation, and aimed to learn how young people communicate online, exchanging opinions about products and brands. The studies of psychology

allow an examination of the internal drivers of human minds that motivate people to pursue online communication and engage in the creation of eWOM. The development of norms by adolescents and the process of thought exchange correlate positively with eWOM (A. Mishra et al., 2018). Thus, culture affects interpersonal relationships and communication.

Studies have focused on the role of culture for decades. Pentina, Basmanova, Zhang and Ukis (2015) synthesised previous findings and stated that multiple studies determined that culture affects how people communicate, their attitudes towards traditions, their caution in their shopping activities, their patterns of online use and how they approach WOM. In other words, culture shapes many behaviours of people, including their communication in face-to-face and online interactions. Pentina et al. (2015) also stated that cross-cultural differences exist, which justifies the conduct of studies focusing on a single country. Tao and Jin (2017) added that culture influences pre-purchase involvement, purchase decisions and post-purchase feelings and behaviours. Since KSA cannot apply the findings from Western research, there is a need to explore the topic from the Saudi cultural perspective.

Cultural values are often determinant in the shaping of the behaviour of customers. Rossi (2018) focused on cultural value orientation as a factor influencing perception of online reviews. Different cultural dimensions may affect perception based on the collectivistic and individualistic qualities discussed below. However, Rossi (2018) indeed revealed that some cultural qualities and differences affect how customers view online reviews. Tao and Jin (2017) also examined cross-cultural differences in the perception of eWOM, using the theory of collectivism and individualism, and thereby supporting the relevance of this approach. Simultaneously, the theories and practical findings of psychology and anthropology are useful tools for exploring and discussing eWOM and culture.

In particular, netnography, used in cultural anthropology, gives additional information about the role of culture in marketing. Izogo and Jayawardhena (2018) employed this method to study cultural differences in emerging markets that shape online shopping experiences. Netnography refers to a methodology that acknowledges the creation and existence of cultures based on online communication. Cultural anthropology has begun considering the changes occurring in society in the wake of

the introduction of internet. As people form communities online, they participate in the creation of new cultures that also affect marketing and business operations.

Reflecting on culture and eWOM motivation, Hargittai (2020) provided evidence that the socio-economic status of users of social media has an impact on both the creation and consumption of eWOM among individuals. Specifically, Hargittai (2020) claimed that the representatives of higher socio-economic status are over-represented among consumers and creators of eWOM, not only because they are more active in participation on social media, but also because their purchase decisions and intentions require more time and consideration compared with less significant purchases of inexpensive products and services. The findings reported by Hargittai (2020) confirm not only the importance of considering the cultural factors on the study of eWOM, but also the need to pay greater attention to socio-demographic variables.

The cultural factors were also discussed in the study by Paul, Kang and Halle (2020) in relation to eWOM motivation. As researchers noted, culture predetermines not only the norms and values in society, but also the way people perceive their environment and make decisions in different situations. Some behaviours are perceived as desirable and others as not. With reference to eWOM, culture shapes the appropriateness of creating of eWOM and cultural beliefs influence the perception of eWOM as useful and reliable. In some cultures, it may be viewed as inappropriate to share negative eWOM through social media, whereas representatives of a different culture may observe it as an action for public good because the benefits of trustful negative eWOM are generated for other members of society. Paul et al. (2020) concluded that culture determines how people care of themselves and for their broader social groups, prioritise future-oriented and current benefits and fulfil their social obligations while avoiding the risks. When applied to eWOM motivation, these cultural aspects create the need or even the obligation for the members of society to engage in eWOM interaction, whether as readers or creators. Paul et al. (2020) hypothesised that cultures with a high level of obligation to serve in the best interests of the society are accompanied by likelihood of a more active engagement with eWOM, whereas cultures with greater value on personal gains and care for the members of close family do not necessitate active eWOM participation. At the heart

of the discussion on culture is the difference between collectivism and individualism as the most important cultural factors shaping eWOM motivation.

2.8.2 Collectivism and individualism

As mentioned previously, the differentiation between collectivism and individualism is a useful approach for understanding the cultural differences between Western and Arab countries. The high level of collectivism in KSA predetermines its use of marketing techniques. Therefore, a discussion about the differences between collectivistic and individualistic societies ensues to identify the qualities that influence eWOM and purchase intentions based on Saudi culture. Cohen, Wu and Miller (2016) pointed out that cross-cultural psychology explores these differences.

Collectivist cultures tend to focus on the wellbeing of the group because people remain closely interlinked with their communities (Hoorn, 2015). The interests of the group prevail over the interests of the individual. Cohen et al. (2016) added that these societies contribute to the development of interdependence because people are supposed to view themselves as interconnected with others in a profound way, which negates the importance of egocentric goals. Tao and Jin (2017) elaborated that people living in collectivistic communities tend to uphold social harmony, and, therefore, prefer to avoid negative feelings. Rossi (2018) agreed that people living in collectivist cultures prefer to base their identities on the identities of the surrounding people. Cross-cultural psychology states that group favouritism and loyalty to the group are the desirable traits in such cultures (Hoorn, 2015). The resulting homogeneity provides individuals with an opportunity to resemble peers. Collectivism, thus, offers a platform for effective eWOM.

Moreover, Baldwin and Mussweiler (2018) further added that self-definition is one of the critical aspects of social comparison in collectivistic cultures. Social comparison is responsible for forming perceptions, defining emotions, establishing attitudes and affecting problem-solving, including purchase-related decision-making processes. With reference to eWOM, the phenomenon of social comparison in collectivistic culture implies the evaluation of situation and cultural factors that facilitate comparisons and self-construal. The social comparison, therefore, is conducted for the purpose of creating strong in-groups and out-groups and assessing

personal status in comparison with others. Conformity with dominant opinion in eWOM leads to the formation of self-identify in collectivistic cultures, whereas the deviance or disagreement with the mainstream opinion produces out-groups. In relation to eWOM, the assumption is that the dominant mood in eWOM is likely to be supported by readers of reviews on social media owing to the characteristics of the collectivistic culture.

Conversely, individualistic cultures tend to emphasise the uniqueness of community members. Hoorn (2015) asserted that people from individualistic societies prefer to take care of themselves and their immediate family, whereas they experience no extreme loyalty towards the group to which they belong. Consequently, individualism emphasises personal rights and goals instead of obligations to a group. People from such cultures have no fear in expressing their thoughts, which may be unpopular among other members of the community. Cohen et al. (2016) stated that individualistic cultures allow people to pursue their personal identities, which may differ dramatically from the common identities within the group. Individualistic people are more self-reliant because they treat personal experiences as prominent sources of knowledge (Rossi, 2018). Understandably, the belongingness of some countries to individualistic societies affects their use and perception of eWOM.

Reflecting on collectivist and individualistic countries, Sedikides, Gaertner and Toguchi (2003) integrated the variable of self-enhancement, suggesting that this gratification associated with eWOM creation and consumption is relevant for both communities. However, for individualist communities, the self-enhancement is more focus on personal gains and benefits. In collectivist cultures, greater attention is devoted to the accumulation of benefits for the broader community or society, implying that self-enhancement is oriented towards a wider level. Explaining the difference in the significant of self-enhancement for individualistic and collectivist cultures, Sedikides et al. (2003) noted that self-worth in individualist communities is expressed through the validation of the internal attributes that can be achieved through harmonisation with the social context without the suppression of personal needs, desires and uniqueness. Personal fulfilment and the satisfaction of personal needs are prioritised. Collectivistic culture, on the contrary, necessitates the members of society to be more motivated with the gains produced for the community as a

whole, neglecting individual attributes. Yet, according to Sedikides et al. (2003), for both cultures, the assertion of strengths, benefits and achievement is equally important, while the orientation is different.

Ultimately, KSA belongs to the collectivistic society because of the importance of group coherence and mentality. Sheikh, Islam, Rana, Hameed and Saeed (2017) stressed that KSA is indeed a collectivist country because it scored only 25 on individualism in Hofstede's analysis. Because of the well-accepted collectivism in the Kingdom, Saudi customers are likely to trust strangers in regard to online reviews and comments about products. The high level of trust ensures that people exchange their opinions and find them to be credible. Siddique, Khan and Zia (2016) also provided evidence that KSA is a collectivistic culture because most companies are family-owned, whereas society remains conservative and male-dominated, with tribal traditions encouraging people to seek advice from extended family members.

2.8.3 eWOM in collectivistic and individualistic societies

Further, the cultural differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures lead to differences in the treatment of eWOM. Whereas a collectivistic country may benefit from a high level of trust among its citizens, an individualistic country is likely to benefit from the tendency of its people to share their strong opinions. Researchers have also found compelling evidence about the differences between such cultures. Tao and Jin (2017) explained that people from collectivistic societies take advice from family and friends seriously and rely on public opinion to enhance social status, which affects their perception of eWOM. Tao and Jin (2017) also specified that people from collectivistic cultures prefer to limit negative self-expression; thus, negative WOM and eWOM may be less common in countries like KSA. The anonymity of online postings may provide these people with a chance to speak their mind about a product that they dislike (Tao & Jin, 2017). This cultural group is also likely to share eWOM when customers develop purchase intentions based on eWOM. Rossi (2018) also shared that source credibility is important to people from collectivistic countries. Hence, the credibility of an online review poster would be an important factor for users when deciding whether they should believe eWOM or uphold a purchase intention. Conversely, Sheikh et al. (2017) failed to

support the idea that collectivism affects purchase intentions on the basis of exposure to eWOM.

As for individualistic societies, researchers have found the following evidence regarding the role of individualism in eWOM. Generally, individualistic customers prefer autonomy, variety and security, as well as a personalised approach (Sheikh et al., 2017). Cross-cultural psychology acknowledges that individualistic customers have a broader number of sources whom they can trust because they do not rely on the beliefs of family members and friends (Hoorn, 2015). Moreover, Tao and Jin (2017) claimed that these customers tend to read online reviews to compare alternatives before making a decision. These users have been proven to exaggerate the importance of WOM, especially when the product aligns with their self-image (Tao & Jin, 2017). People from individualistic countries are also more likely to provide WOM than are people from collectivistic countries. They also rarely make purchases simply because a product is liked by others (Rossi, 2018). Ultimately, both collectivism and individualism may affect how people treat eWOM.

Particular attention should be paid to the research finding reported by Fathi-Makvand and Fernandez (2017), according to which sharing knowledge with others is more common among members of the collectivist countries. The key rationale for this tendency in eWOM creation for the purpose of knowledge sharing is attributed to the assumption that all members of society should benefit from existing knowledge and make more information-based decisions. The inner urge to share eWOM stimulates the generation and the spread of knowledge with greater emphasis on facts and usability and less focus on emotional aspects of product or serviced use. Exploring the cultural tendencies in Iran, the collectivist country, Fathi-Makvand and Fernandez (2017) found that the reliance on social media as the reliance platform to create and share knowledge is perceived as a positive trend. Consequently, members of collectivist cultures are more motivated to write reviews, both negative and positive, for rational, objective reasons. Collectivist culture is based on the belief that knowledge sharing enhances overall knowledge, leads to development on both personal and community levels and facilitates friendly socialisation and relationship building.

There is an overall agreement among researchers that Arab countries are collectivistic. Rouibah, Al-Qirim, Hwang and Pouri (2021) suggested that the collectivistic culture of Arab countries predetermines the way representatives of this culture build trust towards online publications and perceive eWOM as trustworthy or not. Rouibah et al. (2021) provided evidence to illustrate that trust is one of the most significant variables mediating the purchase intention among receivers of eWOM. In ecommerce, risks are classified as financial, social, time loss, personal and privacy among many others. Trust towards ecommerce is necessary to help potential buyers overcome their risk perceptions. Creation and consumption of eWOM is one of the strategies that helps reduce the perceived risks and encourage purchase intentions. For collectivist cultures, such as KSA and other Arab countries, trust is established more for personal eWOM and reviews produced by representatives of the same culture. Rouibah et al. (2021) claimed that in the Arab collectivism culture, trust of internet and trust towards other people are more important than for members of individualistic members. Consequently, anonymous reviews or ratings without sufficient details are likely to be perceived as not trustworthy.

Correlating eWOM, purchase intention and trust for collectivistic and individualistic communities, Rouibah et al. (2021) concluded that Arab consumers tend to have a lower level of trust towards the internet overall, which is partially attributed to insufficient awareness of the internet and eWOM in overall. The correlation between risk and perceived benefits of eWOM is negative. The evidence provided by Rouibah et al. (2021) is surprising because it is reasonably expected that eWOM is instrumental in helping reduce perceived risks for collectivistic cultures. Yet, the complexity of the variable of the perceived risk that may include price or time loss, value loss or reduced satisfaction after the purchase predetermines the enjoyment level. In other words, eWOM in collectivistic cultures is more influential in mediating the risks associated with purchases and perceived value of that purchase, whereas individualistic culture does not emphasise the risks to the same extent.

2.9 Gaps in the Literature

The review of prior studies revealed that the current discussion of eWOM and purchase intentions is mostly embedded in the context of the motivation to share eWOM coupled with analysis of the influence of positive and negative eWOM on

user behaviour. Rialti et al. (2017) confirmed that eWOM shapes purchase behaviour, while Teng et al. (2014) concluded that social media is perceived as a trustworthy source of information about products and services among users. Although these studies offer helpful contributions to knowledge, the discourse about eWOM requires expansion.

This overview of the academic literature provides a foundation for identifying gaps in extant knowledge. This study aims to find new information about eWOM on social media and purchase intentions; thus, it is important to address issues that have not been fully covered in previous studies. Most studies rely on a single theory in marketing and social studies. Scholars applied social exchange theory (Alvarez-Milán, Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2018; Manzuma-Ndaaba, Harada, Nordin, Abdullateef, & Romle, 2018; Y. Wang, Xiang, Yang, & Ma, 2019), while uses and gratifications was applied in other studies (Pelletier, Krallman, Adams, & Hancock, 2020; Sheth & Kim, 2017; D. H. Shin, 2010). Therefore, the current study fills the literature gap by combining the two theories that contribute to existent theoretical knowledge by providing the scholarly community with the conceptualisation that distinguishes motivators from gratifications and elucidates their functionality in shaping purchase intentions.

The knowledge of eWOM in the KSA does not fully address the question of correlation between eWOM as a powerful informational factor and purchase intention. It is also important to note that the studies in the literature review discussion indicate the results for different regions, thereby making it possible to assess the impact of eWOM on consumer behaviour across varied cultural backgrounds (Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014).

As reported by Makki and Chang (2015), internet and social media use in the country is rising, which means that more companies will try to employ the eWOM strategy. As a result, practitioners require findings on the use of social media to generate eWOM, specifically in the context of KSA. The changing economic climate also justifies the design of this research because the country is transitioning from a commodity-based economy to a diversified, knowledge-based one. The collectivist nature of the country adds to the relevance of exploring the cultural uniqueness of KSA as a platform for effective eWOM. Credibility is a significant factor that

differentiates how customers from individualistic cultures and customers from collectivistic cultures approach eWOM (Luo et al., 2014). This study attempts to fill the gaps about the factors that serve as determinants of purchase intentions, specifically in this country, which will allow marketers to increase the product and brand value as perceived by loyal and prospective customers. Additionally, most studies follow either a quantitative design or a qualitative one. The present research adds to the literature by using a mixed-methods design that helps in the generation of new themes that also fill the gaps in current knowledge.

The study extends the discussion of eWOM in world cultures by adding the KSA to the list of countries studied from the perspective of eWOM as an antecedent to purchase intentions and the factors that serve as determinants of purchase intentions. In a similar vein, the study fills a literature gap by providing empirical evidence about motivators and gratifications that consumers perceive as important factors for the formation of purchase intentions. This approach ensures a rational opportunity for marketing practitioners to increase the product and brand value as perceived by loyal and prospective customers. Additionally, most studies follow either a quantitative design or a qualitative one, Therefore, the study addressed the gap by bridging the use of both qualitative and quantitative research frameworks to identify new themes in eWOM analysis with reference to purchase intentions

2.10 Chapter Summary

Both traditional WOM and eWOM are cost-effective methods of marketing that companies can use without an expectation of controlling the process completely because customers have the power to control the narrative with their positive and negative feedback. Despite the lack of control, the benefits of eWOM are too appealing for companies and brands to ignore, with its easy availability, high credibility and low cost (Gruen et al., 2006; Reimer & Benkenstein, 2016). With motivations and gratifications shaping customers' online behaviours, it is possible to identify their eWOM and shopping behaviours. The proliferation of social media websites ensures that more eWOM is generated, but questions remain about the antecedents of purchase intentions related to eWOM, and the current study aims to fill these gaps with its mixed-methods design.

This chapter provides an overview of existing knowledge about eWOM. Although the thesis focuses on digital media and communication, the chapter similarly discusses traditional or face-to-face WOM. This synthesis of information is necessary because conventional communication has set standards for marketing using customer discussions to improve customer engagement with a product, brand or company. However, eWOM standards have also expanded because individuals have received exposure to new contexts.

Past literature reveals that traditional WOM has both benefits and limitations. Advantages of conventional WOM rest on the high level of trust because normally this type of communication occurs between family members, friends or colleagues. The trust established between these individuals diminishes possible risks; people can form their purchase-making decisions based on recommendations of someone they know. As for disadvantages, WOM communication has an extremely limited reach and cannot be archived for others to use recommendations.

Conversely, eWOM has a different set of pros and cons. Customers and marketing professionals benefit from eWOM because this type of communication can be created and spread quickly, with the information being available later, unless a user or page deletes a post. This benefit exposes individuals interested in eWOM to great quantity of information important to make a purchase decision. Despite the benefits, eWOM might be accepted with suspicion because users have no personal knowledge of eWOM creators and might suspect commercial motives behind their posts.

Importantly, the search of literature reveals that motivations and gratifications exert an influence on eWOM engagement. Self-enhancement, social comparison and helping others are motivations that have received sufficient attention from other academics. As for gratifications, the literature review identifies social interaction, knowledge enhancement and entertainment as factors that might influence Saudi customers as well. These factors have an influence on eWOM, which, in turn, affects purchase intentions. Simultaneously, the chapter recognises the role of culture as essential for eWOM engagement and related factors. Differences between individualist and collectivist societies might lead to different attitudes to eWOM and antecedents that shape communication on social media. The lack of knowledge about the Saudi experience of eWOM creates a foundation for this research.

Chapter 3: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

3.1 Introduction

The research question exploring the correlation between eWOM and purchase intention requires theoretical insight from the perspective of applicable theories. The current study is based on the theoretical model built upon two theoretical models: social exchange theory and uses and gratifications theory. The chapter first reviews social exchange theory, its early developments and application in marketing, usability of the theory in consumer behaviour in general and eWOM in particular, and critical reflection on adjustment of the social exchange theory to the purposes of the presented study. The uses and gratifications theory is also presented by outlining earlier developments, relevancy to previous studies on consumer behaviour and usability for the current study. The final section of the chapter reviews literature on each variable, leading to the development of seven hypotheses for the study.

3.2 Social Exchange Theory

3.2.1 Early developments

Initially, social exchange theory gained its application in sociology and social psychology studies focusing on social behaviours. As Nunkoo (2016) stated, the earliest seminal studies on social exchange theory were conducted by Homans; Thibaut and Kelley; Emerson; and Blau. As summarised by Nunkoo (2016), these studies emphasised social behaviours, explored weighting of benefits in exchange relations, included the concept of power between the actors in exchange process and discussed costs and rewards inherent to social exchanges in relationships. The theory of social exchange triggered more attention from scholars in the 1970s. In the study on social exchange theory, Emerson (1976) suggested that it is not a theory at all but rather an analysis of the exchange limited to actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others. According to Emerson (1976), the early views of social exchange theory were limited to the transactions or exchanges among people in social situations. In later years, social exchange theory was applied to a broad range of studies across disciplines, including marketing.

Regardless of its initial use, social exchange theory gained significant popularity among academics in the 1950s and 1960s. The emergence of this framework marked a departure for researchers from pure behaviourism because Homans combined a behavioural understanding of human interactions with other schools of thoughts (Siraki & Khosravi, 2021). Such an approach ensured that theoretical assumptions were comprehensive and applicable to various contexts. The great value of social exchange theory lay in its presumption that interpersonal social exchanges focused on rationality based on cost-reward assessments while employing the terms of cost-reward equilibrium, reciprocity and willingness to help (Chia, Hsu, Lin, & Tseng, 2021). At the early stage of its development, the theory emerged in studies related to anthropology, behavioural psychology, conflict sociology and economics (C. W. Lee & Yu, 2020). In the case of economics, social exchange theory was entwined with classical economist theories because of the application of related concepts. This foundational work helped with the expansion of the theory to marketing studies.

3.2.2 Social exchange theory in the context of consumer behaviours and eWOM

Social exchange theory is applied to a broad range of studies in sociology and marketing. A recent study reported by Manzuma-Ndaaba et al. (2018) relied on social exchange theory to explore the concept of student loyalty in higher education service destination. Justifying the choice of social exchange theory, Manzuma-Ndaaba et al. (2018) mentioned that this theory contains both an attitudinal component (cognitive, affective and conative elements) and behavioural elements (related to decisions taken by consumers). Alvarez-Milán et al. (2018) applied social exchange theory to investigate consumer engagement in the marketing field. The conceptual framework developed by Alvarez-Milán et al. (2018) was built upon social exchange theory aspects, including rules and norms of exchange, resources and relationships. Researchers hypothesised that marketing relationships with consumers can be effectively explored from the standpoint of social exchange theory. eWOM, as a form of social exchange through technology-mediated channels, falls within the theoretical and practical applications of social exchange theory. Y. Wang et al. (2019) relied on social exchange theory in their marketing study, suggesting that this theory offers an opportunity for a balanced evaluation of consumers' attitudes and behaviours in two

domains: economic and social. According to Y. Wang et al. (2019), economic benefits of social exchange include products, services or knowledge. Social benefits may include reputation and friendship. Social exchange theory is applicable to study consumer behaviours and purchase intentions using eWOM as the form of social exchange situation.

Multiple other studies demonstrate the applicability of social exchange theory in marketing. The variety of the most recent studies emphasises that the framework maintains its importance in the modern setting. For example, Rizal, Amin, Suddin, Sondoh and Ku (2020) reported that social exchange theory was applicable to the concept of e-loyalty that has value to modern practitioners because of the popularity of online marketing and online purchasing that depend on loyal customers. The theory is relevant to the discussion because online buyers and online providers complete exchanges in their relationships, while relationship quality affects the outcomes for both stakeholder groups. Remarkably, Jahan and Kim (2020) established that online community participation behaviour depends on perceived members' support of behaviours and perceived benefits of such interactions. These findings contribute to the understanding of eWOM as a major element of online communication.

As expected, recent studies have addressed the dimensions of eWOM from the perspective of social exchange theory. In particular, Phan, Pham and Nguyen (2020) used the framework to theorise empirically about the singular function of social commerce qualities. The study applied different factors such as socialisation and information accessibility, personalisation, the relationship between customer-brand engagement and eWOM intention, and the moderating effect that trust has on these interactions. The importance of social exchange theory for this study accentuates the value that the present thesis can derive from including the framework in its conceptual modelling. Ultimately, the transition of marketing to online contexts and, especially, social media does not negate the importance of exchanges among customers and between customers and companies.

3.2.3 Criticism and conclusions

Despite the wide application of social exchange theory and its applicability to marketing and eWOM situations, the theory is limited in its scope with the focus on

social encounters only, without differentiating between forms of interactions. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) presented an interdisciplinary review of social exchange theory and concluded that the focus on interdependency of actors in social exchanges is a potential weakness of social exchange theory. In a later review, Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels and Hall (2017) mentioned the lack of sufficient theoretical precision and limited utility of social exchange theory. The limitations highlighted by Cropanzano et al. (2017) were addressed in the current study by including additional theory of uses and gratifications to enhance utility and precision of the theoretical framework guiding the research.

Moreover, other limitations are present in the performance of the framework in research efforts. S. Kim and Park (2021) explained that social exchange theory offers a superficial reading of social and relational concepts. This issue occurs because the theory primarily focuses on economic concepts that contrast perceived economic costs and benefits. In other words, this theory illuminates the economic dimension of online behaviours, but its application is limited to efforts to understand social, relational and cultural aspects of online behaviours, including eWOM and purchase intentions. The overuse of social exchange theory in marketing literature also points to the need to enhance the thesis through other theoretical tenets.

3.3 Uses and Gratifications Theory

3.3.1 Earlier developments in marketing

Uses and gratification theory emerged in late 1940s to explore and explain motivations of people in using media (Hossain, Kim, & Jahan, 2019). At the heart of the theory is the idea that users of different media have clear understanding of their needs, motivations and expectations of media, which in turn results in media choice and gratification. D. H. Shin (2010) defined gratifications as some aspect of satisfaction experienced by users related to their active use of certain media. Considering that users are in control of their internet communication process, uses and gratification theory offers a user-centric approach to marketing, helping researchers and practitioners in marketing understand the reasons and factors that motivate consumers to engage in online spaces-related commerce (D. H. Shin, 2010). Although uses and gratification theory initially emerged to explore user engagement

with traditional media, this theory is widely applied in marketing studies for the online environment (Hossain et al., 2019; D. H. Shin, 2010). Recent research has also utilised uses and gratifications theory to address online marketing questions.

In fact, uses and gratifications theory has been valuable for marketing researchers who uncovered important insights about marketing efficacy. Pelletier et al. (2020) explicated that uses and gratifications theory contributes to the understanding that different users employ the same platform for different purposes. Practitioners have managed to apply this knowledge by learning from the framework about digital marketing by email, website and social media platforms. Pelletier et al. (2020) stressed that social media websites were particularly conducive to research that elucidates marketing through the lens of uses and gratifications. The framework is instrumental to identify factors that users assess to locate the medium, in which their motivations and goals would be achieved (Rrustemi, Hasani, Jusufi, & Mladenović, 2021). Social media brand followers are normally value-conscious, which affects their behaviours online and community participation (Zollo, Filieri, Rialti, & Yoon, 2020). In addition, Corrada, Flecha and Lopez (2020) pointed out that the consequences of social media popularity rise are reflected in the need to have a more nuanced examination of uses and gratifications. Although the tenets of the theory apply to social media marketing as they did for classic media, technologies create new ways of gratifications as a result of online communication.

3.3.2 Uses and gratification theory in the context of consumer behaviours and eWOM

Applying uses and gratification theory to marketing, Hossain et al. (2019) argued that liking behaviour on Facebook can lead to the intention to use Facebook frequently. This finding can be applied to the hypothesis that uses and gratification associated with online media engagement can trigger certain behavioural patterns, including purchase intention. An and Kim (2018) applied uses and gratification theory to study the competition between social commerce companies and measured the usage of WOM for this purpose, approaching eWOM as the essential feature of social commerce for the purpose of increasing awareness and motivating the purchase behaviour. Similarly, Sheth and Kim (2017) reported that social media is an extension of traditional WOM marketing, on which users discuss and inform others about their

experiences with the brand or product and form product perceptions, motivate purchases and facilitate marketing reach. Sheth and Kim (2017) relied on uses and gratification theory in their marketing research to show how consumer behaviour can be altered through eWOM.

Uses and gratifications theory has been widely applied in research on consumer behaviours and eWOM. For example, Masouras and Papademetriou (2018) applied uses and gratifications theory to explore the mediating role of audio-visual materials in eWOM, suggesting that users and consumers of eWOM are active and conscious. In other words, Masouras and Papademetriou (2018) hypothesised that eWOM serves a much broader objective than finding information on purchases. eWOM creation is an active procedure characterised by motives and needs behind the purchase intention, the research process among consumers of eWOM and the influences behind the creation of eWOM among users. The motives of individuals for reading the internet for news and reviews on products, brands and companies are diverse and differ from one user to another. The uses and gratifications theory is, therefore, instrumental in providing insight into the factors that shape eWOM creation and consumption processes with reference to purchase intentions.

Recent research has employed uses and gratifications theory to explore eWOM tendencies from different perspectives. For example, Martínez, Herrero and los Salmones (2020) used the theory to understand whether specific motivations and gratifications encourage individuals to share news related to corporate social responsibility and found several factors to have a positive correlation with eWOM. This study has value to the present research because Martínez et al. (2020) demonstrated that different purposes of eWOM are mediated by uses and gratifications. Although the mentioned study does not address purchase intentions, valuable insights describe consumer behaviour in general.

In recent years, expansion of internet celebrities' influence has occurred. This situation contributes to the development of research questions about influencer marketing that energises customer behaviours online and the spread of eWOM. Morton (2020) studied this phenomenon with the help of uses and gratifications theory to guide research on influencer marketing. Morton (2020) clarified that most extant studies concentrated on extremely narrow topics, which allows new studies to

employ this framework and discover new information about customer behaviour online. Morton (2020) stated that the sample of young adults viewed social media influencers as ordinary individuals who created and shared eWOM about brands that they supported or with which they engaged in collaboration.

3.3.3 Criticism and conclusions

While uses and gratification theory is relevant for marketing studies, the limitations of using a single theoretical approach include the focused scope, emphasis on awareness of individual motivations, and resulting behavioural patterns (Hossain et al., 2019). Noting the limitations of the theory, Zia, Raza and Iftikhar (2018) built their own theoretical framework based on this theory by expanding it with interpersonal communication mediation model as one of the factors that can potentially influence behavioural choices of the users. Rossmann et al. (2016) applied uses and gratification theory to understand user engagement in eWOM across online services and product communities with a focus on prior experience of creators of eWOM. Hence, previous studies show that the framework offers the best benefits when incorporated in a conceptual model.

Notably, inherent limitations of uses and gratifications theory apply to studies that explore both classic and online media. For example, Gibbs, O'Reilly and Brunette (2014) suggested that the assumptions of uses and gratifications theory guide research in such a way that data collection instruments must rely on self-reported information. In other words, uses and gratifications theory relies on subjective perceptions, while self-reported subjective perceptions may not necessarily reflect the actual attitudes of people towards online communication. Despite several limitations, uses and gratification theory is widely applied in marketing field in general and with reference to eWOM and behaviour of customers in particular.

3.4 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework creates a rational means of understanding the relationship among the variables of the study. The conceptual model is adapted from Alexandrov et al. (2013). The main difference between their work and the current study is that Alexandrov et al. focused on WOM as opposed to eWOM. Because the

two concepts are relatively similar, with the exception that they employ varied communication channels, the researcher finds it rational to adapt the conceptual framework of Alexandrov et al. (2013).

As Figure 3.1 shows, the dependent variable is purchase intention. The independent variables are grouped into motivations and gratifications. The independent variables produce either positive or negative eWOM which, in turn, influences purchase intention.

The motivations group consists of three variables: self-needs, social needs and social intentions, following the conceptual framework from Alexandrov et al. (2013). The self-needs variable refers to the self-enhancement behind sharing or reading eWOM. The social needs variable is built upon social comparison motivation attached to eWOM. Finally, the social intentions variable is the motivation to help others.

Closely related, the conceptual framework indicates a correlation between gratification and positive or negative eWOM. In other words, the continued use of social media allows consumers to achieve varied forms of gratification (e.g. knowledge enhancement, entertainment and social interaction). This means that consumers prefer the eWOM that increases their level of gratification. Depending on the gratification expected by the creator or user of the content, either negative or positive eWOM is shared or used.

Further, Figure 3.1 illustrates that the motivation to use and the gratification related to eWOM share a close link with purchase intentions. This is because the motivation to meet self-needs, social needs and social interactions and gratifications can encourage consumers to share or use eWOM. In turn, positive or negative eWOM can strengthen, weaken or have no impact on purchase intentions.

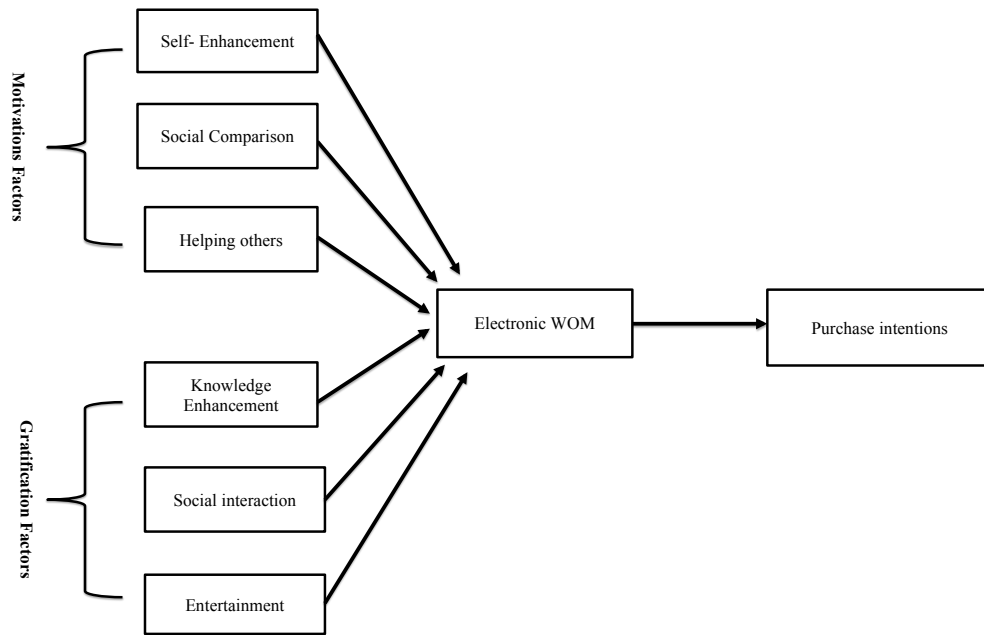


Figure 3.1. Conceptual framework (designed by the researcher)

3.5 Hypotheses Development

Based on the conceptual framework developed for the study and integrating uses and gratification theory along with social exchange, seven variables were selected for the study, including self-enhancement, social comparison, helping others, knowledge enhancement, entertainment, social interaction and purchase intention. This section presents a literature review on variables and provides hypothesis for each. The development of the hypotheses takes into consideration that internet users assume the roles of eWOM creators and eWOM readers alike. Consequently, the hypotheses relate to internet users who engage with eWOM in their different identities.

3.5.1 Motivation: Self-enhancement and eWOM

The motivation to engage in eWOM creation or reading can be attributed to positive or negative factors. Self-enhancement is a positive motivation. Previous studies reported that self-enhancement has a positive impact on eWOM behaviour (Hu & Kim, 2018). Self-enhancement is defined as the way to express the self, reflecting on the experiences through posting comments online. With the dominant

motivation of self-enhancements, users of social media tend to create positive eWOM. Self-enhancement was one of the variables in Killian et al. (2016). Researchers noted that consumers can be categorised according to their motivations as self-interested helpers, consumer advocates, multiple motive consumers and altruists. The self-enhancement motivation is most common among self-interested helpers, who are driven by concern for others/self and economic incentives. Self-enhancement motivation implies a rational approach in deciding on engagement in eWOM. Killian et al. (2016) focused on economic gains related to self-enhancement motivation; Sohaib et al. (2019) shifted the discussion towards fame-seeking behaviour. Researchers linked the self-enhancement variable to positive eWOM, suggesting that individual customers are interested in opportunities to acquire fame by creating and sharing positive eWOM. For this group of online users, self-enhancement is closely correlated with social interactions through sharing of consumption-related experiences among friends in online community.

More recent research has also been significant to the understanding of the role of self-enhancement in eWOM intention and engagement. For example, Romero and Ruiz-Equihua (2020) established that self-enhancement has a reinforcing influence on the interaction between content creation and eWOM. Incidentally, this finding was true specifically for eWOM but failed to maintain relevance for WOM. The researchers asserted that online contexts have appeal to customers with high self-enhancement motivation because they have an opportunity to connect with an infinite number of other users and demonstrate their identity as smart shoppers and experts in their respective shopping knowledge areas. Romero and Ruiz-Equihua (2020) also offered a managerial recommendation for marketers to incentivise customers, for whom self-enhancement matters, to engage in eWOM communication patterns. Ismagilova et al. (2020) supported the significance of self-enhancement for individuals to form eWOM intentions.

Further, previous evidence suggests that a target audience matters to eWOM creators. Kitirattarkarn, Tao and Tsai (2020) confirmed that individuals may create either positive eWOM or negative eWOM based on the group likely to read their feedback. Whereas self-enhancement particularly works for users who share positive eWOM among strangers, negative eWOM is employed as a bonding mechanism for

users to communicate with friends online. Therefore, this study shows that self-enhancement might vary based on the target audience.

Ultimately, the results of Kitirattarkarn et al. (2020) agree with other research because self-enhancement is primarily used for the demonstration of one's ability to shop smartly (T. T. H. Le & Vo, 2020; Romero & Ruiz-Equihua, 2020). From this perspective, negative eWOM would fail to emphasise their intelligent online shopping decisions. Users with the self-enhancement motivation are most likely to spread negative eWOM among friends to support their self-enhancement because of the additional need to bond with friends. This approach does not apply to other individuals online because they are strangers and unlikely to develop a friendly relationship with the eWOM creator.

H1: Self-enhancement motivation is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchase.

3.5.2 Motivation: Social comparison and eWOM

Similarly to the self-enhancement variable, social comparison is an intrinsic type of motivation, which is closely linked to the studies on personality. Reflecting on the self-presentation variable as one of the factors shaping eWOM, Pasternak, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas (2017) noted that eWOM serves the purpose of providing confirmation to pre-defined product and service judgements and facilitates social comparison among current and potential consumers of a certain brand or product type. The social comparison variable is closely associated with brand reputation in the eyes of customers, which is particularly relevant for expensive brands. T. Wang, Yeh, Chen and Tsydypov (2016) introduced the concept of social capital in the discussion on social comparison variable, suggesting that group members gain personal benefits and achieve common goals with the help of eWOM behaviour. Social capital is defined as the type of personal relationships online users develop with each other through interaction via social media, encouraging members to take a certain action or to achieve group goals by helping each other. Rossmann and Zimmermann (2017) also discovered that eWOM participation is based on emotional factors, specifically on the feeling of belonging in sharing positive content. Social comparison is conducted to minimise the gap between the current social status

of eWOM participant and those who belong to the group with the purpose of creating identification with other members of the groups through mutual experience. The importance of personality and social comparison was also stressed in Fine et al. (2017), who discussed the five-factor personality model in eWOM exchange experience.

The concept of social comparison has received attention in the most recent studies that focus on eWOM and online communication. For example, H. Liu, Jayawardhena, Osburg, Yoganathan and Cartwright (2021) studied social comparison as one of the dimensions that affect customer behaviours online. Social comparison relates to social sharing that helps individuals verify their knowledge and attitudes to match those of other people, especially when users experience confusing emotions. Based on these experiences, people compare their emotions and thoughts with those expressed by peers in eWOM.

Further, individuals who depend on the motivation of social comparison follow certain rules when they create eWOM. Their behavioural patterns are influenced by their desire for alignment with other individuals. This alignment ensures that individuals create eWOM that fails to distinguish them from their community of peers, while communication with friends forms the self-identity of an online shopper (Le, 2021). This discourse includes information about peer purchase expectations because people aligned with peers are more likely to buy an item that their friends and family would also buy, unlike individuals who are independent from social comparison as a motivational factor.

Social comparison has gained attention in research of influencer marketing. Taillon, Mueller, Kowalczyk and Jones (2020) aimed to understand the relationship between social media influencers and followers, while their research unveiled that perceived closeness between an influencer and the follower audience moderates social comparison, as followers conduct self-evaluations based on an influencer's online presence. This information has significance because of the relevant focus on influencers who have become important creators of eWOM that other users may or may not expand with their feedback. Thus, social comparison occurs when users compare their opinions, not only with friends, family and community peers, but also with influencer celebrities.

H2: Social-comparison motivation is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchase.

3.5.3 Motivation: Helping others and eWOM

Among the motivations to engage in eWOM behaviour, creation of online content and sharing of views and perspectives on certain experiences, products, services or brands, the motivation to help others plays one of the important roles. Teng, Khong, Chong and Lin (2016) reviewed the motivation of online users to engage in eWOM behaviour, specifically the reading of online reviews, and suggested that reviews provide helpful information that helps them narrow down the choice more easily. eWOM is perceived by online users as a helpful tool to obtain knowledge of products and services, which helps reduce the risk and uncertainty of the purchase decision. A similar conclusion was also noted by Kudeshia and Kumar (2017), who suggested that online reviews have the primary purpose of making decision-making easier for consumers by reducing overall cognitive load. The studies by Teng et al. (2016) and Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) both focused on the motivation to read eWOM rather than the motivation to write online reviews. The study by Erkan and Evans (2016) used primary data collection through interviews and one of the reported findings was the perception that people write online reviews are primarily driven by the motivation to help others by showing good and bad sides of products and services to potential customers with the help of social media.

Moreover, helping others has received much attention in recent studies that focus on altruism as one of the motivations to engage in online communication. Ismagilova et al. (2020) identified altruism as a construct based on personal conditions that includes many factors, such as altruistic intentions, affection, caring for other people, enjoyment and satisfaction from altruistic behaviours. Ismagilova et al. (2020) also found that helping others via eWOM has a strong positive correlation with eWOM behaviour. This perspective corroborates the importance of the concept and variable for the current research.

Other research elaborates on altruistic motivations in eWOM behavioural patterns. For example, Rosario, de Valck and Sotgiu (2020) clarified that the altruistic purposes of individuals might depend on the platforms they use for eWOM creation

and dissemination. The same study recognised that internet users of the early stages of social media development were more social and altruistic than modern users. Rosario et al. (2020) also pointed out that companies that offer a platform for individuals with verified purchases to answer questions of other potential customers appeal to altruistic motivations in people, but the value of altruistic eWOM has decreased under the pressure of individualised intentions and motives.

Despite the possible decline of altruism as a motivation, helping others is important to individuals interested in different industries, but the tourism field has the most evidence for altruism value. Particularly, Thomas and Kanje (2021) confirmed that vacationers use altruism to shape their eWOM messages in the tourism business. Zhou et al. (2019) agreed that tourists demonstrate a significant inclination to the motivation of helping others. Nam, Baker, Ahmad and Goo (2020) added that altruism entails the generation of both positive and negative eWOM depending on the situation. As altruism has gained much interest from researchers, it must be acknowledged that egoism similarly received academic attention.

The recent research confirms the positive correlation between egoism and eWOM. In particular, Bilal et al. (2020) provided evidence to illustrate that egoism is one of the most significant factors affecting eWOM, leading to the conclusion that individuals rely on social media to satisfy their egoistical needs. Bilal et al. (2020) hypothesised that social media provides the avenue for the users to achieve inner satisfaction through eWOM rather than help others. Yet, the conclusions presented by Bilal et al. (2020) also refer to the finding that even egoism-motivated eWOM creation is accompanied with the sense of belonging, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of using eWOM among individuals communicating and locating information through social media. Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesise that eWOM and the variable of helping others are interconnected, even though the factor of egoism and self-satisfying motives should be considered. According to these findings, the motivation of helping others is strong for both groups of eWOM participants: readers and creators.

H3: The helping others motivation is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchase.

3.5.4 Gratification: Knowledge enhancement and eWOM

Among gratifications as variables of eWOM participation, knowledge enhancement is closely correlated to the helping others motivation. Gvili and Levy (2018) concluded that eWOM encompasses positive interaction between consumers and brands on three levels: cognitive, emotional and behavioural. Knowledge enhancement is a cognitive type of interaction, in which both a user who creates eWOM and a user who reads eWOM achieve knowledge enhancement gratification. For eWOM creator, the most important factor is the time spent and effort invested in writing a review, while for eWOM reader, credibility and enhanced knowledge about the product, service or a brand are the sought benefits (Gvili & Levy, 2018). Reflecting on the process of adopting eWOM messages, Qahri-Saremi and Montazemi (2019) concluded that knowledge enhancement occurs through the process of information adoption process, in which information about a product shared by one customer via eWOM is transformed into internalised knowledge of another customer, ultimately affecting decision-making on purchase intentions. Knowledge enhancement depends on two factors inherent to perception of eWOM: informativeness and persuasiveness (Tien, Rivas, & Liao, 2018). Both these factors affect perceived usefulness of eWOM messages and contribute to knowledge enhancement, either supporting or discouraging intention to make a purchase depending on the essence of eWOM message. Malik and Hadi (2019) confirmed that knowledge-sharing motivation, knowledge enhancement gratification and perceived usefulness of eWOM are positively related to the intention to use eWOM for online purchases.

The gratification of knowledge enhancement is closely correlated with the variable of trust and reputation. Consumers tend to trust eWOM if it is created and shared by figure of authority, official representative of the company, a celebrity or social media influencer. Banchariya and Sharma (2020) concluded that readers of eWOM tend to perceive sources of eWOM as credible if they are authored by famous people. Simultaneously, reviews posted by influencers are frequently understood as biased and less trustworthy because of the inherent conflict of interests. Banchariya and Sharma (2020) noted that the reliance on influencers in marketing activities is a highly popular practice among companies, especially small ones that do not have a

loyal customer base and are just entering the market. For smaller companies and unknown brands, influencers are the tools for knowledge enhancement among potential consumers, whereas eWOM or just a product reference leads to the spread of information and, as the outcome, knowledge enhancement and purchase intention. The use of influencers by companies to create eWOM presents an opportunity to eliminate the barriers between consumers and company for the purpose of knowledge enhancement.

Bishop (2021) drew attention to the increased awareness among consumers that social media influencers recommend and promote goods and services for money, as part of their income. Consumers' trust or lack of it depends on the public credibility of celebrities and the brand. In both cases, knowledge on brand, product or service is enhanced through eWOM created by influencers because of the reach to the extensive audience. The greater awareness among consumers of eWOM on the fact that influencers create reviews for money reduces the value of knowledge-enhancing attribute of eWOM owing to the "fakeness" and "dishonest practices" employed by marketing experts to manipulate consumers into purchase intentions and actual purchases inspired by social media influencers (Bishop, 2021). Trusting influencers and other eWOM creators with non-celebrity status gained attention from other researchers.

Specifically, some research focuses on persuasion knowledge that affects eWOM perception. Tabassum et al. (2020) clarified that persuasion knowledge refers to a person's view on the motives of marketing messages, including eWOM feedback, because people understand that a message writer might have vested interests in spreading a specific message while using certain persuasion techniques. Additionally, people understand how to evaluate the intentions set behind an eWOM message. This research is important because individuals would like to enhance their knowledge, but they still have awareness of ulterior motives that some eWOM creators might have, like receiving money from sponsors. Moreover, Tabassum et al. (2020) established that persuasion knowledge indeed exerts a positive influence on the formation of purchase intentions in those who read eWOM messages, but the study pertained to the sample that contained exclusively individuals of Generation Z. This age focus fails to provide information on the effects of persuasion knowledge for other age groups;

other populations may not have awareness of ulterior motives that influencers have when promoting products. This situation might affect how individuals address their knowledge enhancement gratification.

H4: Knowledge enhancement gratification is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchase.

3.5.5 Gratification: Entertainment and eWOM

While knowledge enhancement and perceived usefulness are cognitive-based factors of eWOM interactions that underlie rational purchase decision-making, entertainment gratification falls within emotional domain. By definition, the entertainment property of eWOM is the ability of electronic message sharing to fulfil the need of the audience for escapism, diversion, aesthetic enjoyment and emotional release (Gvili & Levy, 2016). Entertaining aspects of eWOM contribute to the positivity of the message, virtual community and product. Gvili and Levy (2016) confirmed that perceived entertaining essence of eWOM positively correlated with users' attitude towards receiving content and facilitating interpersonal interaction as the outcome. Previte, Russell-Bennett, Mulcahy and Hartel (2019) added to the discussion on entertainment gratification by claiming that eWOM shapes affective states of service and product experiences. Positive states are enjoyment, happiness and entertainment. Negative states are fear, anxiety and distress. Depending on perceived state of the eWOM creator, eWOM readers gain either positive or negative gratification and, consequently, the attitude towards brand, service or product. Pasternak (2017) reported that entertainment associated with brand community participation through eWOM is an experiential benefit—eWOM engagement helps individuals meet their own emotional and entertainment needs. Individuals that participate in eWOM improve their mood and share their positive and negative sentiments about product-related experiences. As a result, eWOM involvement is viewed as a joyful and engaging activity (Pasternak, 2017). Weerawatnodom, Watanapa and Watanapa (2018) and Zhou et al. (2019) emphasised the importance of entertainment gratification in eWOM engagement in their studies.

Recent research recognises that social media has created a fruitful foundation for entertainment. In particular, Tabassum et al. (2020) pointed out that digital

platforms prevented advertising from being interruptive and annoying in customers' eyes. The digitalisation of communication enables marketing professionals to distinguish advertising by making it entertaining, while this differentiation extends to eWOM as well because marketing has gained entertaining and exciting features (Tabassum et al., 2020). Moreover, Thomas and Kanje (2021) discovered that entertainment was the most important factor for their sample consisting of vacationers in both eWOM-giving and eWOM-seeking situations. Zhou et al. (2019) added that social media experiences are more entertaining than online interactions on websites. In the case of the tourism industry, social media offers multiple entertaining options, like geolocation shares, notifications and photo and video content. These findings suggest that the gratification of entrainment should not be underestimated as a construct that shapes the conceptual framework of this study.

Further, entertainment contributes to value co-creation that connects individuals. Cheung, Pires, Rosenberger, Leung and Ting (2021) added to scholarly knowledge because they confirmed that entertainment was important to value co-creation, as companies and brands developed tools that would engage customers in eWOM generation. Nadeem, Tan, Tajvidi and Hajli (2021) added that value co-creation occurs in two-sided interactions, like surveys or feedback opportunities, because customers and companies exchange responses that lead to improved services and experiences. Although the study by Cheung et al. (2021) demonstrated that entertainment was not the most important dimension of online communication, the findings corroborated the assumption that entertaining features in social media posts moulded an atmosphere that would highlight intimacy that connected the consumer and brand. These research results show that entertainment has a place in the framework as a factor influencing value co-creation that, in turn, has an impact on brand position and customer-company relationship.

H5: Entertainment gratification is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchase.

3.5.6 Gratification: Social interaction and eWOM

eWOM engagement is a form of social interaction in online community. Product users, including previous, current and potential, engage in eWOM to share

experiences or obtain additional information, which both fall into the type of social interaction. X. Yang (2019) suggested that frequent online communication and social interaction among product users cultivates affectivity among customers, shortens social distance between current and potential users and leverages social relationships on commerce sites. Ruiz-Mafé, Bigne-Alcañiz, Sanz-Blas and Tronch (2018) focused their research on the factor of social presence/social identity in the context of discussion on eWOM, suggesting that groups with high levels of social interaction and mutual activities (such as discussing the same product, service, or brand) tend to have greater social influence on members and modify their perceptions and behaviours towards brands and products. Thus, the more active social interaction through eWOM, the greater influence eWOM has on behaviours and preferences of readers. With regard to Facebook, in particular, Aghakhani, Karimi and Salehan (2018) added that its major role is social presence of users in the form of online interpersonal interactions and relationships. In the case of eWOM engagement, it is one of the alternative forms of social interaction for users.

The most recent research efforts also address social interaction as one of the gratifications that individuals endeavour to address when they engage in eWOM. Unlike websites, social media platforms emphasise the importance of social interactions because social networking websites promote sociability and emotional exchange (Zhou et al., 2019). Social interactions ensure that even the lack of face-to-face discussions abundant in traditional settings does not prevent individuals from enjoying the benefits of interacting with peers. Phan et al. (2020) stressed that virtual social interactions in chatrooms, forums and social media create hedonic benefits for users because their need for communication and respect from others is gratified. Companies use this to their advantage because such interactions online strengthen customer engagement with the brand (Phan et al., 2020). As users perceive others voicing their opinions, they often choose to add their perspective to the array of others. This constant attention assists a company or brand in maintaining attention of current and future customers.

The view of social interactions as a gratification need is based on the idea that few decisions are taken without communication. Hussain, Song and Niu (2020) confirmed that social interactions represent a social tie that helps a person make a

decision, which extends to relationships with brands or companies. In other words, social interactions have theoretical evidence of influencing decisions based on eWOM and purchase intentions. A sense of belonging, emotional support and replacement of real-life communications are the opportunities that social media interactions provide to users. Thomas and Kanje (2021) emphasised that these examples of gratifications relate to the concept of social interaction. These additional gratifications demonstrate the versatility of social interactions that might influence eWOM from multiple perspectives because different people might have a specific gratification associated with social interactions.

H6: Social interaction gratification is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchase.

3.5.7 eWOM and purchase intentions

The correlation between eWOM and purchase intention has been established with a wide range of studies. Among recent researchers, Erkan and Evans (2016) noted that eWOM through social media, in which communication occurs between friends and acquaintances, has a bigger impact on purchase intentions compared with consumer review websites and discussion forums. Anonymous reviews of products and services are less influential in terms of purchase intentions (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Similarly, Hong, Haroon, Yew and Hoo (2019) discovered that eWOM shared among friends on different social media platforms can either motivate or discourage purchase intention, even if readers of eWOM have not considered making a purchase of that particular product or brand before reading a review. Hong et al. (2019) emphasised that younger people (Generation Z) are more influenced by eWOM on social media platforms compared with anonymous reviews shared elsewhere. Researching the difference in effect between positive and negative eWOM, Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) suggested that positive eWOM has a significant effect on purchase intention (stimulates purchase), whereas negative eWOM is more frequently evaluated in terms of credibility, social media presence of the reviewer and overall trustworthiness of the review. It implies that online consumers tend to believe in reliability of positive eWOM more than in negative eWOM (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). The relationship between eWOM and purchase intentions has multiple other factors affecting this connection.

For example, brand image receives attention from the perspective of eWOM and purchase intentions. Rahman et al. (2020) explained that brand image refers to the representation of a brand in the public perception, including views on the features of a product from the market perspective. It was also stated that brand image and purchase intentions affected eWOM, but the study did not focus on the reversed relationship that would explicate how eWOM might influence purchase intentions and brand image. Further, Tariq, Abbas, Abrar and Iqbal (2017) claimed that eWOM credibility is partially mediated by brand image held by readers of eWOM, but exposure to eWOM on social media still affects consumer purchase intention regardless of the previous brand or product image. Rahman et al. (2020) discussed the rising importance of consumption power that enables customers to exert an influence on brand perception and peers' purchase intentions. When Zhang and Dong (2020) discussed environmental marketing, the researchers stated that consumer buying power is more influential than product features. Therefore, brand image alongside consumption power elucidates different dimensions of the relationship between eWOM and purchase intentions.

Whereas purchase intentions matter to companies, customer suspicion might prevent users from becoming paying customers. Pektas and Hassan (2020) offered information on suspicion being a barrier to using digital content because eWOM messages might contain information that would deceive them and encourage them to make a mistake in their online buying decisions. Therefore, trust serves as a vehicle for eWOM messages to gain understanding and support from social media users (Rahman et al., 2020). Evidence illustrates that individuals with high levels of trust are likely to create, repost and respond in other ways to eWOM (Lee, Phua, & Wu, 2020). These findings demonstrate the multidimensional connection that eWOM and purchase intentions share. While eWOM and purchase intentions might influence each other, it is useful to explore specifically the effects that the former has on the latter. Based on existing studies, the hypothesis suggests that the relationship must be positive.

H7: eWOM is positively related to purchase intentions.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This thesis depends on a sound theoretical framework that guides the investigation of the research questions. Existent evidence offers a foundation for identifying factors that exert an influence on eWOM, while eWOM in itself might have the power to shape purchase intentions. To answer these questions and address gaps in the literature, two theories are combined to create a single conceptual framework.

Specifically, social exchange theory and uses and gratifications theory are the frameworks relevant to the research area. Social exchange theory contributes to the understanding of human behaviour in traditional and digital settings. The main assumption of this theory rests on the idea that an exchange between two or more parties leads to a specific social behaviour, while individuals normally try to maximise the benefits of their interactions and minimise the negative effects. In its turn, uses and gratifications theory focuses on mass communications and seeks to understand specific needs that individuals pursue by using social media. Based on these frameworks, a conceptual model concentrates on a list of motivations and gratifications.

Whereas motivations include the self-need of self-enhancement, the social need of social comparison and the social intentions of helping others, gratifications entail knowledge enhancement, social interaction and entertainment. The conceptual framework demonstrates that these factors might influence eWOM, while eWOM might affect purchase intentions. Moreover, scholarly literature guides the conceptual framework to determine a possible relationship that these variables possess. Based on previous studies, the hypotheses are formed to suggest that all gratifications and motivations have a positive effect on eWOM. In a similar vein, previous research suggests that eWOM also has a positive influence on purchase intentions. The conceptual framework is expected to offer a deeper understanding of social exchange theory and uses and gratifications theory by expanding the hierarchy of variables. This approach addresses gaps that have emerged in research about eWOM, its facilitators and purchase intentions.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology of the study. Section 4.3 discusses the mixed-methods research design consisting of two phases: the quantitative questionnaire and the qualitative interview. A mixed-methods design was used to determine whether eWOM predicted purchase intentions in the KSA. The research paradigms and study selection are discussed. Data were collected from university students in the KSA who were selected through the nonprobability convenience sampling technique. The sampling design and sizes are discussed and justified. The sampling among university students was dictated with the assumption that this group consists of the most frequent readers and creators of eWOM. Section 4.5 covers the questionnaire administration and translation, followed with a detailed explanation of the data analysis methodology, including reliability and validity, descriptive analysis and SEM for the survey and thematic analysis for interviews. The chapter concludes with the ethical considerations and summary of methodology.

4.2 Research Paradigms

The identification of a relevant research paradigm ensures that the study is based on an effective worldview that guides the entire research process. In fact, Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that such a paradigm refers to “a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research” (p. 44). Different terms exist to discuss research paradigms, as some academics identify them as epistemologies, ontologies and broadly conceived research methodologies. As differences exist among individual worldviews, such differences are similarly present in narratives that researchers create. The detection of a suitable research paradigm helps scholars illuminate a topic from a specific perspective. Each research paradigm possesses a specific set of philosophical tenets that offer a foundation for scholarly investigations (Khaldi, 2017). Although multiple research paradigms exist, positivism, post-positivism, constructivism (also known as interpretivism) and pragmatism are some of the most popular choices for researchers to uncover important information about social, business and cultural phenomena affecting human

lives. For this reason, an overview of these research paradigms is presented to identify the most appropriate academic worldview to address the research questions and aims formulated early in the process.

4.2.1 Positivism

The study was motivated by positivism, which is one of the earliest research paradigms that has guided researchers to obtain concrete results in studies. Positivism perceives the world in a determinist way because empirical evidence gained in positivism-inspired research is factual. Park et al. (2020) clarified that positivism requires researchers to employ the hypothetico-deductive method that entails the verification of hypotheses tested quantitatively. Therefore, positivism focuses on functional relationships affected by causal and explanatory factors and outcomes that represent independent variables and dependent variables, respectively. Quantitative purists who follow positivism tend to view social observations objectively rather than subjectively (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The significant accuracy of the positivist worldview mostly applies to quantitative studies dealing with verifiable statistics and methods subject to potential replication. Qualitative analyses may become part of quantitative experiments that adopt this worldview, as long as other positivist assumptions are respected (Park et al., 2020). While positivism offers accuracy, replicability and generalisability as benefits, it has some limitations. Aliyu, Bello, Kasim and Martin (2014) stated that the constraints of positivism rest on the uncertainties surrounding the connections of framed realities, which participative realism can address.

Advantages and disadvantages of positivism considered, positivism philosophy is suitable for studies on marketing and eWOM. Positivism is capable of providing concrete answers to eWOM-related questions, especially when statistics are needed for the development of practical recommendations. Yet, the selection of this research paradigm is accompanied by the lack of subjective opinions that might elucidate a topic from an unexpected angle. Positivist philosophies still matter to marketing research by eliminating bias and establishing internal validity in line with the laws of nature (Park et al., 2020). In recent decades, positivism was less used by researchers because it was displaced by post-positivism, which demonstrates similar traits.

4.2.2 Post-positivism

The post-positivist worldview has been built upon the assumptions set forward by positivists. Post-positivism is commonly used by most scholars (Aliyu et al., 2014). Much like positivism, post-positivism focuses on quantitative data and results. Post-positivism relies on the assumptions that determinism and cause-and-effect thinking processes address existent gaps in knowledge (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This research worldview also embraces reductionism by reframing theory to specific variables that researchers observe and measure. This approach motivates scholars to focus on the evaluation of theories to verify or disprove them. Both positivism and post-positivism integrate determinism and reductionism, so it is important to identify a shift in worldview assumptions between the two paradigms.

Despite their similarities, positivism and post-positivism provide unique views on the functioning of the world and natural laws. Positivists acknowledge a real external reality that is objective and knowable, whereas post-positivists consider reality imperfectly knowable (Brennan, Voros, & Brady, 2011). The evolution of research paradigms has prepared post-positivism for greater application because scientists acknowledge the limitations in the efforts to expand scholarly knowledge on a topic. Positivism has become outdated because of its assumptions for reality to be perfectly knowable, so post-positivism is more suitable for the studies with a quantitative approach aiming to verify theories, enable reductionist thinking and inquire into interactions among variables.

Given its strengths and preference among researchers, post-positivism has value for research that concentrates on questions in marketing and eWOM. The identification of inter-variable relationships informs practitioners about the use of statistical knowledge in practical settings. The use of existing theories ensures that such studies are capable of verifying the current theoretical knowledge. Post-positivism has also managed to enhance the approach that researchers applied when using tenets of positivist philosophies. Such innovative thinking and decision-making in research development have enabled post-positivism to replace traditional positivism in multiple academic endeavours.

4.2.3 Constructivism/interpretivism

Conversely, constructivism, also known as interpretivism, represents a philosophical worldview assisting researchers in uncovering new knowledge about the world. Constructivism uses qualitative data while embracing specific assumptions. In particular, constructivism assumes that researchers gain the understanding of the essence of a phenomenon based on a narrative constructed by participants and their subjective opinions (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The subjective insights offered by participants rest on the meanings bestowed on phenomena in the process of social communication and personal experiences. This research approach makes reductionism and determinism unsuitable for inquiry that uses constructivist values and principles. Qualitative purists delve into the investigation of multiple realities constructed by multiple participants and reject the importance of generalisation (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The constructivist worldview requires researchers to shift from specific and individual knowledge to broader patterns and knowledge (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This research philosophy contributes both to social and historical construction and theory generation. Theory design is viable for research that follows the constructivist paradigm because new insights into phenomena illuminate new concepts and ideas that might become a ground for novel theory generation.

The philosophical tenets of the constructivism make it a promising research paradigm to consider in marketing research. Multiple realities investigated in research are based on the relative traits of a specific sample (Brennan et al., 2011). Therefore, different target audiences in marketing might construct different realities. The application of constructivist principles would facilitate the inquiry into the topic from the perspective of a specific group. The current study has a clearly defined targeted customer population of Saudi individuals whose responses might differ from the constructed reality of individuals from other cultures.

4.2.4 Pragmatism

Finally, pragmatism, as a research paradigm, recognises the advantages of qualitative and quantitative data, often focusing on mixed-methods designs (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Pragmatists pursue an interest in the identification of research consequences because the methods employed in the study must address the problems

detected in the beginning of the research process. Pragmatism is preoccupied with the development of useful recommendations. This approach makes the worldview pluralistic and functional enough to address real-world practices and needs. In recent years, pragmatism has emerged as a paradigm to guide academic investigations in multiple subjects.

Feilzer (2010) discussed a relatively recent re-emergence of pragmatism as a research paradigm to address the shortcomings of solely quantitative or solely qualitative data collection and analysis. Whereas quantitative purists argue for positivism or post-positivism and qualitative purists defend the use of constructivism/interpretivism, followers of the pragmatist philosophy suggest enabling the unification of positive qualities that the opposite research paradigm possess. Mixed-methods research embracing pragmatic values creates an opportunity for researchers to address limitations of other designs informed by positivist, post-positivist or constructivist paradigms. Although mixed-methods designs cannot address all issues in academic inquiries, the pragmatic maxim assumes that the current meaning of an expression rests on practical outcomes of the beliefs necessary for expression (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This worldview provides the platform for research to explore different perspectives of the same research topic. Pragmatism has been instrumental for social research because knowledge contains “warranted assertions” arising from action and the experience of consequences (Morgan, 2014, p. 1049). The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods promises a profound exploration of the open questions in marketing and eWOM.

4.2.5 Selected research paradigm

The evaluation of the dominant research paradigms provided evidence to claim that the current research project benefits the most from the pragmatic worldview for several reasons. First, the multiplicity of research questions and objectives emphasises the need to gain both quantitative statistics and qualitative insights. The emergence of mixed-methods research that combines the benefits of quantitative and qualitative approaches matches the need for a research paradigm, like pragmatism, with its focus on different sources of information (Maarouf, 2019). The pragmatist worldview recognises the value of different types of information to support the development of the practical recommendations. Second, the identification of a

problem and the shaping of consequences of actions are part of pragmatic research (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The lack of knowledge on the Saudi engagement with eWOM represents the gap in knowledge for marketing professionals, while the understanding of outcomes of marketing actions would inform practitioners about the outcomes of their professional activities. Third, pragmatism addresses the issue of change that presents as reality (Lowe, Rod, & Hwang, 2020). This perspective has relevance for the research because the topic addresses the constant change in trends based on social networking and the growing interconnectedness of individuals on social media, whereas eWOM is part of a change that has become reality to multiple users.

Last, this research focuses on the development of practical recommendations that are the outcome of pragmatism-led studies (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Pragmatism has managed to take place in research because academics have recognised the importance of this worldview for the development of policies, including those related to the economic situation (Kolodko, 2017). Mendling, Berente, Seidel and Grisold (2021) claimed the pragmatist perspective to have value for the investigation of business and organisational processes. Visser (2019) agreed that a re-energised interest in pragmatism has entered research efforts focused on business concepts, including business ethics. Although this project leads to the identification of theoretical implications, the results are projected to play an essential role in the development of practical recommendations. Consequently, the use of pragmatism enhances the research that would inform practitioners on eWOM use in Saudi settings.

4.3 Research Design: Mixed Methods

Research design is the action plan undertaken by researchers to systematically collect data and information about the phenomenon under consideration and derive results and conclusions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). There are three basic types of research design: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. The quantitative design offers the benefit of higher reliability and validity because the exploration of the phenomenon is objective, minimising personal bias; however, the scope of the data that can be collected through quantitative design is limited and fails to gather in-depth data on experiences and opinions of people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The qualitative

design eliminates this weakness and provides in-depth exploratory data on feelings and perceptions of people. Yet, the reliability and validity of qualitative design are compromised because the data supplied by sources are subject to personal bias (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Researchers apply the mixed methods to address the inherent limitations in mono-methods and maximise the reliability and validity of research results and conclusions.

Mixed methods are empirical and involve the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, combining the elements of both for extent and depth of understanding (Almalki, 2016). The use of mixed methods allows compensating for each method's weaknesses by focusing on the strengths of the chosen methods. The mixed-methods approach provides researchers with more opportunities for a broader understanding of the issues being researched. With sequential data collection, in which the quantitative research method is followed with a narrower and more specific qualitative data collection, the resulting findings and conclusions are more reliable and less biased (Almalki, 2016).

The current study employed a mixed-methods design because it helped to address both subjective and objective aspects of the research questions. The objective aspect was to define and establish the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention and the subjective goal was to explore how KSA students perceived this relationship. Hence, the quantitative data were used to objectively examine the impact of variables while the qualitative data were gathered to confirm quantitative results from perceptions and experiences of KSA university students.

The research used a two-phase mixed-methods approach (see Figure 4.1). The first phase used a quantitative methodology (closed-ended surveys). The second phase consisted of a qualitative method of data collection (interviews). The primary data were collected to explore the relationship between eWOM and purchase intentions. The combination of both research methodologies was chosen to enhance the validity of the research findings by measuring and verifying quantitative results against qualitative primary data (Mackey & Gass, 2015).

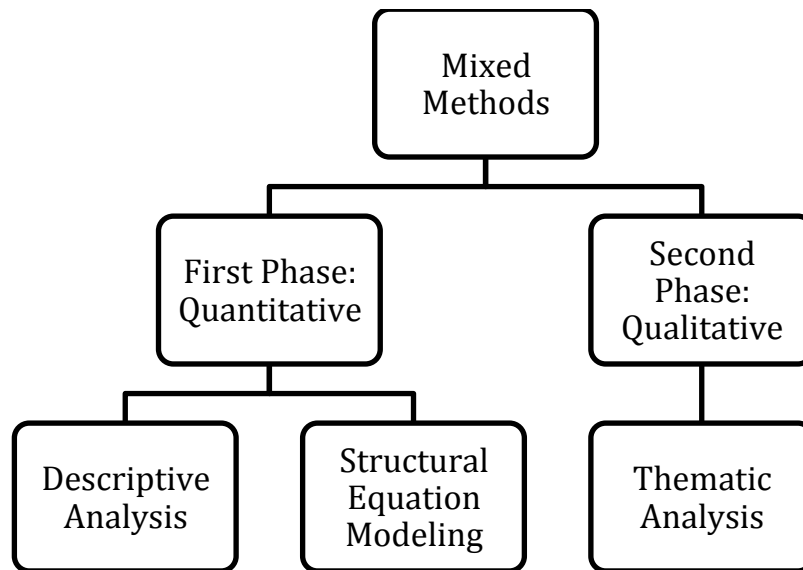


Figure 4.1. Design of the current research (designed by the researcher)

The study aimed to identify the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention, so the mixed methods offered an opportunity to draw a broad picture of the phenomena under analysis through quantitative methods and to narrow it through clarification with the help of qualitative methods.

The quantitative method employed a questionnaire as the research method. Questionnaires allow obtainment of information from large samples of the population and are inclusive in types and number of variables. The use of a questionnaire as the data collection method elicits information about attitudes and generates findings that can be efficiently generalised (Glasow, 2005). Biases may be noted if participants do not provide sufficient responses or questions are not clear. For the presented research, the use of a quantitative method offered several advantages. The survey with closed-ended questions was administered online to identify correlations among the variables. While the study's scope was limited to the KSA, the method can be applied to other contexts for verification and generalisation. Further, a closed-ended survey provided the data for statistical analysis of correlations among the variables.

The qualitative method used interviews for data collection. Choy (2014) added that interviewing fosters homogenous exploration and discussion of more issues through broad inquiry. Interviewing, as a data collection method, facilitates and deepens the understanding of behaviours, which is the focus of the conducted research on eWOM and purchase intentions. While interviews may have such drawbacks as

time constraints and a lack of objectively verifiable results (Choy, 2014), these limitations were addressed through mixed methods research design and triangulation. For the presented study, the survey findings were clarified through interviews with a predetermined sample of the respondents. Following the recommendation by Adams and Lawrence (2014), interviews were conducted in person and by telephone.

Ultimately, the application of the mixed-methods design is justified for the present study that follows a pragmatic research philosophy. Although this research renders theoretical implications, the identification of practical recommendations is equally important while highlighting the pragmatic nature of the effort. The focus on practicality through mixed methods benefits multiple stakeholders, including companies, employees and customers. Because the quantitative and qualitative components of the study gain different types of information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), it is advantageous for this research to use the mixed-methods design that offers the most comprehensive examination of the under-researched topics of eWOM, its antecedents and purchase intentions in the Saudi context characterised by highly collectivist values. Other marketing studies have employed this approach; for example, French, Luo and Bose (2017) acknowledged that mixed methods enabled the research team to gain holistic insights into marketing topics.

4.4 Target Population and Sampling Design

The identification of the target population and sampling design represents a crucial stage in the entire project. The selection of participants and a target audience predetermines the nature of the population to which the findings would be applicable. It is also important for the population to be accessible because research depends on easily available participants willing to participate in research. Additionally, Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that mixed-methods studies benefit from including individuals from the small qualitative component in the larger quantitative survey, but this suggestion can be overridden based on the wishes of respondents. Understandably, the focus of this study requires the project to involve individuals from the KSA because the research area is preoccupied with addressing gaps in knowledge about Saudi collectivist leanings in social media behaviours as applied to eWOM and purchase intentions.

4.4.1 Target population

As suggested above, the identification of the target population strengthens the research project because peers and practitioners should understand what population groups might be affected by research results. The sample must reflect the community of population to which research questions pertain while retaining some heterogeneous qualities to ensure diversity (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015). The involvement of the right type of participants, for whom a research topic is relevant, enables studies to help the sample shape research to an extent (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This understanding emphasises the importance of proper sampling and population identification.

The target population included university students in the KSA. The choice of the target population was dictated with the assumption that young people are the most frequent readers and creators of eWOM. Young people comprise two-thirds of the active users of social media in the Middle East, which justified targeting this specific population (Wam, 2017). Simultaneously, attention targeted at relevant stakeholder groups must reflect their participation in ecommerce practices. Alabdali (2018) stated that the KSA possesses the largest ICT market, despite ecommerce remaining slightly underdeveloped. However, most recent studies project an increase in growth because the ecommerce use rose from USD 5,894 million in 2015 to USD 10,864 million in 2020 in the KSA (Alotaibi & Faleel, 2021). These statistics suggest that the sector of ecommerce affects customers who might prefer innovative digital markets to conventional offline markets. The target population of the presented study allowed obtaining data that can be applied to the analysis of eWOM-purchase intention correlations in the current timeframe.

Certain limitations in the sampling design should be acknowledged to identify the consequences for the research. In particular, the sample consists of Saudi students and excludes young people from other educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. This limitation suggests that the quantitative component would yield findings generalisable only in discussions of the eWOM experiences of young educated eWOM users. Although the study weakness prevents the research from creating a narrative about eWOM experiences for multiple populations, the sample choice offers important insights into the topic. In fact, the homogeneity of the sample signifies that

quantitative data offers considerable accuracy and generalisability when applied to the sub-group as opposed to the larger groups of young Saudi internet users.

4.4.2 Sampling design

Potential participants received information about the research project via university emails. Different universities that cover all regions of the KSA provided access to the email addresses of students upon receiving the researcher's request. Email communication with potential participants occurred whilst adhering to ethical standards and university policies. Consequently, The research included university students in the KSA recruited through a nonprobability convenience sampling technique. Sampling techniques are broadly classified into probability and nonprobability sampling (Creswell, 2013). In the former, the researcher must ensure equal chances for all members of the target population to participate in the study. It implies the researcher must have access to the entire target population. In the nonprobability sampling, this condition is relieved and the sample can be recruited as per convenience and accessibility (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2010). The sampling process has extensive impact on the overall research process because it affects reliability, validity, time and resources required for the completion of the study (Wilson, 2014).

The nonprobability convenience sampling technique entails the recruitment of study participants in the nearest vicinity of the researcher (Brase & Brase, 2016; Zikmund & Babin, 2006). The nonprobability convenience technique is vulnerable to bias and is typically used when the target population is difficult to access. Owing to COVID-19 restrictions, the accessibility to potential participants is difficult in person. Considering the size of the target population, the researcher could not access the entire target population. The researcher relied on the internet and modern telecommunication technologies to address these limitations. The sampling and interaction were administered through online surveys and telephone interviews. The convenience sampling was deemed to be the most suitable choice to meet the objectives of the presented study.

Convenience sampling was used in this research on the correlation between eWOM and purchase intentions in KSA because of the emphasis on the convenience

in collecting data from accessible subjects, specifically students who were active users of the internet at the time the study was conducted (Hamouda & Tabbane, 2013; Turri, Smith, & Kemp, 2013). This decision reflects the issue of accessible resources that might affect the mixed-methods research known for its requirement for significant resources divided between two components of qualitative and quantitative inquiry. The qualitative and quantitative samples for the current study are separate, although they all derive from the same population of interest (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Creswell and Clark (2018) pointed out that mixed methods require significant resources in terms of time and access to participants able to represent the larger population.

4.4.3 Sampling size

Sampling size similarly exerts an influence on the efficacy and credibility of a study. In this research, different sample sizes are used for the two components because the qualitative part requires a great number of respondents to gain a complete and more accurate picture of quantitative information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), while the qualitative part must have few interviewees to avoid data saturation (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015). The sample consisted of 576 participants for the survey and 10 participants for the interviews. The selection of SEM informs the chosen sampling size because studies demonstrate that a proper ratio should have 15 participants per question (Hulin, Netemeyer, & Cudeck, 2001). The sampling size includes 576 recruited individuals, while the survey has 34 questions related to motivation and gratification factors encouraging participants to engage in eWOM and form purchase intentions, so the ratio of 16.9 ($576/34 = 16.9$) confirms the relevant number of participants to provide an accurate picture of the population's attitudes to relevant concepts.

Previous studies have indicated the acceptable range for questionnaire sample to be between 250 and 500 participants for region-specific studies (Alhidari et al., 2015; Rialti et al., 2017). The statistically significant sample size generated a sufficient volume of quantitative data, which increased reliability and decreased possible bias errors in the data collection process. Although the initial recruitment process invited 12 participants to complete the qualitative component, data saturation was reached with the help of ten interviews. Data saturation occurs in qualitative

research when new insights no longer emerge from the participants' responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, the sample for the qualitative component became 10 participants. The qualitative sample recruitment procedure followed the same steps as the quantitative approach because respondents from the quantitative sample received emails about the possibility of participating in the interviews. Interviewees were selected purposefully, so sampling size of 10 participants was adequate for the phenomena to appear in the analysis, as supported by the recommendation for marketing research by Ngulube (2016).

4.4.4 Pilot study

A pilot test was conducted between September and November 2019 to evaluate the questionnaire developed for the current study. It is crucial to test the items of the study before the main data collection. A small number of participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire. Participants were selected from the targeted population, university students. This step is to ensure the reliability and validity of the instruments. It is important to ensure the clarity and accuracy of the items and avoid any confusion and items that may make participants uncomfortable (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Moreover, it suggested including at least 10–30 respondents for the pilot study (Johanson & Brooks, 2009). Therefore, the current study conducted a pilot study with 25 university students. Participants were asked to answer the survey questions and provide their feedback regarding readability and clarity. Once their feedback was obtained, the revising process was conducted using the received comments. Steps also were considered regarding the questionnaire administration and translation, which are discussed further in Section 4.6.

4.5 Data Collection

Data collection includes the instruments and tools used by the researcher to collect empirical evidence from participants. The importance of data collection instruments is reflected by the fact that they directly influence the amount of data that can be collected, shaping the needed time and expenses associated with the research process (Myers, 2013). Researchers select data collection instruments in accordance

with the research design because quantitative and qualitative designs require a different set of data collection tools. Since the presented study is based on a mixed design, both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments were employed in the process (Pickard, 2013).

The data were collected from several universities from November 2019 to February 2020. The data collection procedure included three stages. The first stage entailed reaching out to potential study participants via email. The second stage was to distribute the invitation to complete the questionnaire through WhatsApp groups popular among Saudi students. The third stage applied the direct recruitment of the potential study participants at university classrooms.

Wright (2006) noted that online recruitment of study participants for online completion of the questionnaire offers several advantages. First, data collection was conducted via eWOM, in which the use of social networks online was one inclusion criterion. Second, online questionnaire administration empowered the researcher to narrow down the sample to the target population. Third, online administration of the survey is time- and cost-efficient, reaching a large sample with common characteristics in a short time (Wright, 2006). However, online survey administration is accompanied by sampling challenges; study participants and their specific characteristics are unknown. This disadvantage was efficiently addressed through direct contact with the target population.

Mixed methods were suitable for the nature of the research questions and to meet the objectives of the presented study through the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments (Pickard, 2013). The first objective of this research was to identify factors of eWOM that affect purchase intention. The quantitative data were required to achieve this objective. The second objective of the research was to explore the motivations of eWOM through social media. This objective is subjective in nature, so qualitative data were essential to gain in-depth insights into the attitude and perceptions of study participants in terms of their motivations. The third objective was achieved by using qualitative data as well. Finally, the fourth objective was achieved with the help of the qualitative interview data gathered to determine the motivations.

Data collection was conducted in two phases. The quantitative survey consisted of 39 questions with pre-written closed-ended responses, multiple-choice options and multi-item Likert scale responses. It took approximately 10–15 minutes for each study participant to complete all questions. Interviews were conducted in person face-to-face, and each interview took approximately one hour. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for the subsequent thematic analysis.

Employing a mixed-methods research design ensures that the process of data collection benefits from the comprehensive approach to gathering information from two perspectives. With quantitative and qualitative perspectives combined, researchers are capable of synthesising the newly collected and analysed knowledge to form unique insights. Johnson and Turner (2003) identified benefits in the typology of mixed methods that unified data collection strategies of quantitative and qualitative approaches (as cited in Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015, p. 188). The ability of researchers to employ different data collection strategies in mixed methods shapes a continuum of different qualitative and quantitative interactions. Such a comprehensive point of view enhances the selection of mixed methods as an approach that uses two divergent data collection strategies.

4.5.1 Survey method

In social sciences, two types of survey questionnaires are used. The first is a standard questionnaire that has been developed and tested for reliability and consistency. However, standardised questionnaires do not imply changes and, therefore, fail to address the unique needs of researchers. Given this limitation, a social researcher often adopts self-administered questionnaires (De Leeuw, 2008). A self-administered questionnaire is written and designed to meet the needs of the current study, such as integrating variables that are not present in standardised questionnaires. The primary critique of a self-administered questionnaire is the reliability and consistency issues that the researcher may face because these have not been tested yet by other researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Issues with credibility might arise because respondents might provide insincere answers to questions. Additionally, De Leeuw (2008) stated that respondents tend to provide more answers in face-to-face interactions, while conventional self-administered surveys might result in a great number of no-response issues. These issues should be countered with the

help of the recruitment of a sufficient number of respondents for data, even in cases when participants decide not to provide all answers. Moreover, it is expected that the sample would be open to completing the survey in the comfort of their homes at a time that they deem suitable for this task.

The presented study was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire. The rationale for this choice was that existing standardised questionnaires for eWOM did not meet the needs of this study, which is specifically focused on KSA. To ensure high reliability and consistency, the questionnaire was inspired by several previous studies, from which the relevant questions were adapted and adjusted to meet the research objectives.

4.5.2 Questionnaire development

Instrument development functions as a vital stage in the research process because the instrument, a questionnaire for survey of the quantitative section, is meant to gather relevant information from participants. As a result, research projects depend on instruments that possess significant credibility, including validity and reliability. Creswell and Creswell (2018) pointed out that instruments are normally classified as an instrument designed especially for an ongoing study, a modified one or an instrument created by another researcher. If an instrument had been developed before a current study, a researcher must state how its validity was established, but a novel instrument requires detailed information that would describe and confirm its credibility.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts for the convenience of data collection and ease of completion by study participants. The adaptation procedure implied identification of previous empirical studies exploring either a similar phenomenon or focusing on marketing-related data collection. The second step was the review of the research tools used by researchers in selected studies and adaptation of the questions from surveys to meet the research objectives of the investigation. The questionnaire was anonymous and administered online, so the first questions gathered demographic data, including gender and age range. The second portion of questions related to the use of social networks (specification) and frequency of use of social networks (ranges). The brand category representation part was adopted from

Pasternak (2017). The purpose of the second part was to obtain data to trace correlation between the frequency of social media use and the impact of this variable on purchase intention.

The third and the most extensive part consisted of 34 questions grouped by independent and dependent variables in line with the theoretical segments of theories referred to in the presented research: uses and gratifications theory and social exchange theory. The questions required the selection of answers from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” on the Likert scale (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Adapted questions from previous empirical studies

Factors	Adapted from
Motivation factor: Self-enhancement	Okazaki (2009)
	Follows and Jobber (2000)
Motivation factor: Social comparison	Schneider and Schupp (2011)
	Alexandrov, Lilly and Babakus (2013)
	Alexandrov et al. (2013)
Motivation factor: Helping others	Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004)
Gratification factor: Knowledge enhancement	Chen and Deng (2016)
	Jalilvand and Samiei (2012)
Gratification factor: Social interactions	Godey et al. (2016)
	Huang, Farn and Jeng (2012)
Gratification factor: Entertainment	Froget, Baghestan and Asfaranjan (2013)
	Huang, Farn and Jeng (2012)
eWOM	Ruiz-Mafé, Aldas-Manzano and Veloutsou (2016), Gafni and Golan (2016), Chiosa and Anastasiei (2017), E. E. K. Kim (2016), and Hossain, Kim, & Jahan (2019)
Purchase intentions	Ling, Siong, Hock and Kian (2010), Duffett (2020), Erkan and Evans (2016)

4.5.3 Interview method

For qualitative data collection, two of the most commonly used instruments are interviews and focus groups. Interviews are one-to-one interactions, while focus groups involve more than one participant at the same time. Focus groups are more time-efficient because they empower the researcher to generate larger empirical data in relatively less time; however, confidentiality and anonymity of participants are compromised (Pickard, 2013). Interviews can ensure absolute confidentiality but are more time-consuming. Owing to the social restrictions of COVID-19, the focus group method was not possible. Instead, individual interviews were selected as the main data collection instrument of the current study.

The presented study used semi-structured interviews, in which the researcher formulated a set of tentative questions. These questions were discussed during the interviewing process, while the researcher posed follow-up questions based on the answers to the previous questions (Bryman, 2012). The semi-structured interview questions were formulated by the objectives of the research with the consideration of the context of questionnaire survey variables. The purpose of the questioning process was to collect the data in a way that provided information about research phenomenon and could be used to triangulate with quantitative data.

This strategy of data collection is beneficial to the research effort because a single source of qualitative data saves resources, including time. Creswell and Creswell (2018) acknowledged that some cases call for the development of different qualitative instrument, but the single method of interviewing ensures that the study is conducted in the most efficient way, especially in the view of its mixed-methods design that already uses time for two components. Another strength of the data collection strategy lies in the ability of a researcher to transcribe the opinions spoken by participants. A transcription ensures that a research team has access to generated texts subject to textual analysis (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Thus, the interview method relies on the development of a sound instrument that will enhance this task.

4.5.4 Preparation of interview questions

As with the quantitative instrument, the qualitative instrument of interviews uses the approach of modifying interview questions from previous studies.

Specifically, the interview questions were adapted from Alexandrov et al. (2013), Huang et al. (2012), Dolan et al. (2016), Ruiz-Mafé et al. (2016), Taylor et al. (2012), Ling et al. (2010) and Yang (2017).

The interview process began with the gathering of demographic factors (gender and age range) and education level followed by the set of questions grouped by variable or issue of interest. The questions covered attitude towards social media use, online reviewing and data search approaches. Another set of questions focused on the association among social media interactions and purchase intention, purposes of reading online reviews and motivation to create positive and negative posts about brands and services. The final set of questions targeted the impact of the perceived trustworthiness of online reviews on purchase intention. Interviews were voice-recorded, administered in Arabic and translated into English for the subsequent thematic analysis coding procedure.

4.6 Questionnaire Administration and Translation

The use of the questionnaire instrument influences the efficacy of a study, which requires attention to detail in the methods of translation and administration. The unique setting of the research represented by the KSA determined Saudi customers as a target audience. The need for accurate data collected in both research phases created the necessity to employ Arabic for data gathering because it is the native language of respondents participating in surveys and interviews. Although the questionnaires and interviews were in Arabic, the thesis required the use of English language. Therefore, the research entailed the selection of a legitimate translation method to ensure the credibility of the data collection instruments and analysis.

The forward-backward translation method was deemed suitable for the presented research. The translation method persists as one of the most popular approaches to translation in academic research (De Groot, Dannenburg, & Vanhell, 1994; Lee et al., 2019). This method includes four stages organised sequentially. The first stage represents a forward translation executed by two unbiased interpreters and the second stage focuses on the synthesis of the translated questionnaire into a single draft by the same interpreters (Lee, Chinna, Abdullah, & Abidin, 2018). The third stage requires two experts to translate the texts back into English, with the final stage

enabling a researcher to compare the original questionnaire with the questionnaire that received a backward translation. Upon the identification of mistakes, the first group of interpreters amends the translation and produces a finalised version of the questionnaire. The use of this method strengthens content and semantic equivalence for a cultural context (Ten Hoeve, Castelijns, Jansen, Jansen, & Roodbol, 2016). This approach is instrumental in English-speaking research efforts involving individuals from diverse cultural settings. Further, the involvement of expert translators ensures the accuracy of the survey and, subsequently, the data analysis.

The use of the forward-backward translation method was justified for the current study because the native speakers of Arabic would provide accurate answers with the help of questionnaires in Arabic, despite the original language of the instrument being English. The reliance on expert translators ensured the study generated accurate and credible data. The current research followed the forward-backward translation method as described above. The original survey instrument was developed in English, while professional interpreters were involved in the process of forward-backward translation.

Notably, the translated questionnaires still contained some English terms in brackets under the assumption that the main target audience was represented by university students who were reasonably perceived as aware of these terms that included the concepts of eWOM, purchase intentions, motivations and gratifications. The use of bracketed English terms was justified by the need to provide respondents with comprehensive information, which would facilitate their understanding of the research phase. The administered surveys focused on Arabic translation while using English terms in brackets to enhance the comprehension of questionnaire items by the respondents.

4.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of processing and transforming raw data into meaningful results. The data analysis techniques are affected by the type of data collected during the research. Statistical techniques are commonly used for quantitative data. Statistical techniques present results in tables and graphs and are easier to interpret (Myers, 2013). For the qualitative data, some of the techniques are

content analysis, grounded theory and thematic analysis. Qualitative data analysis techniques are subjective and dependent on interpretation by researchers and analysts. Data analysis techniques affect the overall results and interpretation of data and, consequently, have a significant effect on the reliability and validity of the research results (Hennink et al., 2010).

The data analysis for quantitative survey methodology included construct and concrete validity tests along with reliability tests. Descriptive analysis, SEM, frequency analysis, sensitivity analysis, confirmation factor analysis (CFA) and path coefficient were applied to quantitative data analysis. The qualitative data analysis was conducted using the methodology of thematic analysis based on coding and tracing of common themes across interview answers.

4.7.1 Quantitative approach

The data analysis for quantitative survey methodology consisted of the construct and concrete validity tests along with reliability tests. Descriptive analysis, SEM, frequency analysis, sensitivity analysis, reliability analysis, CFA and path coefficient illuminated results in the quantitative component of data analysis. Quantitative approach included data screening paramount to the detection of problems that might exert an influence on the credibility of the collected data. This precaution is necessary to circumvent the occurrence of errors that have a negative impact of the findings and their interpretation. The location of missing values in the data, univariate outliers, multivariate outliers, and assumption evaluation are aspects of data screening in this case, while skewness and kurtosis demonstrate results to ensure credibility of the research effort,

4.7.1.1 Reliability and validity

Both reliability and validity create a foundation for the credibility of research and suggest to the audience that the findings apply to theory and practice. Reliability refers to the replicability of research instruments and processes. It is established by determining whether existing methods and processes can be replicated by other researchers at any other point in time. Validity refers to the extent of similarity between current and future results should the research methods and processes be

replicated (Creswell, 2013). The implementation of analyses to test reliability and validity ensures the credibility of the results and their interpretation.

To establish the reliability and ensure a high level of replicability, this study explained and described all research methods and instruments. In addition, a copy of the blank questionnaire and a list of interview questions have been provided (see Appendices A and B). Therefore, it is assumed that these instruments and methodologies can be replicated easily, indicating high reliability. The researcher used Cronbach's alpha analysis as a measure of internal consistency of the questionnaire survey (Bryman, 2012). This analytical instrument gauges the internal consistency of the sample's answers. The Cronbach's alpha's value ranges from 0 to 1, with the optimal value being .7, and thus, studies have suggested that a value above this threshold indicates reliability (Ursachi, Horodnic, & Zait, 2015). The necessity to include this analysis rests on the significance of including measures to ensure internal consistency.

Moreover, the creation of conditions for proper validity depends on the consistency of research and methodology. The chosen mixed-methods design is anticipated to enhance validity. The identification of a specific sample and sample size contributes to increased validity. The instrument is also designed to respect validity because the survey has content validity by measuring relevant contents, predictive/concurrent validity by correlating findings with other information and construct validity by measuring hypothetical constructs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These measures are expected to strengthen the research project to produce useful practical and theoretical implications that help stakeholders in academic and business decision-making.

4.7.1.2 Descriptive analysis

The findings, using estimates and calculations, were further analysed through descriptive statistics. The correlation between eWOM and purchase intention was estimated through analysis of the answers to survey questions with a five-point Likert scale (Jin, Annie, & Phua, 2014; Shirkhodaie & Rastgoo-deylami, 2016). The descriptive analysis was conducted for the demographic characteristics of participants by calculating frequency and percentage distribution (Ismail et al., 2012). The

descriptive measures of frequency and response, mean and standard deviation were calculated for the remaining interval-scaled independent and dependent variables in the survey. The descriptive analysis fostered a more meaningful and statistically significant evaluation of the data. The validity and reliability of descriptive statistics depend on frequency analysis and sensitivity analysis.

Frequency analysis represents a method to identify the sum of occurrences of all answers chosen by the sample. Ong and Puteh (2017) confirmed that frequency analysis serves as an important feature of descriptive statistics. This approach is used in this study to present an overview of the demographic profile, including age, gender and education of the sample. This component of analysis offers the audience relevant information about participants who shape the academic narrative about eWOM, its motivations, gratifications and outcomes of purchase intentions.

In a similar vein, sensitivity analysis offers a detailed view of descriptive statistics. Sensitivity analysis refers to a method that gauges how uncertainty in the model output relates to various sources of uncertainty in the model input (Abreu & Ralha, 2018). Sensitivity analysis considers that each measure might result in a ranking based on importance of a factor. In this research, sensitivity analysis has a significant role because minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation are subjected to evaluation. Skewness and kurtosis are also important measures that enable this study to screen the data to ensure credibility of analyses and interpretation, on which multiple stakeholder groups depend.

4.7.1.3 Data screening

As explained previously, data screening is crucial for establishing the credibility of the data and findings. This research employs outlier elimination and standardised z-scores to maximise the benefits of data screening as a research tool. Data screening has value for researchers conducting multivariate analyses, while its use for social and business sciences has been indispensable (Abubakar, Saidin, & Ahmi, 2017). This technique is important to the research process because data screening provides for the identification and elimination of errors before they might exert an influence on the findings. For this reason, survey research depends on effective data screening.

Part of this methodology, outlier removal, is undertaken to prevent errors from shaping the narrative. Specifically, outliers are data points that demonstrate a significant divergence from other points in the data. The presence of outliers has a substantial effect on the findings that might receive a different interpretation that shapes the narrative (Svabova & Durica, 2019). Outlier elimination remains a controversial approach to data analysis, so certain tests are relevant to determine whether this procedure is necessary. The purity of data and results is of paramount importance for the identification of factual insights into a research question. For the purpose of effective outlier removal, data screening includes performing standardised z-score tests.

Moreover, standardised z-score tests have value for the research because they assist in the identification of univariate outliers. A standardised z-score focuses on the evaluation of the dataset with the help of frequency distributions that consider mound-shaped and symmetric characteristics. On the basis of these qualities, a z-score test assumes that important information is absent in the mean and variance (Mowbray, Fox-Wasylyshyn, & El-Masri, 2019). The application of these tests improves data screening because this procedure creates a foundation for deleting irrelevant information.

4.7.1.4 Structural equation modelling

This study employs the SEM approach to explore relationships among variables. However, the main justification for the SEM method rests on its successful use in marketing and business studies. For example, Pan, Chew, Cheah, Wong and Tan (2015) used SEM in the form of partial least squares to address research questions pertaining to mobile marketing. The importance of the SEM approach is also evident in the research by Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle and Mena (2012), who revealed that marketing research benefits from this modelling for the reason of the non-normal data presence, “small sample sizes, and the formative measurement of latent variables” (p. 420). In this study, the reasons pertain to latent variables because this study includes multiple factors in its focus to understand relationships between multiple eWOM-related concepts. In a similar vein, Hackl and Westlund (2000) agreed that the demands of validity lay a foundation for structural measurement models to address latent variables in customer satisfaction management. This

evidence is sufficient to emphasise the applicability of the SEM approach in studies related to management and marketing.

The SEM approach was applied to establish the causal links among the variables. SEM is a set of the statistical techniques used to measure and analyse the relationships among observed and latent variables. This approach is a widely used data analysis method in social and behavioural disciplines (May, Arancibia, Behrendt, & Adams, 2019). The objective of the current research was to identify the correlation between eWOM exposures and purchase intentions, so the application of SEM to the quantitative data analysis was necessary to establish validity, reliability, and causality of the findings (Zurriaga-Carda, Kageyama, & Akai, 2016). The research questions were focused on the examination of the effects that the study variables had on eWOM, and whether it led to the purchase intention. The structural model referred to the relationships among latent variables and their degree of correlation (calculated as path coefficients). For data analysis rigidity, SEM allowed testing of theoretical concepts by combining factor analysis and regression analysis (Briz-Ponce, Pereira, Carvalho, Juanes-Méndez, & García-Peñalvo, 2017; Zurriaga-Carda et al., 2016). The effect of the latent variables of self-enhancement, social comparison, helping others, knowledge enhancement, social interaction and entertainment on eWOM and the impact on purchase intentions were estimated using CFA. The goodness-of-fit of the model would be measured by five indicators: Chi-square test (CMIN), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Bentler and Bonnet’s normed fit index (NFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Anderson, Knight, Pookulangara, & Josiam, 2014; Shi, Lee, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2019). Assumption of normality of data and detection of outliers is addressed. The SPSS software was used for the analysis of the data gathered through online survey. It is commonly used in a wide range of studies of large-scale survey data (Heck, Thomas, & Tabata, 2013). The statistical and descriptive data, including tabulated reports and charts, means and frequencies and other data, were processed through SPSS.

4.7.1.5 Confirmatory factor analysis

Further, CFA has been deemed valuable to the research effort. This analytical approach builds on the results of the reliability analysis and SEM alike by addressing the latent construct structure affected by latent variables. C. L. Wang and Ahmed

(2004) claimed the method to be one of the commonest to address the hypothesised factor structure. CFA has been successfully used in studies focused on business and marketing research to test measurement and structural models (Fuzy, Habidin, & Ong, 2018). Convergent validity and discriminant validity also undergo testing with the help of the CFA. Consequently, the present research depends on the application of the CFA to ensure both validity and reliability.

4.7.1.6 Path coefficient analysis

Ultimately, the analytical component of the research applies path coefficient analysis reliance on R-square value. This method is indispensable to the inspection of variance levels that independent variable possess. The value of this analysis is between 0 and 1; a high value points to the level of impact that the model receives (Owusu, 2017). This analysis serves as an important feature of the procedures because hypotheses can be tested for the study to gain insights into relationships between variables, including eWOM, motivations, gratifications and purchase intentions.

4.7.2 Qualitative approach

Conversely, the qualitative component depends on few analytical tools, as thematic analysis is the only analytical approach to the investigation of data collected in interviews. The analysis of this rich and abundant information focuses on the need to gain a holistic account that provides an extensive and complex view of a research area (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thematic analysis offers a ground for the exploration of past experiences and the formulation of these experiences' interpretation that depends on the unique views of interviewees recruited for the study.

4.7.2.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a systematic process of analysing large pieces of texts. Creswell and Clark (2018) called this method a typical approach to analytical procedures in a qualitative component of a mixed-methods study. This technique implies identifying the keywords to search for the most relevant information followed by refining the search data into categories. The researcher organises the data in categories to identify common patterns, the themes. The results of thematic analysis

are typically reported in the form of a narrative presented with headings and subheadings that correspond to research objectives and questions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The qualitative data gathered through interviews in the presented study were analysed using thematic analysis. The recorded and translated to English language interviews were coded for common themes and patterns (Topcu & Duygun, 2015). To ensure reliability and validity of the identified common themes, the coded patterns were compared with the original research questions to identify the presence or absence of correlation between eWOM and consumption behaviour among Saudi students. The coded themes presented an opportunity for deeper understanding of patterns and relationships between eWOM and purchase intentions (Hajli, 2015; Mortazavi, Esfidani, & Barzoki, 2014). The themes identified in the process of coding were compared with the interview findings for consistency and tendencies.

The researcher applied and followed Braun and Clarke's (2006)'s thematic analysis approach. The following steps were integrated as the researcher analysed the interviews: (1) "familiarised oneself with the data; (2) generated initial codes; (3) searched for themes; (4) reviewed the themes; (5) defined and named the themes; and the (6) production of the whole report" (p. 87). The manual coding used the data content and included phases one to five. After the fifth phase, the researcher uploaded the file using Microsoft Office Package to assist in the methodical coding of the data and establish the significance hierarchy of themes based on the number of references assigned per study theme.

The requirements of a thematic analysis included the importance to prevent data saturation. For this reason, the previously limited number of participants in the qualitative sampling approach served as a restricting force to ensure that data saturation was complete but not excessive (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015). Thematic analysis is a core approach to the exploration of the data abundant in information with the purpose of detecting implicit and explicit insights alike (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). Therefore, this approach has efficacy in terms of analysing large blocks of information that reflect participants' beliefs about eWOM, its antecedents and purchase intentions.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are important to qualitative and quantitative components of a mixed-methods study because recruited individuals might have concerns about personal outcomes that study participation might bring into their lives. For this reason, university and professional standards were consulted prior to beginning the project (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, the researcher obtained ethics approval from the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC), application ID (HRE17-191). Moreover, the study research area, research questions and research aims were formulated with the understanding that the researcher has a moral obligation to provide stakeholder groups with a high-quality study beneficial to their experiences and interactions with each other.

Additionally, ethical considerations refer to the principles and values that are defined by social research community to prevent academic offences and to enhance researchers' integrity (Bryman, 2012). The study required data collection from human participants, so several ethical principles were observed. To ensure respect for the rights and freedoms of study participants, the principle of privacy and the right not to participate were integral to the data collection process (Gray, 2004). Participation was voluntary and participants were able to withdraw at any time. The risks for psychological stress, offence or discrimination were identified and minimised before the data gathering process began. The promise of confidentiality was honoured by not collecting any personally identified information about study participants. The purpose and scope of the study was thoroughly explained to both groups of participants. Informed consent to participate and share the information was obtained prior to data collection. Researcher bias was addressed by ensuring no personal opinion of the researcher affected the flow or data sharing and analysis in the process of conducting the research. Interviewees reviewed the recorded answers for accuracy to ensure absence of researcher bias in data management.

4.9 Chapter Summary

The methodology chapter reviewed, discussed and detailed the methods applied to collect and analyse the primary data. The research uses the pragmatic worldview that aims to provide stakeholders with practical recommendations

necessary to make a positive change. Additionally, pragmatism ensures the efficacy of combining a quantitative component with a qualitative one. The sampling method considers that the number of ecommerce users rises in the KSA and targets the population most interested in social media. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with 10 participants, whose answers were recorded, translated and verified for accuracy and absence of researcher bias in interpretation. Quantitative data were obtained from 576 participants completing an online survey. To meet the objectives of the current research, all study participants were university students in the KSA, who were the most active users of social media and represented the target population of the study exploring the correlation between eWOM and purchase intention variables. The nonprobability convenience sampling technique was applied. Instruments were modified from extant studies to apply the knowledge of previous research to new academic pursuits. Data analysis strategies included descriptive analysis, SEM, frequency analysis, sensitivity analysis, reliability analysis, CFA and path coefficient for survey and thematic analysis for interviews. Potential ethical concerns, including informed consent, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and researcher bias were addressed.

Chapter 5: Results and Findings

The First Phase: Quantitative Findings

5.1 Introduction

The study underpins the assessment of the impact of eWOM on purchase intentions affected by different factors. This chapter evaluates the data collected following the methodology prescribed in Chapter 4. The analysis comprises detailed statistical assessment of the data gathered using survey questionnaires from 576 participants. Consequently, this chapter contains descriptive analysis focused on descriptive statistics and frequency analysis. IBM SPSS AMOVS version 24 was used, which is instrumental to analyses performance to ensure the process quality. Specifically, the software encompasses a wide range of techniques that include descriptive analysis, sensitivity analysis, reliability analysis and SEM, along with CFA. This chapter further includes the assessment of reliability and validity of the factors and latent constructs used in the study. This section comprises descriptions of the path model and assessment, as well as the hypotheses summary and chapter summary.

5.2 Procedure

The initial step of the procedure entailed the task of data recoding from qualitative options to transform information into numeric form. Moreover, the second step determined the missing data, but few observations revealed missing elements in the data. Therefore, the missing elements underwent interpolation based on the nearby points. The procedure continued with frequency analysis and descriptive statistics. The next step involved data screening that mainly identified and excluded outliers. Outliers may affect the credibility of research, so their removal upon identification and assessment contributed to the generation of useful results. Simultaneously, research states that outlier exclusion does not affect the quality of academic evidence (Bakker & Wicherts, 2014; Svabova & Durica, 2019). The outlier removal preceded the stage of data reliability assessment and the evaluation of the factors of variables as latent constructs aligned accordingly to achieve higher values of reliability. Further,

data analysis included the testing of data validity that recognised both convergent and discriminant validity. The quantitative data analysis concluded with the CFA model, its fitness and path assessment indispensable to classifying hypotheses as accepted or rejected.

5.3 Descriptive Analysis

5.3.1 Frequency analysis

Frequency analysis represents a type of descriptive statistical method that depicts the sum of occurrences of all responses selected by study participants (Ong & Puteh, 2017). Similarly, this study employed the test of frequency analysis to present the overall outcomes of the survey. The results of frequency analysis are illustrated in Table 5.1, which address demographic details of the sample: participants' age, gender and education level. The understanding of the sample's demographic profile offers a complete overview of participants shaping the narrative about the use of eWOM and its effect on purchase intentions.

Table 5.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of participants

Variable	Category	Frequency (n = 576)	Percent (%)
Age	18–25	336	58.3
	26–45	240	41.7
Gender	Male	251	43.6
	Female	325	56.4
Level of education	Bachelor's degree	502	87.2
	Master's degree	67	11.6
	PhD degree	7	1.2

Table 5.1 highlights the breakdown of study participants based on age groups. The results demonstrate that 58.3% of respondents belonged to the age group of 18–25 years, whereas 41.7% of participants were aged 26–45 years. This observation is influential for results and discussion because social media use may differ among generations. Previous studies support the assumption that younger and older

generations have demonstrated differences in social media use. For example, Sheldon, Antony and Ware (2021) found that older adults tend to use Facebook and Instagram to replace real-life interactions with virtual communication that alleviates loneliness and isolation, while millennials do not show the same results; they pursue other motivations and gratifications. Moreover, the Statistical Analysis and Decision Support Center (2020) indeed reported that 98.4% male Saudis and 97.6% female Saudis in the age group of 15–35 years demonstrate active engagement in social media for personal and/or professional purposes.

Second, Table 5.1 illuminates the composition of the sample by gender differences. The participation of male respondents in the survey was 43.6%, while the participation of female respondents was 56.4%. Gender differences might exert an influence on the interactions among eWOM, motivators and gratifications. Kebah, Raju and Osman (2019) unveiled that Saudi female customers are more likely to shop online than Saudi male customers. Therefore, a higher prevalence of female respondents in the study arguably has value for marketing professionals whose target audiences are female customers.

Third, Table 5.1 details the sample composition based on the level of education. Responses collected during the survey have revealed that 87.2% of the respondents had bachelor's degrees, whereas 11.6% of the respondents had master's degrees, with 1.2% of respondents holding a PhD. Research claims that higher education predisposes customers to prefer offline shopping to online shopping (Jaller & Pahwa, 2020), so it is important to understand how the Saudi sample, which consists exclusively of graduates, views practices related to online shopping.

Further, frequency analysis entails an overview of different social media platforms that Saudi customers employ in their daily life. Table 5.2 demonstrates how many individuals from the sample use Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube and WhatsApp as some of the most popular social media networks recognised by the Saudi population. As internet and mobile penetration is almost at 100% in the KSA (Kraidy, 2021), it is likely that Saudi users would continue relying on multiple social media platforms that connect them with family, friends, peers and corporate or brand representatives.

Table 5.2 Social media use by social media platform

Variable	Category	Frequency (n = 576)	Percent (%)
Instagram	No	137	23.8
	Yes	439	76.2
Twitter	No	119	20.7
	Yes	457	79.3
Snapchat	No	74	12.8
	Yes	502	87.2
YouTube	No	177	30.7
	Yes	399	69.3
WhatsApp	No	544	94.4
	Yes	32	5.6

To obtain more insightful information regarding the general use of social media by the respondents, the researcher asked them to respond to the frequency of use. In this concern, multiple social media platforms have potential for marketing specialists, including approaches that use eWOM. Table 5.2 shows that Instagram was popular among 76.2% of respondents, while 23.8% of the sample made no use of Instagram. In the case of Twitter, 79.3% confirmed their active engagement with this social network, but 20.7% of respondents indicated that they did not use Twitter. Moreover, 87.2% of respondents stated that they used Snapchat, while 12.8% made no use of the platform. Frequency analysis similarly addresses participants' preferences in terms of YouTube use; 69.3% of respondents were revealed to be active users, with 30.7% of the sample taking no interest in the video-sharing platform. Finally, the analysis demonstrates that the vast majority of participants did not use WhatsApp for online shopping because only 5.6% of study participants recognised their active use of the platform, whereas 94.4% of the sample were non-users (see Figure 5.1). This implies that the participants of the study are addicted to the frequent use of social media to some extent.

Thus, academic evidence confirms that Instagram (Alghamdi & Bogari, 2020; Catheline, 2019; S. Lee & Kim, 2020), Twitter (Pressgrove, McKeever, & Jang, 2018), Snapchat (Alghamdi & Bogari, 2020), YouTube (ALNefaie, Khan, & Muthaly, 2019) and WhatsApp (Weichbroth & Baj-Rogowska, 2019) might exert an influence on marketing and eWOM. The results of this frequency analysis related to social media use and specific platforms have potential to guide marketing professionals in the KSA who encounter the need to select the most suitable social networking websites for eWOM campaigns with the purpose of elevating purchase intentions.

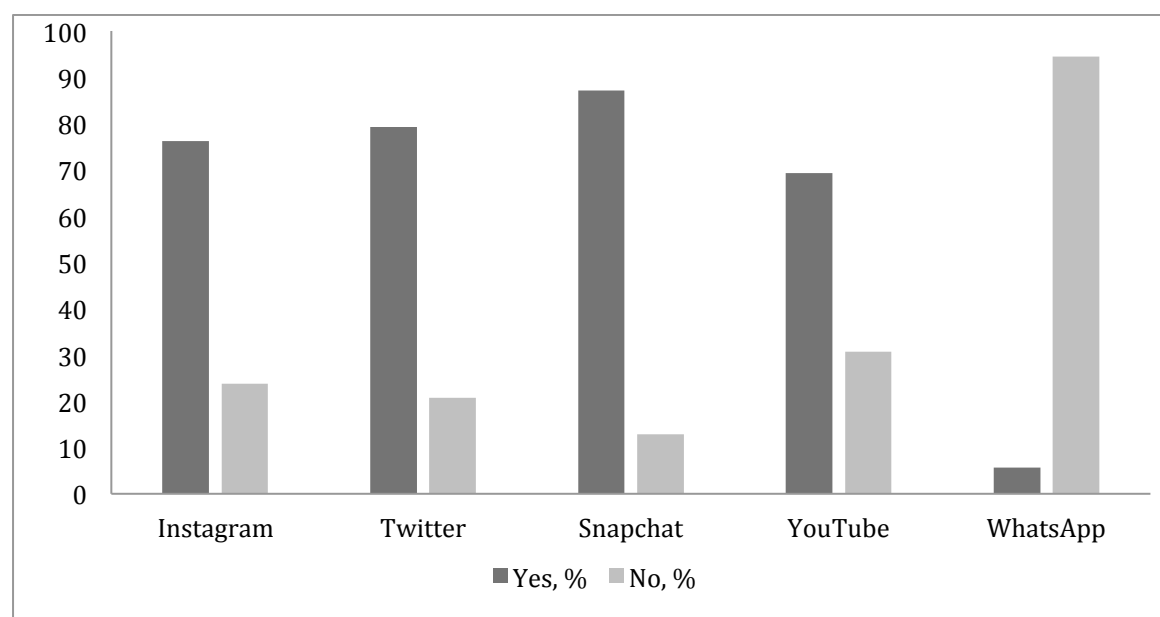


Figure 5.1. Social media platform usage

Apart from different platforms, users might vary in their time spent on social media. Time spent on social networking websites might predetermine the readiness of individuals to engage in eWOM interactions. Studies suggest that social media intensity might indeed affect attitudes towards eWOM (Gvili & Levy, 2018; Thoumrungroje, 2014). Table 5.3 details how the sample identifies their time spent on social networking websites.

Table 5.3 Time spent using social networks

Variable	Category	Frequency (n = 576)	Percent (%)
Time spent on social media	Several times per week	12	2.1
	Once per day	39	6.8
	Several times per day	525	91.1

As evident from Table 5.3, the vast majority of the sample—91.1% of respondents—use social network platforms several times per day, whereas 6.8% frequent social media once per day and 2.1% reported that they use social networks several times per week. These findings might provide marketing practitioners with an understanding of habitual use of social media that related to the readiness to read and create eWOM messages.

In a similar vein, frequency analysis targets questions about industry categories that respondents view as interesting and compelling for them to explore eWOM messages about an industry. Table 5.4 identifies the most popular and least popular industry categories. Practitioners might find the results of this analysis useful because some industries might not demonstrate great outcomes for eWOM engagement owing to weak interest in specific industries' representation on social media.

Table 5.4 Industry categories

Variable	Category*	Frequency (n = 576)	Percent (%)
Industry categories	Automotive	24	4.2
	Consumer electronics	93	16.1
	Fashion	176	30.6
	Food and beverage	119	20.7
	Hospitality and tourism	18	3.1
	Media and	18	3.1

entertainment		
Beauty and personal care	77	13.4
Sport	30	5.2
Telecommunication	17	3.0
Others	4	0.7

*(The category list was adapted from Pasternak's study, 2017)

Table 5.4 highlights that in the context of product and depiction of the brand, the respondents were asked to clarify their stance on the representation of a particular product or brand. It was found that 30.6% considered the product/brand to be fashion, 20.7% considered food and beverage, 16.1% answered as consumer electronics, 13.4% believed it to be beauty and personal care, 5.2% answered as sport and 4.2% answered as automotive. Moreover, there were other categories; therefore, it was revealed that 3.1% regarded the product to be media and entertainment, 3.1% answered as hospitality and tourism and 3.0% believed it to be telecommunications (see Figure 5.2). These findings are beneficial to academics and practitioners because the statistics provide an insight into the current tendencies in management and marketing by identifying industries that have the greatest impact on consumers.

In terms of industry popularity, secondary research also offers insights into these trends. For example, Hsiao, Wang, Wang and Kao (2020) acknowledged the enormous changes that the fashion industry sustained because of social media, as consumers pay attention to trends shaped by social media communication and brand pages. Additionally, Klassen et al. (2018) identified another popular industry—foods and beverages—as particularly influential on young adults. This information coincides with the understanding that the vast majority of Saudi young people use social networking websites.

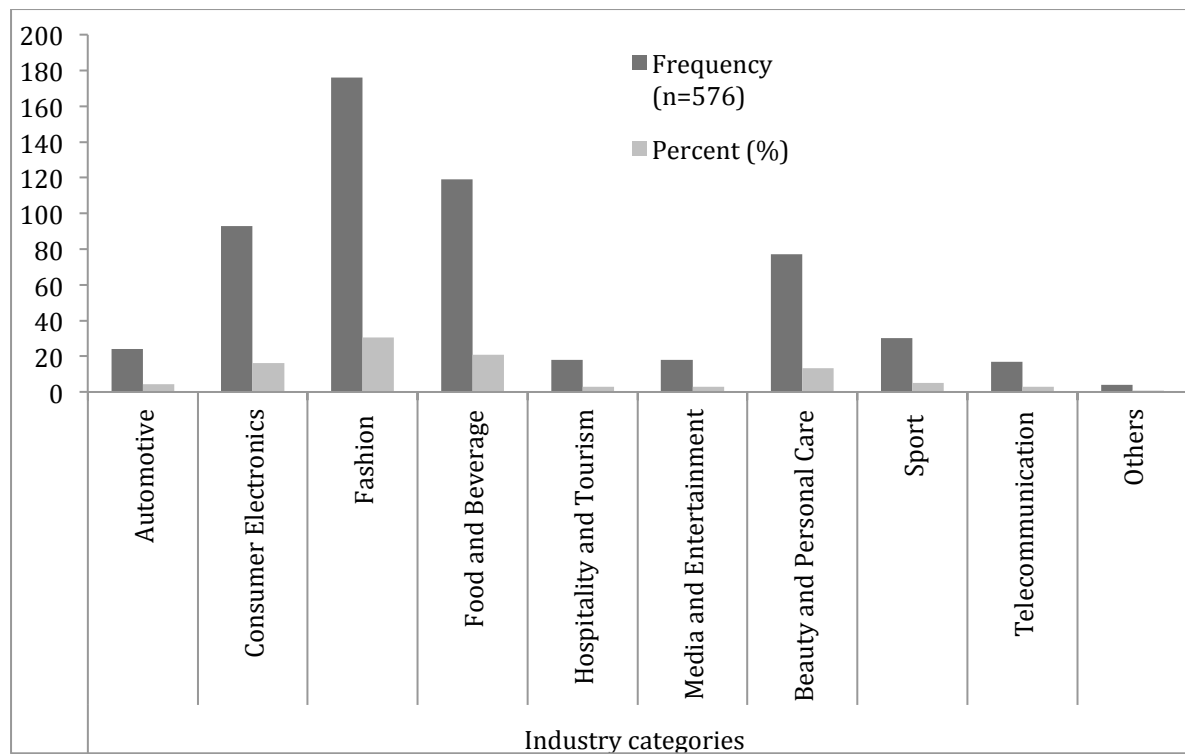


Figure 5.2. Industry categories

5.3.2 Descriptive statistics and sensitivity analysis

This section pertains to descriptive statistics that summarise the raw data in a meaningful and interpretative form. Primarily, four components of minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation underwent assessment. The minimum and maximum investigate the range of the data; for instance, the minimum value is reported in the indicator along with the maximum value. Conversely, the mean value assesses the average value of the variable; for example, if the mean value is closer to 5, this suggests that respondents strongly agree with the item. Last, the standard deviation reflects the dispersion of the dataset that evaluates the level of spread observed in the data (Mishra et al., 2019). Further, the sensitivity analysis is conducted through incorporating skewness and kurtosis. The skewness and kurtosis serve as methods for testing the normal distribution of the data, for which the acceptable range of skewness lies between -3.5 and $+3.5$ for indicating the normally distributed data (C. Wang, Su, & Weiss, 2018), while the kurtosis acceptable range for indicating normally distributed data is between -10 and $+10$ (Chan, 2003; Mantalos, 2011). Table 5.5 (see Appendix C) offers comprehensive statistics that include the identified relevant measures.

Therefore, Table 5.5 provides statistical information about results related to variables, including self-enhancement, social comparison, helping others, knowledge enhancement, social interaction, entrainment, eWOM and purchase intentions. The mean for self-enhancement is above 3 for most items, which confirms that the average response for self-enhancement was “agree”. However, this response is expected to deviate from “strongly disagree” because the standard deviation for all items of self-enhancement is around 1. Considering the normality of data, all items in the variable self-enhancement follow normal distribution because skewness and kurtosis are in range of ± 3.5 .

Moreover, analysis of the social comparison variable determined that the average response for most items was neutral because the mean value obtained is around 3. The variable is expected to deviate from “strongly disagree” because the standard deviation is determined to be around 1 for all items. Similarly, the value of skewness and kurtosis determined that the data are normally distributed because none of the values exceed the threshold of ± 3.5 .

Additionally, the analysis demonstrates that the mean value for helping others shows that average responses for the variable are inclined towards “agree” because most of the items have mean values around 4. This variable is expected to deviate from “strongly disagree” because this measure for most of the items of helping others is around 1. The values of skewness and kurtosis are also in range, which emphasises the normal distribution of data.

As for gratification factors, the mean values for most of the items in knowledge enhancement are around 4. This result suggests that the average responses are inclined towards “agree”, while they are expected to deviate from “strongly disagree” because standard deviation for most items is around 1. The data possesses the qualities of normal distribution because skewness and kurtosis values remain in the designated range.

This statistical analysis also requires exploration of the measures focusing on social interaction as a variable. Specifically, average responses related to items of social interaction gravitate towards “agree”, while the variable is expected to deviate from “strongly disagree” because the standard deviation is computed to be around 1

for most of the items. Moreover, the data follow normal distribution patterns because skewness and kurtosis values are in range.

The mean value for the items of entertainment is around 4, which suggests that the average responses are inclined towards “agree”. Simultaneously, the items related to the variable are expected to deviate from “strongly disagree”. The values of skewness and kurtosis are also in range because the measures correspond with ± 3.5 limitations.

The analysis also targets eWOM as a variable that affects purchase intentions. The average mean measure for these items nears the indicator of 3, which signifies neutral average responses. The responses are anticipated to deviate from “strongly disagree” entries. Kurtosis and skewness values fall within the limits designated for these measures.

Last, the mean values for the items of purchase intention are around 4. This indicator demonstrates that average responses are inclined towards “agree”. This result creates prerequisites for expecting responses to deviate from “strongly disagree”. The data also receive normal distribution because the values for skewness and kurtosis remain in the relevant range.

5.3.3 Data screening

The preliminary examination of the data entails the application of the outlier test to prepare the data for analysis. Outliers refer to data points that differ significantly from the other data entries. The term is reflected in the values that have divergent characteristics that distinguish them from the rest of the data. Svabova and Durica (2019) stated that outliers might influence dramatically the outcome of statistical analyses. Specific tests ensure that outliers undergo proper removal because extreme values might prevent research findings from being accurate. In particular, outliers might distort results that subsequently lead to erroneous conclusions and practical and theoretical implications. Hence, it is critical to detect and remove outliers to circumvent issues in statistical analyses. The consequences of having outliers in the dataset include misleading interpretations (Liu et al., 2018; Shahjaman, Kumar, & Mollah, 2019). In the initial data screening, univariate outliers were determined with the help of standardised z-scores.

Specifically, a standardised z-score refers to a test applied with the dataset characterised by frequency distributions and mound-shaped and symmetric qualities. The underlying assumption of z-scores is that neither mean nor variance contains any valuable information (Mowbray et al., 2019). Feigelson and Babu (2012) unveiled that the range of standardised z-score is -3 to $+3$. Based on the values obtained from standardised z-scores, this study identified and removed 79 univariate outliers. Conversely, the Mahalanobis distance test detected multivariate outliers in the research. Feigelson and Babu (2012) suggested that the threshold for Mahalanobis distance is 0.001, whereas the values below this threshold must be removed. Therefore, the test guided data screening and resulted in the elimination of 39 more multivariate outliers.

The removal of 112 outliers led to the final sample size reaching 464 respondents. The next step regarding data screening involved a normality assessment that targeted the data generated by 464 participants. Kurtosis ensured the dataset normality assessment that targeted multivariate value and critical value. As shown in Table 5.6, the multivariate value is 95.332, while the critical value is determined to reach 42.244. Read and Cressie (2012) revealed that the threshold for critical value is 75. Thus, both multivariate value and critical value confirm the normality of data, including its normal distribution. The measures taken to ensure quality data screening improve the quality of the data to strengthen the value of this study to practitioners and theorists alike.

Table 5.6 Multivariate normality

Variable	min	max	skew	cr	Kurtosis	Cr
PI1	1	5	-0.406	-3.547	-0.673	-2.939
PI2	1	5	-0.497	-4.346	-0.603	-2.635
PI3	1	5	-0.735	-6.418	0.117	0.511
EWOM1	1	5	-0.708	-6.187	-0.121	-0.530

EWOM2	1	5	-0.509	-4.449	-0.529	-2.310
EWOM3	1	5	-0.706	-6.167	-0.287	-1.255
EWOM4	1	5	-0.315	-2.756	-0.870	-3.801
EWOM5	1	5	-0.134	-1.168	-1.048	-4.577
EWOM6	1	5	-0.409	-3.571	-0.708	-3.091
EWOM7	1	5	-0.341	-2.976	-0.890	-3.889
EWOM8	1	5	0.018	0.159	-1.020	-4.456
ET1	1	5	-0.974	-8.508	0.316	1.380
ET2	1	5	-0.827	-7.222	-0.447	-1.951
ET3	1	5	-0.960	-8.384	0.122	0.535
ET4	1	5	-0.842	-7.354	-0.077	-0.335
SI1	1	5	-0.484	-4.224	-0.375	-1.640
SI2	1	5	-0.517	-4.520	-0.524	-2.290
SI3	1	5	-0.593	-5.178	-0.378	-1.652
KE1	1	5	-0.878	-7.675	-0.354	-1.545
KE2	1	5	-1.025	-8.960	-0.223	-0.975
KE3	1	5	-1.078	-9.416	-0.112	-0.490
KE4	1	5	-0.927	-8.102	-0.238	-1.040
HO5	1	5	-1.235	-10.787	0.450	1.965
HO4	1	5	-1.255	-10.965	0.478	2.087
HO3	1	5	-0.924	-8.074	0.373	1.629
HO2	1	5	-0.879	-7.678	-0.049	-0.214
HO1	1	5	-1.090	-9.524	0.165	0.721
SC1	1	5	-0.498	-4.348	-0.350	-1.528
SC2	1	5	-0.689	-6.019	-0.252	-1.103
SC3	1	5	-0.259	-2.262	-0.815	-3.558
SC4	1	5	-0.137	-1.197	-0.957	-4.180
SE1	1	5	-0.473	-4.135	-0.626	-2.733
SE2	1	5	-0.264	-2.310	-0.872	-3.808
SE3	1	5	0.033	0.292	-0.906	-3.960
Multivariate					195.332	42.244

5.3.4 Reliability analysis

The reliability analysis tests the internal consistency of the variables. Cronbach's alpha represents an instrument to assess reliability, as demonstrated for every variable in Table 5.7. This study considers that the acceptable Cronbach's alpha value is 0.7 (Roberts-Lombard, 2010; Valentijn et al., 2019). The main function of Cronbach's alpha is the evaluation of the internal consistency of responses when it is critical for responses to be highly consistent internally, as reflected in the dataset reliability. The Cronbach's alpha value ranges from 0 to 1; a value close to 1 signifies that the variables are internally consistent. Poor consistency in responses might alert researchers to an issue in questionnaire surveys. Therefore, Table 5.7 illustrates that self-enhancement, social comparison, helping others, knowledge enhancement, social interaction, entertainment, eWOM and purchase intention have Cronbach's alpha values of 0.790, 0.781, 0.856, 0.821, 0.768, 0.806, 0.893 and 0.797, respectively. All values are well above the criterion of 0.7, which indicates that variables possess high reliability and, consequently, eligibility for further analysis.

Table 5.7 Reliability test

Variables	Cronbach's alpha
Self-enhancement	0.790
Social comparison	0.781
Helping others	0.856
Knowledge enhancement	0.821
Social interaction	0.768
Entertainment	0.806
eWOM	0.893
Purchase intention	0.797

5.4 Structural Equation Modelling

As one of the principal research techniques, SEM represents a collection of statistical methods that entails the application of various model types that address variable interactions. SEM is mainly used for estimating the causal association of variables, while the confirmatory approach enables this method and requires the researcher to formulate hypotheses. For example, Y. Kim, Weaver and Mcleary (1996) illustrated the suitability of SEM in the evaluation of relationships between information sources and motivation factors. Martínez-López, Gázquez-Abad and Sousa (2013) stated that the modelling type must depend on the rigour of research that requires scholars to employ effective measures, like the inclusion of CFA, which is also part of the current thesis.

Moreover, the use of SEM contributes to reliability and validity testing that enhances results and discussions. This approach has gained wide acceptance in marketing and consumer behaviour research (Hirschmann & Swoboda, 2017; Hoyle, 2012; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 2000). In the multilevel research effort, SEM is combined with CFA and the path coefficient analysis. The research questions focused on the examination of the effect that the study variables had on eWOM, and whether it led to purchase intention. The identified study variables that might exert an influence on eWOM include motivations—self-enhancement, social comparison and helping others—and gratifications: knowledge enhancement, social interaction and entertainment (see Figure 5.1).

Y. Kim et al. (1996) employed this model to address motivations among tourists in marketing research, while Momen, Sultana and Haque (2020) used the approach to understand how educational brands could use social media to improve brand image and brand equity. The structural model referred to the relationships among latent variables and their degree of correlation (calculated as path coefficients). Path coefficients relate to self-enhancement, social comparison, helping others, knowledge enhancement, social interaction and entertainment to eWOM, while eWOM itself is related to purchase intentions through this approach. Thus, SEM has demonstrated its substantial ability to test hypotheses in marketing and management research.

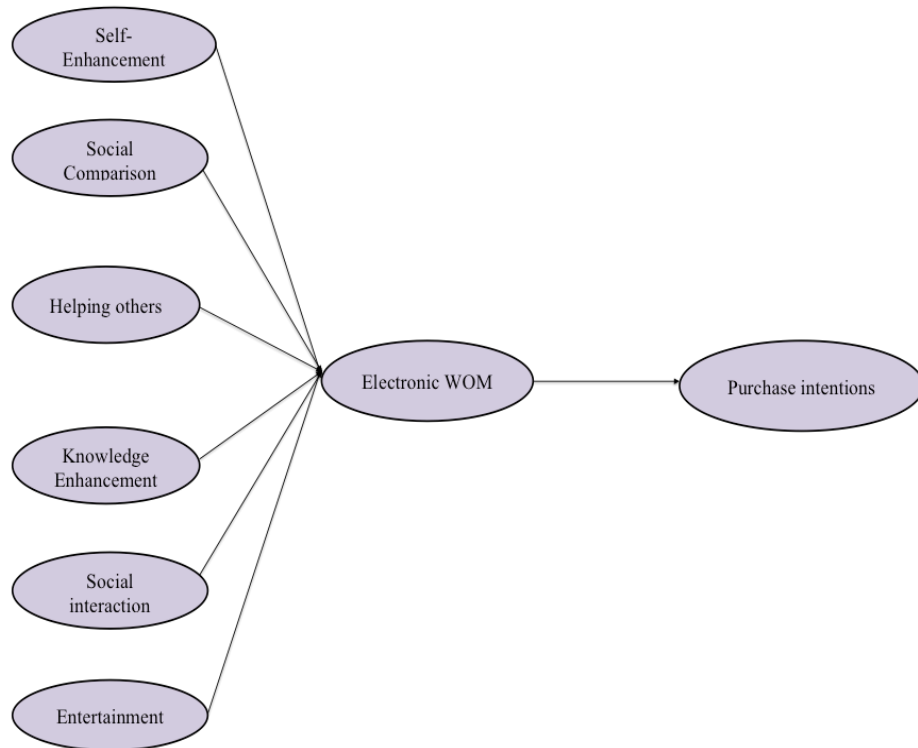


Figure 5.3. Research model

5.4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis

The data normality analysis and internal consistency assessment ensured by Cronbach's alpha sets the foundation for further research with CFA. This approach is regarded as a vital aspect of SEM that develops understanding regarding the latent construct structure and a thoughtful assessment of latent variables and constructs. This precaution is achieved by the evaluation of the latent constructs' factor loading. The CFA-enabled factor assessment determines associations among latent variables and constructs (Brown & Moore, 2012). The initial step of CFA is factor loading determined with the help of standardised regression weights. The measurement of factor loading provides the variance extracted from the variable (Garson, 2012). Further, the threshold for standardised regression weights or outer loadings is .4, in which the values of the outer loadings must be above .4 (Ahmed, Rahim, Alabdullah, & Thottoli, 2019; Avkiran, 2018). The outer loading is applied on the indicators of the

constructs at which point it investigates the absolute contribution as per their respective constructs.

Related to the CFA, Table 5.8 indicates that the minimum value for standardised regression weights is determined to be .466, which is well above the threshold of .4. Additionally, composite reliability tests variable reliability, while standards suggest that the criteria for determining reliability from the composite reliability is .7, in which the values must be above .7 (Fahmi et al., 2021; Putra, Asbari, Purwanto, Novitasari, & Santoso, 2021). The composite reliability is similar to the Cronbach's alpha that assesses the internal consistency of responses and is applied through the SPSS SEM-AMOUS. Therefore, Table 5.8 confirms that the minimum value for composite reliability is .778, as identified for the purchase intention variable, which is well above the threshold of .7. This result confirms the reliability of latent constructs (see Figure 5.4). Therefore, the variables employed in the study possess reliability and are eligible for further analysis.

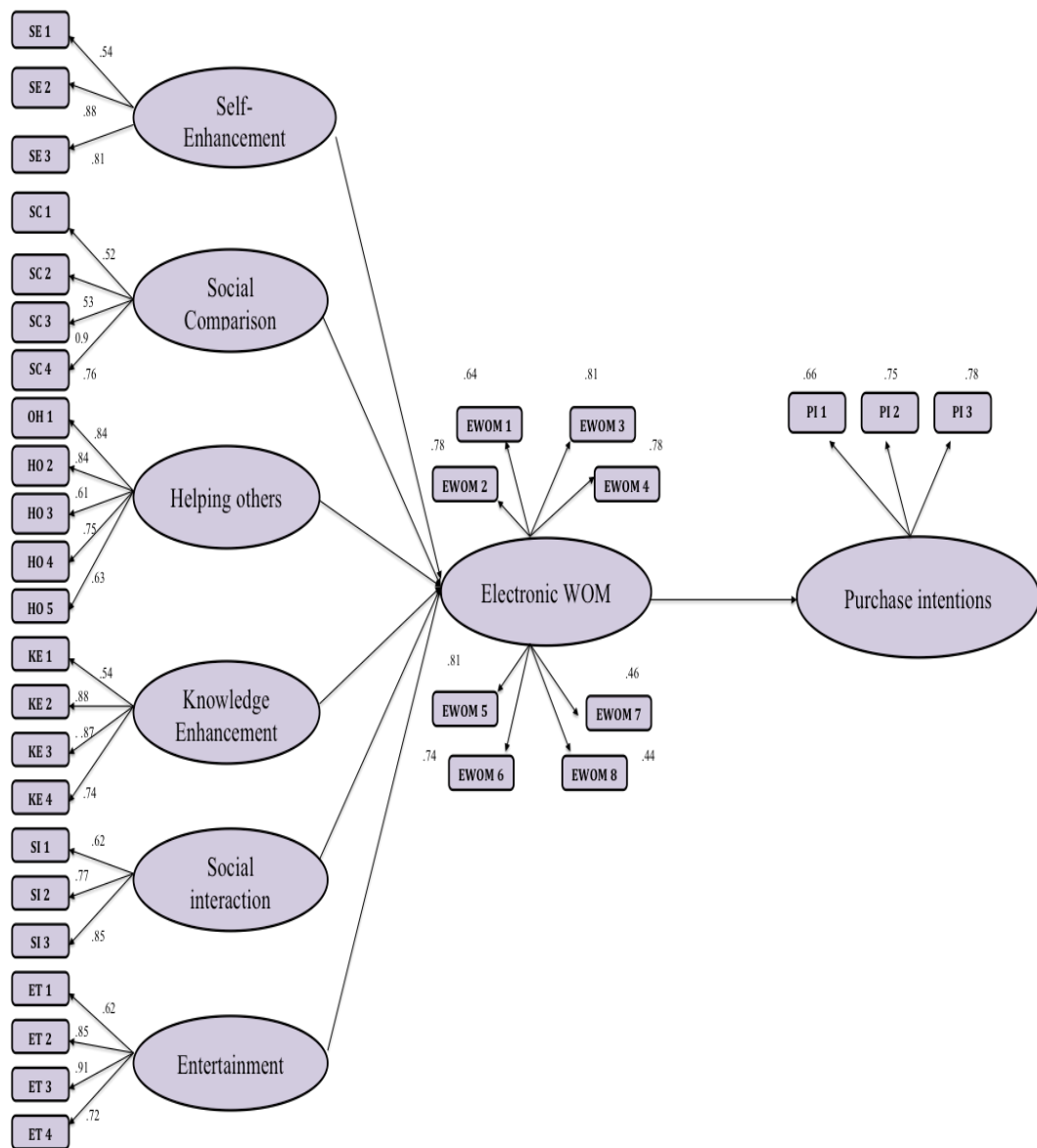


Figure 5.4. Structural model

Convergent validity is another aspect of the CFA that has been tested with the help of average variance extracted (AVE), with its threshold being .5 (Afthanorhan, 2013). Table 5.8 offers information about the minimum value for AVE being .504, which is just above the threshold of .5. This result confirms that the constructs possess convergent validity and are eligible for further analysis.

Table 5.8 CFA—validity and reliability

Variables	Indicators	Standardised regression weights	CR	AVE
Self-enhancement	SE1	.542	.801	.582
	SE2	.886		
	SE3	.816		
Social comparison	SC1	.529	.795	.501
	SC2	.536		
	SC3	.900		
	SC4	.767		
Helping others	HO1	.845	.865	.565
	HO2	.843		
	HO3	.610		
	HO4	.754		
	HO5	.633		
Knowledge enhancement	KE1	.549	.853	.599
	KE2	.883		
	KE3	.875		
	KE4	.740		
Social interaction	SI1	.622	.796	.570
	SI2	.773		
	SI3	.851		
Entertainment	ET1	.629	.866	.623
	ET2	.857		
	ET3	.912		
	ET4	.728		
eWOM	EWOM1	.642	.886	.504
	EWOM2	.784		
	EWOM3	.815		
	EWOM4	.781		
	EWOM5	.810		
	EWOM6	.740		
	EWOM7	.466		

	EWOM8	.448		
Purchase intention	PI1	.662	.778	.540
	PI2	.751		
	PI3	.788		

The CFA also includes the exploration of discriminant validity that might affect research results. Thus, Table 5.9 depicts findings for the discriminant validity of the variables, as calculated with the help of the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The main purpose of discriminant validity is to evaluate the distinctiveness among the variables when it is crucial for variables to have a certain degree of difference. Moreover, it is vital that the variables demonstrate no high correlations with each other. Notably, .9 is the threshold for the HTMT ratio, while the values must not exceed the threshold for the purpose of fulfilling the discriminant validity standards (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019). Therefore, Table 5.9 shows that all values are below the threshold of .9, which confirms the discriminant validity of the variables.

Table 5.9 Discriminant validity

	SE	SC	HO	KE	SI	ET	eWOM
SE							
SC	.579						
HO	.324	.409					
KE	.141	.191	.511				
SI	.437	.331	.538	.434			
ET	.264	.298	.390	.515	.496		
EWOM	.376	.336	.360	.263	.672	.352	
PI	.221	.318	.460	.650	.546	.525	.408

The application of CFA must have strong justification to ensure its suitability for the present research. Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010) found that CFA and its appropriateness for a study must undergo evaluation with the help of at least four tests of model fitness. The model fitness test's applicability helps in examining whether or not the model is acceptable and valid, as well as identifying how well the data fits into the model. The sample size alongside the complexity of the model influences the fitness of the model. Hence, the goodness-of-fit in the model is

investigated for determining if the data fits the model (Dagnino & Cinici, 2016; Khine, 2013). Goodness of the model was investigated with the help of five goodness-of-fit indices: Chi-square (CMIN) to the degree of freedom (DF), CFI, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), Bentler and Bonnet’s NFI and the RMSEA. CFI, TLI and RMSEA represent the three widely used model fit indices (Xia & Yang, 2019). The threshold value for CMIN/DF is 3, while values below 5 are also acceptable (Blunch, 2012). CFI should preferably be higher than .9, but values above .8 are also acceptable (Blunch, 2012). Therefore, the CFI is acceptable when the value is calculated to be .892 because the index is above .8. As for TLI and NFI, the values should be above .9, with values above .8 being acceptable (Byrne, 2010). Further, the RMSEA value should be below .08 (Ahmad, Jye, Zulkifli, & Bujang, 2020; Kamis, Hussain, Kob, Yunus, & Rahim, 2018). The values presented in Table 5.10 indicate that the model used is statistically fit because CMIN/DF ($2.86 < 3$), CFI ($.89 > .8$), TLI ($.876 > .8$), NFI ($.844 > .8$) and RMSEA ($.064 < .08$) abide by the mentioned criteria.

Table 5.10 Model fitness metrics

Model fitness metrics	
CMIN/DF	2.896
CFI	.892
TLI	.876
NFI	.844
RMSEA	.064

5.4.2 Path coefficient analysis

5.4.2.1 Path model

Table 5.11 Model summary

R-square	
EWOM	34.6%
PI	12.3%

The coefficient of determination or R-square value mainly investigates the level of variance captured by independent variables. The R-square is the representation of a latent variable's collective effect on a dependent variable. This value refers to the number of dependents predicted or explained by independent variables. The value of R-square ranges from 0 to 1; a higher value indicates a substantial influence on the model (Owusu, 2017). Table 5.11 reflects the model summary results in which two models are involved with eWOM and purchase intention. The variables linked to eWOM include self-enhancement, social comparison, helping others, knowledge enhancement, social interaction and entertainment. The value of the eWOM path model is computed as 34.60% and indicates that the mentioned variables are able to predict or explain eWOM by 34.60%. The second model connects the PI and eWOM influence, which leads the path value model for eWOM to be computed at 12.30%. This value suggests that eWOM is able to predict or explain the variance of purchase intention by 12.30%.

5.4.2.2 Path Analysis

Table 5.12: Path coefficient analysis

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
eWOM	<---	SE	.089**	.042	2.122	.034
eWOM	<---	SC	.053**	.025	2.145	.032
eWOM	<---	HO	-.005	.032	-0.162	.871
eWOM	<---	KE	.005	.033	0.150	.881
eWOM	<---	ET	.048	.032	1.506	.132
eWOM	<---	SI	.308***	.049	6.333	***
Purchase intention	<---	eWOM	.446***	.086	5.171	***

*** depicting significance at 1%; ** depicting significance at 5%; * depicting significance at 10%

Moreover, the path coefficient analysis illuminates the influence of variables on eWOM and the latter's subsequent influence on purchase intention. The results of the path coefficient analysis shown in Table 5.12 are instrumental to hypotheses evaluation. Path analysis is important to research because its inclusion in data analysis

ensures the exploration of different relationships among variables (Lleras, 2005). The discussion of the path coefficient analysis is relevant to Section 5.5 focused on hypothesis testing.

5.5 Hypotheses Testing

Table 5.13 Hypotheses assessment

H.no	Hypotheses	Significance and coefficient	Results
H1	Self-enhancement motivation is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchase	Coefficient = 0.089; p -value = 0.034	Accepted
H2	Social comparison motivation is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchase	Coefficient = 0.053; p -value = 0.032	Accepted
H3	Helping others motivation is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchase	Coefficient = -0.005; p -value = 0.871	Rejected
H4	Knowledge enhancement gratification is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchase	Coefficient = 0.005; p -value = 0.881	Rejected
H5	Entertainment gratification is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchase	Coefficient = 0.048; p -value = 0.132	Rejected
H6	Social interaction gratification is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchase	Coefficient = 0.308; p -value = 0.000	Accepted
H7	eWOM is positively related to purchase intentions	Coefficient = 0.446; p -value = 0.000	Accepted

The next step involves conducting the path coefficient analysis with the establishment of the reliability and validity testing on the dataset. The purpose behind the path analysis is to evaluate the influence of the determinants on eWOM and examine the effect of eWOM on purchase intention. The path analysis also enables the testing of the hypotheses, developed at an early stage of research. The results of the path analysis are provided in Table 5.12. Moreover, Table 5.13 overviews the seven hypotheses developed and assessed based on coefficient value and p -value. The coefficient value functions to determine whether it has a positive effect or negative effect, whereas the p -value identifies whether results are significant or insignificant.

The first hypothesis (H1) relates to the self-enhancement motivation that demonstrates a positive relationship with the intention to use eWOM for online purchases. The results show that the p -value of self-enhancement is .034 while the coefficient value is .089, which leads to the acceptance of the first hypothesis ($b = .089, p = .034$), **(H1 = accepted)**.

Moreover, the second hypothesis (H2) reveals that the motivation of social comparison is positively related to the intention to use eWOM for online purchase. The path coefficient analysis demonstrates that the coefficient value is computed as .053, which signifies that it has a positive influence, while the p -value is determined to be .032, which illustrates that the results are significant. Therefore, this result leads towards the acceptance of the second hypothesis ($b = .053, p = .032$), **(H2 = accepted)**.

The third hypothesis (H3) relates to the motivation of helping others that has a positive association with the intention to use eWOM for online purchase. The results of path coefficient analysis are evaluated for assessing the hypothesis, in which the coefficient value is computed as $-.005$, which signifies that it has a negative influence. However, the p -value is determined to be .871 and is above the threshold that points at the insignificance of the finding. Hence, these computations lead towards the rejection of the third hypothesis ($b = -.005, p = .871$), **(H3 = rejected)**.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) postulated that the gratification of knowledge enhancement is positively related to the intention to use eWOM for online purchase. Using the results on the path coefficient analysis, the coefficient value is computed as

.005, which signifies that it has a positive influence, while the p -value is determined to be .881 and is above the threshold that illustrates that the results are insignificant. Therefore, this leads in the rejection of the fourth hypothesis ($b = .005$, $p = .881$), **(H4 = rejected)**.

The fifth hypothesis (H5) of the study suggests that the entertainment gratification is positively related to the intention to use eWOM for online purchase. The results of the path coefficient analysis comprise the coefficient value as .048, which signifies that it has a positive influence, and the p -value as 0.132 and is above the threshold, which points at the insignificance of the finding. Therefore, this information gives a foundation for the rejection of the fifth hypothesis ($b = .048$, $p = .132$), **(H5 = rejected)**.

The sixth hypothesis (H6) suggests that the gratification of social interaction is positively related to the intention to use eWOM for online purchase. The path coefficient analysis revealed the p -value to be .000, which means that social interaction has a significant influence on eWOM in terms of online purchases online, while the coefficient value is computed as .308. The coefficient value being positive illustrates that the social interaction gratification has a positive and significant influence on eWOM for purchasing products; therefore, the sixth hypothesis is accepted ($b = 0.308$, $p < .01$), **(H6 = accepted)**.

The seventh hypothesis (H7) is concerned with eWOM having a significant and positive influence on purchasing intention. The path coefficient analysis reveals the p -value to be 0.000, which signifies that eWOM has a substantial influence on purchasing intention. In addition, the coefficient value is computed to be .446, which means that eWOM has a positive influence on purchasing intention. It is clear that the seventh hypothesis is accepted ($b = 0.446$, $p < .01$) **(H7 = accepted)**.

5.6 Quantitative Summary

This chapter addresses the quantitative findings using the data gathered from survey questionnaires filled out by 576 participants. The data are indispensable to statistical analyses that reveal results from a numeric perspective. The first technique applied to the dataset is the frequency analysis; the purpose of the technique is to

evaluate the demographic profile of respondents. It was determined that the majority of participants were female, with the dominant age group being 18–25 years. The second technique employed to analyse the dataset is the descriptive statistics and sensitivity analysis. The descriptive statistics addressed the indicators of the variables that highlighted the mean, range and standard deviation. Enabled by the use of skewness and kurtosis, the sensitivity analysis evaluated the data distribution in terms of normality. Further, the data screening determined multivariate outliers with the support of Mahalanobis distance that led to the exclusion of 39 multivariate outliers. Univariate outliers were identified with the help of the standardised z-score that resulted in the removal of 79 univariate outliers. The total number of eliminated outliers was 112, with the final sample size being 464.

The next step involved the performance of the reliability analysis, in which Cronbach's alpha was incorporated for evaluating the variable reliability. All variables of the study were found to be reliable. The data normality assessment, outlier removal and data reliability assessment prepared the study for the next step of the main test incorporation. In particular, SEM involved two main assessments: CFA and the path coefficient analysis. CFA evaluated reliability and validity, with positive results that enabled the performance of further analysis. The path analysis relied on two models; the first model focused eWOM influenced by self-enhancement, social comparison, helping others, knowledge enhancement, social interaction and entertainment. The path analysis employed the *p*-value and revealed that self-enhancement, social comparison and social interaction have a significant positive influence on eWOM, whereas helping others, knowledge enhancement and entertainment were found to have an insignificant influence on eWOM. Additionally, the second model of the path analysis related to purchase intention affected by eWOM. The results showed that eWOM has a significant positive influence on consumer purchasing intention. Hence, eWOM has the potential to increase customer purchasing intentions.

The Second Phase: Qualitative Findings

5.7 Introduction

This chapter provides extensive details on the qualitative component of the study. Participants shared their insights about their eWOM experiences through in-depth interviews, so this chapter has the power to discuss motivations and gratifications that shape communication patterns of Saudi customers, as well as their openness to forming purchase intentions based on these communications. MS Word was used to complete the qualitative component of the research study. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the results on self-enhancement, social comparison and helping others as motivation factors. Similarly, the section details the gratification factors distinguished into knowledge enhancement, social interaction and entertainment. Participants' views on the role of eWOM in the formation of purchase intentions is also explored in the results.

5.8 Demographic Profile of Participants

University students of KSA participated in the qualitative phase of the current research. Table 5.14 demonstrates the gender distribution of participants; as evident, the equal number of participants of both genders has the potential to give a rounded overview of how males and females approach eWOM alongside its motivators and gratifications. Table 5.15 examines age distribution of participants in the interview stage. As for the educational level, Table 5.16 offers sufficient details, demonstrating that all participants have some higher education, with most achieving a postgraduate level.

Table 5.14: Gender distribution of participants in the qualitative phase

Gender	Participants (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	5	50
Female	5	50
	10	100

Table 5.15 Age distribution of participants in the qualitative phase

Age	Participants (N)	Percentage (%)
18–24	4	40
25–45	6	60
	10	100

Table 5.16 Educational level distribution of participants in the qualitative phase

Educational level	Participants (N)	Percentage (%)
University	4	40
Postgraduate	6	60
	10	100

5.9 Thematic Analysis Results

The thematic analysis of the study entails the identification of themes relevant to research questions about eWOM engagement. The contributions of the interviewees recruited for the research have provided abundant textual data with insights into their attitudes to eWOM from the perspective of eWOM generation that entails both creating and receiving information about companies and products. Furthermore, themes detected in the analysis are aligned with motivation and gratification factors featured in the conceptual framework.

The theme of emotional experiences in eWOM engagement is tied to the motivational factor of self-enhancement. As another element of the thematic analysis, distinguishing oneself from peers corresponds with the theme of social comparison. As for the themes of rewarding companies and helping other customers, they undergo consolidation into the theme and motivational factor of helping others. Similarly, the themes of corporate representation, social media influencers, and the conflicts between trust and mistrust rest on the single gratification of knowledge enhancement. eWOM generators' positive attitudes, eWOM content's attractive features and innovation in eWOM content represent themes that emerge in the focus on

entertainment as a gratification. Constructive criticism and spiteful reviews assume the role of the qualitative insight and theme that informs the factor of social interactions, while knowledge of product quality similarly emerges in interviews about the social aspect of eWOM engagement. Finally, the challenges of developing trust become a theme relevant to purchase intentions as an important variable and theme for the research. The following overview of the results discusses these themes, retaining the terminology of the conceptual framework which mentions motivations, gratifications and purchase intentions because the variables are effective for classifying the newly uncovered insights into people's behaviour on social media.

5.10 Motivation Factors

From the analysis of the interviews, the researcher found that self-enhancement, social comparison and helping others were the key motivators for Saudi customers to engage in eWOM of both types. Participants indicated that the three factors indeed play a significant role in consumers' eWOM or online engagement that could affect purchase intentions. In this section, the researcher discusses the themes uncovered from the interviews.

5.10.1 Theme 1: Experiencing self-enhancement upon product engagement

The collectivism typical of KSA requires new research efforts to explore and understand how Saudi customers approach the self-need of self-enhancement in similar settings with eWOM purposes. The participants recruited for this study contributed significantly to the exploration of self-enhancement in Saudi customers' engagement in eWOM. According to the interviewed participants, satisfaction from contributing to the general knowledge of product quality enables Saudi customers to experience self-enhancement. For example, Female 2 revealed:

I made a positive comment about a food product ... This experience made me feel happier because it gave me self-satisfaction. (Female 2)

Moreover, most participants explained that their process of self-enhancement through social media and eWOM is associated with the generation of powerful positive emotions that amplify the self-enhancement satisfaction. Female 1 mentioned the following feelings as they engage through eWOM: "happiness, joy, excitement,

positivity, feeling comfortable and looking forward to the best”. Meanwhile, Male 8 referred to having positive feelings related to “entertainment and knowledge” gained from social media. For these statements, the abundance of positive feelings that customers experience while communicating about products enables them to express more information about products that please or displease them. Most participants identified negative feelings that they receive in the process of internet communication.

5.10.1.1 Subtheme 1: Developing fear of encountering the negative side of online use and engagement

Following the first theme, most participants identified having negative feelings in the process of accessing or using internet communication. The negative feelings shared by participants in their experiences signify that barriers are indeed present when Saudi customers want to generate eWOM but are hesitant to begin or write a message for fear of experiencing the negative side of internet use. For example, Female 4 expressed her frustration in the continued misuse or abuse of the internet by the people:

When I watch negative meaningful content such as a response from a person or expressions of defamation, I really feel sad and angry at the same time when I am exposed to such situations. (Female 4)

The exposure to negative comments and product reviews may then prevent Saudi customers from using the opportunity to discuss brands and products with honesty because some individuals experience a barrier to their self-enhancement. Negative feelings should be considered when companies incite eWOM campaigns. Additionally, Male 9 explained:

I regret when I write and send a message that I cannot delete.

The feelings of regret for posting a negative product review or comment may become an obstacle to using eWOM as a result of the self-need for self-enhancement. Simultaneously, the ability of participants to distinguish between their positive and negative experiences on the internet related to communications and interactions about products signifies that Saudi customers are aware of the different platforms and

settings that may contribute to their greater experience of self-enhancement or lesser experiences of this self-need.

5.10.1.2 Subtheme 2: Feeling of self-enhancement as other consumers listen to feedback

Importantly, self-enhancement occurs when customers provide other potential buyers with negative feedback because the authority of the former increases their self-enhancement efforts. As they share negative comments, they influence others' decision-making, which then increases the level of self-importance owing to the helpful information they provide to dissuade customers from buying a product of poor quality. Negative eWOM is also related self-enhancement because users can see that their beliefs and experiences have the power to affect others when their negative feedback assists other people in avoiding the products and services of poor quality. For example, Female 2 recounted during the interview:

I made a comment intended to explain how a commercial product works and educate users to be aware of it and stop using it. This made me feel happy to help others and keep them safe.

The experience of Female 2 demonstrates the power of posting negative reviews that lead to the feelings of happiness because of the user's connection with others; they are able to help and assist in bringing safety and awareness to others. Self-enhancement occurs because people believe that their input shapes marketing as a safer practice. In other words, companies cannot embrace their authoritative approaches to the product presentation because customers join in conversations to self-enhance with the help of their own authority and experience with a product. Female 3 shared a similar experience, while elaborating on the rewarding nature of communicating with other customers who had paid attention to her negative feedback:

I was excited when I received a response from a woman to my tweet that mentioned my bad experience with a clothing website. She told me that she was grateful because she was about to order a dress but backed away after reading my negative comment about the quality of the fabrics.

The qualitative results show that self-enhancement indeed presents an opportunity for customers who would like to share their experience to gain positive

emotions from the communication experience. Moreover, negative eWOM provides customers with an opportunity to embrace self-enhancement. Although some participants identified negative feelings occurring in cases of reading or creating negative eWOM, this phenomenon still provides instruments for self-enhancement, especially in the cases when customers receive feedback from other potential buyers whose purchase intentions they changed with their negative reviews. These qualitative insights provide more information on the concept of self-enhancement that has value in eWOM and marketing.

The overall theme has two sides in the interviewed textual data obtained from participants. Saudi customers acknowledge self-satisfaction that they gain from writing positive reviews because these reviews contribute to a sense of comfort associated with many other feelings ranging from joy to excitement. Negative eWOM can also be a source of these positive self-enhancing outcomes because some customers feel satisfaction when they post negative reviews about products that failed to meet their expectations. This issue occurs especially in situations when eWOM creators gain feedback from other people who base their purchasing decisions on these creators' reviews. In this way, self-enhancement interacts with other variables and themes: helping others and social interactions, confirming the importance of communication for such a culturally interconnected and collectivist country as KSA.

Conversely, self-enhancement and self-satisfaction from eWOM engagement are contrasted by negative emotions that customers may experience. As some participants revealed, they may feel regret and guilt after posting negative reviews. Specifically, Saudi customers may worry that their negative feedback may be hurtful for stakeholders, causing them to feel guilty because of their morality. This information is likely to help marketing specialists and companies to understand how to discourage customers from writing particularly hurtful negative reviews.

5.10.2 Theme 2: Believing in the active role of social comparison on eWOM.

Further, from the analysis, another theme related to social comparison was formed in relation to marketing and other business professionals because eWOM enables customers to distinguish themselves from others. Participants in this study, for the most part, acknowledged that social comparison belonged to the factors shaping

their eWOM behaviours. Most participants in the in-depth interviews admitted to having knowledge that distinguishes them from their family members, friends and peers. This knowledge ensures that participants have confidence in their understanding of product quality and functioning, which in turn encourages them to share valuable insights. For example, Male 6 explained:

Living abroad for several years helped me develop many skills necessary for expressing opinions and sharing my experiences to make them heard.

In the case of Male 6, the participant perceives his ability to distinguish his experiences from others as an advantage gained from the cultural experiences that helped him to improve his communication skills. The confidence gained through his travel experiences and stay in a foreign country translates into his ability to create eWOM that sets him apart from other users writing product reviews. Cultural experiences also add to the ability of customers to voice their opinions through eWOM with the pursuit of social comparison.

The professional or academic awareness of customers is another a foundation for the users to pursue social comparison. Some users rely on their authority in professional and academic fields to provide insight into a situation related to brands and products. Thus, Male 7 explains how social comparison encourages him to join in the conversation on social media:

When the discussion poorly covers a subject of my academic specialisation and my practical experience, I try to counter weaknesses in other speakers' narratives.

This quotation determines the importance for some customers to distinguish their expertise because their professional identities had provided them with authoritative information that they can share in eWOM. The concept of professional and academic identity elucidates the motivator of social comparison because people with proper credentials have the power to enter the conversation with positive or negative feedback owing to their exceptional knowledge related to the product or brand. Apart from professional and academic experiences, customers have connoisseur identities related to practical situations.

The theme of social comparison touches upon the need of customers to make practical decisions and share their knowledge of practical products. Female 5 admitted to having more experience in some fields than her family and friends:

Friends and family often ask me about things related to cosmetic products, restaurants and sweets because I know more about these products and related brands.

The comprehensive knowledge of Female 5 of practical products that she uses on a regular basis distinguishes her from her peers and provides her with an instrument to discuss her experiences and assessments online. Social comparison enables individuals to prove useful to others, simultaneously shaping the decision-making process of such customers to share more. When they establish themselves as connoisseurs of a certain product, product type, brand or field, these reviewers earn the trust of their peers and employ their position to share more information in other eWOM messages.

Additionally, one participant offered information on an experience when his product advice was not followed, but the failure of the product to perform well persuaded his audience that his expertise was trustworthy. Male 9 shared:

I gave a recommendation about a product, but my family didn't consider my advice. However, when they faced a problem, they turned to my solution.

This scenario demonstrates the lack of trust that may be present in communications. Although some product reviews may not be heeded in the beginning, future experiences of potential buyers may encourage them to return to the feedback that they had heard or read to make the final decision. In this situation, social comparison may be helpful because the more experience and the more credentials an eWOM creator has, the more likely they are to influence the audience. Social comparison serves as a motivator for users to point out why they have the authority to speak about concepts, ideas, products and brands.

The qualitative results of the study support the extant knowledge on the necessity of self-esteem for people to pursue social comparison through eWOM messages. Saudi customers have shared that their unique experiences in the world,

like particular knowledge of technologies or a prolonged stay aboard, prepare them to generate eWOM that would differentiate them from others and give them sufficient credibility to speak about products and services. Apart from a general area of expertise and cultural experiences, Saudi customers value their professional and knowledge backgrounds because they also provide messages with credibility and, subsequently, enhance their online reviews that are likely to be taken seriously because they have the command of effective communication and relevant knowledge. The demographic profile illustrates that most interviewees have higher education, which emphasises the importance of education for this audience to pursue social comparison.

Despite the country's gravitation towards collectivism, participants appreciate opportunities to demonstrate their difference from others based on their background, profession and education. Although collectivist cultures are characterised by homogeneity, online reviewers of services and products prefer to act as advisors who might have more knowledge than the public; this approach includes their communication with family, friends, peers and strangers.

5.10.3 Theme 3: Sharing feedback to help others

Most participants in the qualitative segment of the study shared their experiences with helping others through eWOM. Most interviewees could recall at least a single instance when their eWOM motivations rested on the need to help others, including other customers and companies that create products that they had bought and used. For example, Female 1 recalled her experience with being compensated for a mistake a fast-food restaurant made:

The compensation was twice the price of the product I ordered, which motivated me to post a positive comment about their professionalism when dealing with clients and listening to their opinions.

Similarly, Female 2 assessed positively the ability of a company to compensate for its product, as she recounted her experience with an online shop distributing cosmetics and health products:

The strategies of offering free products as compensation, rewarding with discounts or returning the amount paid makes me grateful to them and increases my loyalty. This also encourages me to share my positive experiences with others.

The cases of Female 1 and Female 2 demonstrate that companies have the power to communicate with customers in such a way that customers would want to reciprocate for their recognition of a mistake and provision of incentives to continue the use of the company's products or services. In other words, companies can use their ability to communicate with dissatisfied customers to remedy the situation and encourage customers to inform others of their positive experience. Even an initially unpleasant situation can become a reason for positive eWOM because customers are often ready to show their appreciation of the correct customer support. Therefore, helping others includes the drive of people to help companies that make an effort to guarantee satisfactory experiences for people.

Moreover, Saudi customers realise that their contribution on their experiences with products, brands and companies assists others in making the right decision. Male 6 explained that his possession of knowledge about a specific product or service leads him to share this comprehensive information with others because he can provide them with the insights that they are missing in their purchase decision-making process. Specifically, Male 6 stated:

I share my experience on social media to save people's time and money.

In other words, the case of Male 6 in the theme of helping others demonstrates that people understand that their reviews help potential buyers determine which product would suit them the best. The explanation by Male 6 shows that he recognises his role in helping customers save time and finances when choosing a product or service. The same participant acknowledged his need to help other people by dissuading them from buying a product of poor quality:

I gave the product the one star to warn people so they would not face the same bad experience.

The interconnectedness among Saudi customers ensures that people understand that their eWOM has the power to help people buy products of good quality and avoid products of poor quality. Moreover, some participants find different

aspects of companies and brands important to discuss in their eWOM. Male 7 shared that he strives to provide other customers with information on different dimensions of his experiences, including “product quality, price, product benefits and customer service”. The extensive approach for generating positive or negative eWOM to employ altruistic intentions that would expose future buyers to narratives of customer experience means that companies should be aware of the diverse factors that encourage users to create reviews and comments based on characteristics that tend to shape purchase and post-purchase experiences.

In the similar vein, Male 10 shared that the fast processes in a company always make him share his positive experiences to help both the company that makes an effort to present customers with exceptional service and the potential clientele to learn about the quality and punctuality of service:

I tried a service from the Ministry of Justice that previously required me to personally attend. However, this service is now available online. It was a wonderful experience that deserved praising.

This elaboration demonstrates the appreciation by some customers of efforts made by organisations and companies to facilitate the service process. When customers understand that organisations invest new resources and innovations to save their time, they often have positive feelings that they would like to share to show gratitude for the changes made by an organisation. In this case, the organisation was a governmental body, which shows that eWOM and helping others extend to non-commercial agencies.

Simultaneously, some customers focus merely on product quality to create helpful feedback because Female 3 explained that product quality was the main reason for her to create social media posts to share her experiences. Therefore, the theme of eWOM altruism or helping others has several dimensions because, first, companies and other customers can benefit from such eWOM, and second, different factors affect the contents of an eWOM message. These factors may include the preparedness of a company to develop new solutions and introduce innovations that facilitate customers’ experiences, their attention to detail and their readiness to

remedy negative experiences, as well as price, product advantages and the quality of customer service.

Using the qualitative findings on altruism, it is possible to make several analytical conclusions. To begin, most participants are aware of their need to help others when they create eWOM. Customers realise that their feedback can help other potential buyers and can either harm or assist companies in growing their audience of paying customers. Further, a more specific and new finding from this phase pertains to the ability of some businesses to use customers' negative experiences to transform them into positive eWOM. As evidence volunteered by some participants suggests, customers who reach out to businesses with criticisms and who witness businesses correcting the mistake tend to post positive reviews. In other words, when companies are quick enough to amend a mistake, customers' appreciation finds an outlet in their positive eWOM engagement. This finding is significant because normally customers' negative experiences encourage them to post negative reviews, but the insight stresses the importance for the company to act quickly and surely to remedy the situation and win back the dissatisfied customer's favour.

Simultaneously, some customers are more oriented towards helping other people rather than businesses who offer products and services. Such eWOM generators believe that their experiences are helpful for others to avoid spending money and time on products of low quality. This positive attitude to the needs of others is underlined by the collectivist nature of the country. Since Saudi customers share strong bonds with their peers, including strangers, they would like to assist them in finding the best products and in avoiding the worst ones.

5.11 Gratification Factors

The conceptual framework acknowledges that knowledge enhancement, social interaction and entertainment are the gratification factors capable of encouraging people to generate eWOM.

5.11.1 Theme 1: Using knowledge enhancement to affect purchase decisions

The in-depth interviews have shown that knowledge enhancement matters to people reading reviews. Female 1 shared that she enjoyed reading other users'

reviews because she learned about new products from others, even though in some instances she risked buying a new product without having extensive knowledge on its quality. Simultaneously, her knowledge enhancement methods were restricted because she sought credibility of eWOM found on platforms. Specifically, she preferred reviews to come from unbiased customers who had no professional connections with the company:

If the posted reviews are made by people who work for the brand, I cannot trust their reviews.

Despite the scrupulous approach to the identification of trustworthy sources, some users admitted that they trusted diverse reviewers:

I learn about products and brands from social media influencers, friends and ads on social media. (Female 3)

The statement by Female 3 demonstrates that even people hired by companies, such as influencers, can serve as credible sources of information about a product or brand. The impact of influencers is significant because Female 3 shared that she trusted these people's experiences. The interview revealed that influencers and social media friends alike were credible sources when they demonstrate a consistent awareness of a product.

The presence of information on various platforms, like YouTube and Twitter, helps customers conduct their search and confirm the consistency and credibility of the data. A consistent brand or product image contributes to the creation of consistent eWOM and the generation of a positive purchase intention. Female 3 also confirmed that the diversification of information sources helps her to make the right decision; she avoids buying a product that was recommended by a single or two individuals or online posts. Thus, customers are aware that companies may hire influencers or reviewers to create positive eWOM buzz, which incites customers to seek knowledge enhancement through different channels that may include influencers, friends, different platforms and advertisements.

Whereas some customers mistrust information given by official representatives of companies and brands, some users believe that official channels of

communication are the most trustworthy to gain the knowledge needed for the formation of a positive purchase intention. In particular, Female 5 explained:

I surf the official websites as well as social media of these companies to increase my knowledge. I consider official websites as reliable sources. (Female 5)

When companies are able to showcase their expertise in their fields and products, they earn the trust of customers willing to pursue and enhance their knowledge. In the case of Female 5, the participant explained that she resorted to official channels when she wanted to buy a product, which suggests that the quality of information indispensable for knowledge enhancement also functions as an instrument for the formation of purchase intentions and decisions. Female 5 also self-presented as a person who enjoyed increasing her knowledge with correct information and who expected companies to make an effort to provide her with official data. As for positive and negative eWOM, Female 5 explained that the presented opinions should not be only positive or negative because a mix of different opinions would serve her the best with her pursuit of knowledge that prepares her to purchase a product or service.

The sequence of knowledge enhancement matters to people engaging in eWOM. In particular, Male 7 explained that he focuses on negative reviews at first to learn about a product or service:

Sometimes I focus on negative reviews and check them to make sure whether their reviews are correct or not. I then pay attention to the published positive reviews.

After the familiarisation with negative feedback, he shifts his attention to positive reviews, which demonstrates the importance of negative eWOM that often precedes the impact of positive eWOM. The process of knowledge enhancement plays a role in the company's image because a great number of negative reviews with consistent themes might prevent eWOM readers from continuing their knowledge pursuit through positive comments.

As for the bias present in the narrative about a product, brand or company, some users prefer to avoid official channels for several reasons. Male 8 argued:

Brand communities may promote biased opinions, praise products and limit posts to positive ones only. Therefore, I search for others' posts and reviews on social media.

The statement by Male 8 illustrates that bias avoidance occurs outside brand communities. Customers aware of prejudiced opinions prefer to look for product information on other resources that have an independent platform profile. Female 1 added to this stance on bias:

Exact bias is not clear in any opinions ... Mostly, I avoid considering opinions altogether if I see them as biased and look for another source.

The approach described by Female 1 demonstrates her awareness she may not be completely certain that a positive or negative review of a product is devoid of bias. Nevertheless, when she senses that feedback is insincere, she does not use such comments to make purchasing decisions. Thus, the information provided by Male 8 and Female 1 aligns because they state that they prefer to locate sources that show no bias.

The understanding that official platforms might provide potential customers with biased information is an important result of the qualitative component of the study. Saudi customers are aware that official websites and social media pages may use the opportunity to emphasise the benefits of a commercial offering while downplaying its weaknesses:

Brand communities are not a reliable source. They may have their own goals for marketing those products and profit from these sites. (Female 2).

Therefore, the online presence of companies in official brand communities is not considered a credible source by some customers. For them, the official online presence of a company would be insufficient to gain the gratification of knowledge enhancement related to products or brands.

The theme of knowledge enhancement plays an important role for Saudi customers. They satisfy their gratification needs related to knowledge seeking that pertains to products and topics associated with them. The qualitative data have been helpful in the identification of various resources that customers consider trustworthy

or, conversely, the opposite. For example, some customers consider official websites as reliant sources, whereas other users of eWOM prefer to avoid official websites of products and brands. The former audience trusts that representatives of brands provide potential buyers with credible information on products and services because their job relies on honest informational content. The latter audience considers official representatives on official websites to lack an unprejudiced standing. This finding is crucial for future exploration of bias present in eWOM.

Other sources of knowledge enhancement include influencers, peers and advertisements. The abundance of sources that have the potential to satisfy users' needs of knowledge pursuit means that companies should be aware of different methods to reach their audiences. With Saudi participants mentioning the important role of influencers, these results should be noted with utmost attention.

5.11.2 Theme 2: Considering social interactions in purchase decisions

The qualitative component of the research project offers additional insights into the reasons why customers consider social interactions valuable enough to promote their reliance on eWOM either as its generators or consumers. Most participants in interviews acknowledged that social interactions matter to their use of social media platforms for the purposes of discussing products, services, brands and companies. Female 2 suggested:

I would enhance my enjoyment of these social interactions by sharing others' opinions on products, whether in a negative or positive manner.

In other words, some customers find value in the ability not only to create and read eWOM, but also in the ability to share such messages on social media platforms, while messages can have different types of feedback. Simultaneously, Female 2 identified an issue in being affected by companies that strive to persuade users that they should buy their products. The participant explained that social interactions are appreciated by her when she can discuss and share eWOM generated by real people rather than businesses that promote their marketing agendas.

Moreover, some customers believe that their need for social interactions in the field of products can be satisfied when users share honest feedback that can be used

for the improvement of the company. Spiteful reviews are not the type of eWOM that earns the support of some customers engaging in online communication. Female 4 stated:

I enjoy the exchange of feedback, and I support or reject reviews based on the constructive criticism that they offer.

Constructive criticism ensures that eWOM is taken seriously because many users prefer to base their purchase decisions on information provided in a rational manner. Male 6 also pointed out that mutual respect among social media users was crucial, which can be observed in the honesty when expressing an opinion and the clarity of the message. The high standard of communication is appealing to many interviewees. Thus, Male 7 explained that he prefers not to waste his time on social media platforms, but he would be open to reading reviews as long as they have signs of trustworthiness. Specifically, he shared:

When the discussion is based on high credibility and impartiality, I am ready to get acquainted with new experiences.

Therefore, the quality of products discussed should be supported by the quality of communications perpetuated on relevant social networking platforms dedicated to reviews and products discussions. Male 8 agreed that social media wastes time, with some of the content being repetitive, while credibility and trust are important to remedy his perception of product reviews. For such users, social interactions are not a strong gratification need that encourages them to engage in eWOM. However, even such resistant users can become interested in eWOM, as long as its quality meets high standards.

5.11.3 Subtheme 1: Learning about product quality through others

Product quality has special value for individuals seeking effective social interactions on social media while engaging in eWOM. Both Male 9 and Male 10 identified product quality as the main reason that would make them enjoy social interactions in the specific context. Specifically, Male 9 commented:

Product quality, the experience of others and satisfaction with the product enhance my social interactions.

Further, Male 10 added:

Having good quality products at reasonable prices contributes to my enjoyment from social experiences.

In other words, these customers require eWOM and social interactions alike because discussions of product quality lead them to understand what products they can trust and purchase. Such discussions contribute to their appreciation of social interactions online that focus on product and service conversations.

Moreover, some users connect social interactions with knowledge enhancement because they believe that relevant communication online can expose them to numerous opportunities to enrich their knowledge of a topic or product. For example, Female 1 explained that the provision of beneficial content based on personal and general experience makes her enjoy social interactions associated with eWOM:

If you provide good content and encourage good interactions around it, you see the impact of its benefits on others, which increases my enjoyment from these interactions.

This participant believed that the ability of such eWOM messages to remove ignorance and clarify issues was an important feature of social interactions. In her opinion, the elimination of ignorance is necessary because users should have the information to decide which products and services they should acquire.

In a similar vein, Female 3 elaborated that “the presence of a group of individuals interested in a specific field and active interactions” would enhance her satisfaction from social interactions. The presence of connoisseurs does not only cater to the need of users to enhance their knowledge but also increases the enjoyment that they gain from social interactions in social media. As for active interactions, this dimension of eWOM communications encourages users to invest their time in a platform and activity that engages many other people.

The qualitative phase has been revealing in its treatment of the theme of social interactions because interviewees clarified that different types of eWOM have the potential to increase their enjoyment of social interactions. The collectivist nature of

the Saudi culture also explains why customers like writing eWOM and sharing posts of others on social media. The collectivist attitude means that people enjoy sharing and exchanging ideas close to their own life philosophies.

Remarkably, the information on spiteful reviewing is a valuable finding in this phase of the study. As participants noted, they prefer social interactions targeted at the common good, which means that only beneficial eWOM, be it positive eWOM or negative eWOM, is viewed as contributing to enjoyable social interactions. In other words, spiteful eWOM repulses Saudi customers because they would like to read only those comments and messages that would help other customers make sound purchase decisions and companies to improve. The gratification of social interaction again connects with helping others because the dislike of spiteful eWOM implies the altruistic quality of interactions.

5.11.4 Theme 3: Meeting of one's entertainment gratifications

The qualitative interviews aimed to gain insights into how Saudi consumers use social media for entertainment purposes when creating or reading eWOM messages. The focus on positivity was a major insight gained from the discussion of entertainment factors with the interviewees. For example, Female 1 preferred posts that demonstrate “acceptance in society” instead of focusing on things that are “deplored and abhorred”. The eWOM messages that have negative associations and ideas would, therefore, lose their entertainment value for this participant, whereas optimistic and informative posts would fulfil this gratification factor. Female 1 stated:

Simplicity and pleasure do not contradict each other.

This explanation suggests that some users appreciate simple but effective posts that entertain them. The same participant offered additional insights into the situation by explaining that even strangers have the power to create such messages. The mistrust towards strangers can be mitigated when the entertainment factor exists. Female 3 added to this understanding with the quality of the content:

Its content is presented in an innovative way that attracts the viewer.

Attractive qualities of eWOM posts often make them entertaining for the audience. The innovation in expressing thoughts and ideas about products, brand and

companies also enhances the experience of customers. Attractive, innovative and positive features encourage participants to share eWOM messages and reviews that they find entertaining. Moreover, the general communication through comments and discussions can also be entertaining for users. Female 5 shared that even the process of reading eWOM comments helps her meet the gratification need of entertainment:

I really enjoy reading comments on social media sites in general and participating in them when they relate to a specific product.

The same participant elaborated on her behaviour pattern by stating that she enjoys reading reviews especially when she wants to buy a product. Therefore, purchase intentions are being formed when the entertainment gratification is met. Female 5 recalled that she recently wanted to purchase a shampoo, which led her read all the reviews and comments about the specific product on the website from which she wanted to buy the item. She explained that some comments were written with good humour, which entertained and encouraged her to continue engaging in eWOM. The interview of the same participant was useful because of her emphasis on the necessity for eWOM messages to possess an aesthetic component:

When a social media campaign uses beautiful music and beautiful people to present their products, I enjoy such posts. (Female 5)

This revelation indicates that the aesthetic component enhances the ability of users to meet their entertainment needs. This statement aligns with the information provided by Female 3, who also pointed out that attractive features of eWOM campaigns, posts and advertisements were crucial for establishing the entertaining value of posts, comments and reviews. Female 5 stressed that people who had been hired as models or actors for online advertisements should meet the high standards of beauty. Simultaneously, the participant elaborated that posts and comments under such marketing photos and videos should contain complete and accessible information. In other words, both style and substance matter to users, like Female 5. The enjoyment from interaction with eWOM also comes from personal experiences that users encounter in those reviews and product. Thus, Female 2 shared:

I enjoy reading reviews that support this product according to users' personal experiences.

In other words, the entertainment factor relies on personal experiences that reviewers are willing to share. Their honesty about the use of a product and service contributes to entertainment features of online feedback. The same interviewee explained that she could also recall her own experiences with products that she liked and wanted created positive reviews, which also translated into enjoyment from writing such comments and messages about a skincare brand. Therefore, not only reading eWOM is entertaining but also the creation of eWOM is enjoyable for many users. For example, Male 5 shared similar attitudes:

I really enjoy sharing my opinions and experiences with others.

Male 5 explained in his interview that he once bought a projector that pleased him with the features that functioned as the company advertised them to function, which motivated him to write a positive review that, in turn, resulted in active communication with others because potential buyers requested additional information about his experience. This attention and lively discussions contributed to the gratification need of entertainment being met. The ability to share positive content contributes to the positive feelings associated with relaxation and entertainment that customers embrace through eWOM.

In regard to entertainment, innovation is an essential analytical finding in the qualitative phase of the research. Participants emphasised that their experiences with eWOM provide them with entertainment when people, including strangers, have unique and innovative ways of communication. For a collectivist culture, innovation means that eWOM users are exposed to novel ways of describing the product and its advantages and disadvantages.

5.12 Becoming More Active and Open to Engaging In eWOM, Affecting Their Purchase Intentions

The importance of eWOM on purchase intentions means that the present research should investigate how Saudi consumers use eWOM to form their purchase intentions in regard to different products and services. The qualitative part of the study sheds a light on the purchasing behaviour mediated by reviews and messages on social media platforms.

The minimisation of negative eWOM has been a viable option for businesses to restrain the rising mistrust that occurs under the pressure of negative eWOM. The attitudes of Saudi customers matter to businesses because their values and beliefs on this topic may differ from the common knowledge gained in global research owing to cultural differences.

5.12.1 Subtheme 1: Viewing trust and credibility as important factors

From the analysis, it was found that the topic of trust remains important to Saudi users. Male 9 stated the importance of the source's credibility and reliability as he reads and considers the reviews:

I trust online reviews if the writer is someone I trust or if that person has other trusted opinions and reviews.

The statement made by Male 9 illustrates that some users approach online reviews with caution because in forming their purchase intentions, they should utilise feedback that they can trust. The identification of friends as a reliable source of information corresponds with the need of Saudi people to belong to the community and pursue collective objectives and goals. Strangers' reviews must deserve the trust of some individuals from the audience. However, other participants in the qualitative component of the study pointed out that trust is relative because some situations cause them to trust reviews, while other situations force them to exercise caution. Male 7 stated:

Yes, I trust online reviews to some extent. Especially if there is consensus on the same reviews.

Male 6 shared a similar outlook:

I trust eWOM to some extent because I read many comments to reach an appropriate decision.

The approaches used by Male 6 and Male 7 show that some users filter the information that they gain from social media platforms that include product feedback. These users prefer to examine and consider many reviews to understand to which side the general public leans. The consensus about a product, whether negative or positive,

helps some users identify the product that they might buy. With the help of such feedback, purchase intentions are formed. Alternatively, some users have significant trust in online feedback:

I trust posts, and they really help me a lot when making purchasing decisions.

(Male 8)

The situation described by Male 8 demonstrates that some users prefer to rely on reviews because they believe that people engaging in this type of eWOM provide truthful information about their experiences. This type of trust also aligns with the sense of collectivism typical of KSA because the homogeneity of its population enhances the trust that society members would have in similar experiences with products featured in eWOM on popular social media websites. Female 3 also explained that she trusts numerous people who had posted a review with similar opinions. The importance of collective experience is substantial for Saudi consumers who trust their communities.

Purchase intentions form when potential customers learn about positive experiences of their peers. Female 5 shared her experience when she wanted to purchase expensive gym shoes because she had to confirm that the true value of the product corresponded with its high price. She conducted a comprehensive search of online reviews, which led her to the decision to buy the shoes, as she explained for the study:

Multiple positive reviews clarified for me that the product was very good and I should buy it. I have to say that without the positive reviews, I would not have bought this product, so I see them as a main reason for the purchasing decision.

(Female 5)

The case of Female 5 emphasises the importance of positive eWOM for the creation of purchase intentions. Moreover, this scenario shows that positive reviews not only created a purchase intention in another user, but also allowed this purchase intention to come to fruition as the participant made the purchase. This result pertains to expensive products, showing that the value of the product or service can be enhanced by positive eWOM. Simultaneously, eWOM in general affects Saudi

customers because they appreciate the ability to connect with their peers who share their experiences.

The analytical findings pertaining to eWOM and purchase intentions demonstrate the different factors affecting purchase decision behaviours. The existence of trust predetermined by social interaction and knowledge enhancement helps people form effective purchase intentions. In a similar vein, some participants endeavour to establish credible eWOM messages by reading many sources, with multiple reviews having to be positive or negative. The quality of the content within eWOM anticipates customers' purchase intentions.

5.13 Qualitative Summary

In closing, the qualitative component provides rich textual data on the findings about eWOM and purchase intentions in KSA. The qualitative component explains that the self-need of self-enhancement provides Saudi users with a reason to discuss their experiences online and listen to opinions of others. Similarly, the social need of social comparison helps them to distinguish themselves from family, friends and other peers. The self-intention of helping others is an important feature of eWOM engagement because of the collective sense of Saudi users. Gratifications, like knowledge enhancement, social interactions and entertainment, demonstrate how strongly these variables perform for Saudi users to find relaxation and enjoyment in their discussions online. United, these motivations and gratifications contribute to the development of purchase intentions that may or may not result in actual purchases.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings gained in the current research. Specifically, the chapter overviews the results from both phases of the study because the project explored and analysed both quantitative and qualitative sources of information. The section mostly offers comprehensive information about the differences and similarities of findings generated in the quantitative and qualitative phases, while the comparative approach also enables the research to confirm and disconfirm the findings to existent literature, including the studies mentioned in the literature review. For this reason, the chapter discusses findings for the three motivation factors (self-enhancement, social comparison and helping others) and the three gratification factors (knowledge enhancement, entertainment and social interaction), as well as purchase intentions affected by motivators and gratifications. Notably, people engaged in eWOM messaging often assume the roles of eWOM creators and eWOM readers. The results and discussions do not discriminate between the two roles because the study aims to unveil information about different behaviours that internet users exhibit when they engage with eWOM messages.

6.2 Discussion of Quantitative and Qualitative Phases

This subsection discusses the quantitative and qualitative phases to compare the findings; both parts of the research aimed to either support or disprove the identified hypotheses. Quantitative and qualitative research methods differ in their collection, analysis and interpretation of data, so it is possible that certain inconsistencies might arise. In such cases, logical explanations ensue to provide an interpretation to a potential discrepancy. The comparisons are enhanced with the help of connections to previous literature to emphasise findings that match with the existent knowledge and new findings that fill in the gaps. The relationship between eWOM and different factors influencing purchase intentions has been of significant interest to researchers because individuals form relationships with companies and brands on the basis of WOM or eWOM (Fine et al., 2017). A closer examination of motivators and gratifications expands the understanding of the topic.

6.2.1 Motivation factor: Self-enhancement and eWOM

The current study proposed that the motivating factor of self-enhancement positively relates to intention to use eWOM for online purchases. The quantitative phase of the study confirmed that the hypothesis had scientific grounds. This finding suggests that Saudi customers indeed view self-enhancement as a motivating factor to engage in eWOM. In their investigation of WOM, Alexandrov et al. (2013) categorised self-enhancement as a self-need that users attempt to satisfy in their conversations. More recently, Romero and Ruiz-Equihua (2020) discovered that self-enhancement moderates content creation, which positively affects both WOM and eWOM. The present study's hypothesis was supported; thus, the finding suggests that Saudi users are motivated by the benefits of the self-enhancement that improves their eWOM experiences.

The results that support the hypothesis align with previous findings that identified self-enhancement as a factor to consider in marketing (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2012). Previous research has identified strong correlations between self-enhancement and eWOM (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Moreover, the current findings agree with the results of Taylor et al. (2012), who determined that online advertisements indeed used self-enhancement as a motivator to entice customers to become invested in eWOM. This finding also corroborated that of Alexandrov et al. (2013), who described self-enhancement as a motivator that improves self-presentation and confidence, which helps people receive positive assessment from other users. Previous seminal research has also claimed that self-enhancement improves users' chances of demonstrating their awareness and knowledge, and of emphasising superior qualities and status (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Therefore, the first hypothesis of the study was confirmed by the reviewed literature; quantitative data remain a credible source of information to create statistical evidence that can be generalised for the targeted population.

Further, the theme of experiencing self-enhancement upon a positive product engagement was also supported in the literature. The thematic analysis revealed that the findings of the qualitative component of the study corresponded with the results of the quantitative component previously discussed. Given this, it could be inferred that self-enhancement is valuable to Saudi customers and internet users. The qualitative

phase of the study confirmed that eWOM users feel positive emotions that transform into satisfaction from self-enhancement when they manage to create effective eWOM messages. However, interviews revealed that negative feelings were also part of eWOM experiences because users might feel anxiety or regret upon posting or encountering a negative comment or review. These insights point at the complex nature of self-enhancement that might change depending on the situation or condition.

In regard to the Saudi community, it is understandable that users prefer to demonstrate their knowledge and experience because of the collectivist society of KSA, which indicates that people care about how others perceive them. Extensive knowledge and experience enhance users' opportunities to demonstrate behaviours that might be considered impressive by peers. Collectivism has indeed been a focus for researchers examining customer behaviour and marketing needs. For example, Luo et al. (2014) explained that individualism and collectivism had an impact on the credibility perception because communities with trust would be likely to take note of peers' experiences with products. Sedikides et al. (2003) elaborated that self-enhancement occurs for people from both types of communities because individualists' self-enhancement is based on individual attributes, while collectivists self-enhance using collectivist attributes. Thus, Saudi users find self-enhancement in connecting with other members of their communities. As a collectivist society, KSA embraces trust among its citizens who depend on other people's perceptions and experiences. Hence, Saudi users are likely to use self-enhancement to develop trustful connections with peers online, which could influence their purchase intentions.

Moreover, the new insights about self-enhancement strengthen the tenets of social exchange theory that served as a foundation for the conceptual framework developed for this study. The need of self-enhancement serves as a motivator for Saudi individuals. The social exchange theory is preoccupied with questions of prestige and self-presentation that self-enhancement partially fulfils (Falkenreck, 2010). The results demonstrate that the application of the theory has been useful to the pursuit of knowledge.

Ultimately, it is important that the findings from the quantitative phase matched those from the qualitative phase. The positive emotions from interactions in the form of eWOM affect customer behaviours online. Simultaneously, the qualitative

phase has been helpful in identifying the negative aspect that undermines self-enhancement. This information is essential to scientists and practitioners, as explained in Sections 7.3 and 7.4.

6.2.2 Motivation factor: Social comparison and eWOM

The quantitative phase of the research investigated a hypothesis related to social comparison as a motivator. Based on the extant literature, the current research initially proposed that social comparison is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online buying behaviours. This hypothesis means that the ability to compare one's experiences with peers' experiences would encourage a person to create eWOM or interact with eWOM in other ways. Unlike the motivator of self-enhancement that belongs to self-needs, social comparison represents one of the social needs (Alexandrov et al., 2013). Social comparison is grounded in the inherent belief that a person holds and compares to others' beliefs and experiences (Patil et al., 2020). The variable of social comparison is indeed significant for a collectivist country, like KSA; notably, the analytical tests showed that the hypothesis was accepted. The current result aligned with and expanded the existent knowledge on social comparison as a motivator to engage in eWOM.

In particular, previous studies also identified social comparison as a factor influencing online communication about products and brands. The hypothesis acceptance matches the findings that view social comparison as a factor that influences WOM (Alexandrov et al., 2013) and eWOM (Belarmino & Koh, 2018; Liu et al., 2019). Additionally, Y. L. Liu and Keng (2014) clarified that the motivator of social comparison might be challenged when individuals have little or no certainty about the validity of their experiences. Therefore, confidence in one's evaluation might encourage a person to create eWOM, whereas insecurity in one's evaluation might encourage a person to read eWOM generated by other people to inform one's decisions. This complex motivator exerts an influence on online users from around the world and on Saudi customers, as confirmation of the second hypothesis shows.

In the qualitative research, the researcher found the opportunity to explore unique experiences that Saudi users have with eWOM, given the singular culture that the country possesses. Most participants offered insights into their needs to

distinguish themselves and their knowledge from experiences of other people. Most participants voiced their opinions about having knowledge that others might lack, which places them in the position to share their unique experiences with products. An aspect of confidence enables different Saudi customers to create eWOM because they either have a vast cultural experience or academic background that enhances their communication skills to propose and support arguments. Most participants had higher education, so this population would likely gain confidence to stand out from peers online through academic experiences.

Moreover, the qualitative findings should be viewed from the perspective of the collectivism that KSA embraces. Although the country has collectivist values, this tendency does not necessarily mean that Saudi customers would have a homogenous perception of products, which would create similar narratives about brands or products. On the contrary, the collectivist nature of Saudi society encourages individuals to distinguish themselves from their peers. This information can be explained by the findings in the research by Baldwin and Mussweiler (2018), who stated that social comparison was an important element of collectivism because self-definition of individuals occurs in a relational manner. In other words, Saudi customers use social comparison to enhance their relationships with other users because they view eWOM as an opportunity to impress others with their knowledge, experiences, professional background or academic background.

Ultimately, the quantitative and qualitative phases are similar in their analysis of information about the motivating factor of social comparison. This subsection suggests that the aspect of social comparison aligns with the extant literature, while the hypothesis confirmation similarly aligns with the insights gained in interviews. These findings were anticipated, while the mixed-methods design added more insights about the perception of social comparison as a motivator for Saudi customers and internet users.

6.2.3 Motivation factor: Helping others and eWOM

The final motivating factor of helping others is connected to altruism as an antecedent of eWOM generation. The hypothesis used in this study proposed that help offered to others served as motivation that was positively associated with intention to

use eWOM for online purchases. This motivation factor has received much attention from marketing researchers who envisioned altruism as influential in shaping people's communication online. Whereas self-enhancement is viewed as a self-need and social comparison is categorised as a social need, helping others or altruism, is often called a self-intention that might affect WOM/eWOM engagement with both negative and positive narratives (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). The source of helping others comes from psychological need for people to assist others without expecting a reward (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; F. X. Yang, 2017). Despite the existent knowledge on altruism, the quantitative data collected from the sample led to the rejection of this hypothesis. The surveys provided statistical evidence that altruism had no effect on the intention to use eWOM in online shopping.

The hypothesis was rejected, so it is particularly useful to draw parallels with academic literature on the subject. Since other scholars determined that helping others was a significant motivator for some users (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Rossmann et al., 2016), the result gained in the current project is surprising. The finding disagrees with the results of Alexandrov et al. (2013) because they discovered that concern for other customers might drive users to generate WOM. In other studies, concern for corporate success might also encourage users to share positive feedback because businesses that customers support might benefit from positive eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Information sharing and information building predispose users to creating eWOM messages that help others (Rossmann et al., 2016). Hence, a question arises about the lack of altruism in the sample's survey responses. Participants are likely to perceive questions about eWOM and online purchases as their use of feedback for the formation of purchase intentions. In other words, participants viewed eWOM from the perspective of usefulness to them for online shopping instead of usefulness to others. In this case, they focused on their online shopping instead of considering the opportunity to write eWOM with altruistic purposes. This finding sets a foundation for the discussion of egoism that might contrast the altruism explored in this study. Previous research indeed recognises the influence of egoism on eWOM. For example, Bilal et al. (2020) confirmed their hypothesis about egoism being a driving force that has a positive influence on eWOM because users employ social media to pursue egoistical needs. Moreover, Killian et al. (2016) asserted that true intentions of users posting feedback may not always be

evident, while their inner experiences and emotions would shed a light on the core of true intentions, including their altruistic or egoistic origin. This information suggests that the sample preferred selfish pursuits to selfless ones. Magno et al. (2018) revealed that altruistic and egoistic goals alike influence the frequency of eWOM, but differences might occur based on other motivations. This information assists in the rationalisation of reasons that have led to the hypothesis rejection. Helping others might have less appeal to Saudi users than achieving objectives that improve personal experiences with products, brands and eWOM messaging in general. Another possible explanation might relate to the target population of the research because Millennial consumers might have different attitudes compared to the attitudes of the general population (Barnes, 2015; Weber & Elm, 2018). Additional studies with a focus on Millennial characteristics could offer new insights into the topic of altruism and egoism in marketing, as well as their intersection in eWOM engagement.

Under the qualitative findings, the opposite of the quantitative results was uncovered, which demonstrated a different approach to altruism in connection to eWOM. Some participants recognised the desire to help companies, but this altruism covered cases of rewarding businesses for dealing effectively with mistakes. This result aligns with the extant literature on the importance of gratitude for customers to leave positive feedback that might be helpful to companies (Nasr et al., 2018; Samadara & Fanggidae, 2020; Vermeer et al., 2019). Additionally, the qualitative phase unveiled that some users prefer to post helpful feedback because they like to assist others in choosing a product that would not become a waste of time and money. These responses confirm insights gained and developed by multiple studies that connect altruism and WOM/eWOM (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Previte et al., 2019; Rossmann et al., 2016; Sohaib, Hui, Akram, Akram, & Bilal, 2018). The difference in the quantitative and qualitative findings show that the in-depth interviews were essential to reveal and explain the importance of helping others as a factor that influences individuals engaged in eWOM generation. However, these findings contradicted the findings of the quantitative phase.

The differences between the findings of the quantitative and qualitative components are explained below. As suggested, participants recruited for the quantitative phase focused on eWOM from the perspective of customers interested in

online shopping, whereas interviewees in the qualitative phase concentrated on their role as possible creators of eWOM content. This difference is a potential explanation for the inconsistency in results; however, the discrepancy might point to the need to expand the knowledge of helping others in eWOM, which future researchers may consider.

Ultimately, collectivism should be considered in discussions of helping others in online conversations because collectivist countries tend to have prosocial values and relationship-oriented goals reflected in concern for others that they might demonstrate in eWOM messages meant to help others (Tao & Jin, 2017). Sohaib et al. (2018) similarly discussed the importance of collectivism and altruism to create eWOM that promoted the welfare of a group and demonstrates concern for others.

6.2.4 Gratification factor: Knowledge enhancement and eWOM

In terms of gratification factors, scholarly literature demonstrated that knowledge enhancement must be part of hypothesis formation because of the importance of this factor for WOM and eWOM (Gruen et al., 2006; Rossmann et al., 2016). Knowledge enhancement occurs for customers and businesses because the former learns from peers about their product experiences, while the latter learns from customer feedback (Dolan et al., 2016; Fine et al., 2017; Rossmann et al., 2016;). Using previous literature findings, the hypothesis was formulated to suggest that knowledge enhancement was positively associated with the intention to employ eWOM for online purchases. From the analysis, the hypothesis was rejected, which illustrates that the importance for Saudi individuals to find informative messages online that guide them in purchasing choices was insignificant.

Specifically, the rejection of the hypothesis in the quantitative phase opposes arguments posed by multiple studies that envision knowledge enhancement as an antecedent of eWOM. The rejection of the hypothesis is surprising because Saudi customers do not find the gratification of knowledge enhancement useful, unlike participants from other countries in previous research. Studies have discussed the importance of users exchanging information about products and brands (Gruen et al., 2006; Moran & Muzellec, 2017). Knowledge enhancement is possible because users endeavour to demonstrate their knowledge of products and brands because this

awareness positions them as experts in the eyes of those wanting to access knowledge and information about the product (Abrantes et al., 2013), while continuous engagement in social media leads to constant pursuit of knowledge enhancement, as well as opportunities to help others (Carlson et al., 2018). As previously explained, the target population consisted of young university students and prior evidence suggested that the Millennial group differs markedly from other generational groups (Weber & Elm, 2018). The rejection of the hypothesis might suggest that the age and experience of the survey respondents prevented them from using knowledge enhancement as a motivator for eWOM engagement. The hypothesis was rejected, so it is particularly important to pay attention to the insights gained in the qualitative phase.

From the qualitative interviews, the researcher found that indeed, Saudi consumers could use knowledge enhancement through social media and eWOM. The qualitative phase unveiled that two sides to the experience of eWOM messaging for Saudi users. Some participants identified official corporate representatives and social media influencers as credible sources of knowledge about products. Conversely, some participants manifested mistrust towards eWOM generated by such biased parties. This two-sided information reflects the general perception of influencers as both useful and biased (Banchariya & Sharma, 2020; Bishop, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021). The lack of trust in communication on social media platforms might be explained by the high level of bias perceived in actions of influencers. For this reason, the discrepancy in qualitative and quantitative findings might be explained by the two aforementioned arguments.

First, it must be noted that the qualitative component of the study cannot be generalised for the entirety of the targeted population. The insights of few interviewees shed a light on the role of knowledge enhancement for the population, but the data collected from the larger sample recruited for the quantitative phase offer conclusive results. Despite the difference in results, qualitative research is helpful to identify solutions for marketing from a cultural perspective (Belk, 2017), which is relevant to the discussion of eWOM in a non-Western culture with unique qualities.

Second, collectivist values must play a role in the formation of knowledge enhancement as a gratification in the eWOM engagement process. Some studies have

determined that trust found in collectivist societies contributes to knowledge enhancement (Luo et al., 2014), especially because people in collectivist countries view knowledge sharing positively (Fathi-Makvand & Fernandez, 2017). Moreover, Obrenovic et al. (2020) stated that knowledge enhancement was connected to helping others. It is possible that the hypothesis was rejected in the quantitative phase because the collectivistic inclination of KSA and its people focus on relationship building (Baldwin & Mussweiler, 2018) rather than on knowledge pursuit. The inconsistency is helpful in the identification of avenues for further research.

6.2.5 Gratification factor: Entertainment and eWOM

With entertainment being an important element of previous eWOM research, the current study created a hypothesis featuring this gratification factor. Previous studies have suggested that entertainment introduces an element of fun that contributes to people's engagement with eWOM that has entertaining characteristics; such content diminishes the negative perception of social media's invasion of privacy and related discomfort (Carlson et al., 2018; Dolan et al., 2016; Gvili & Levy, 2016). This evidence from previous research sets a foundation for the formation of a hypothesis related to entertainment. The hypothesis postulated that entertainment acts as a gratification influence that has a positive connection to using eWOM during online shopping. However, despite expectations, the analysis of the survey results led to the hypothesis rejection, which creates a ground for the generation of new knowledge about gratifications that exert an influence on eWOM behaviour among Saudi customers.

The quantitative results failed to complement the extant knowledge about entertainment playing a crucial role in eWOM engagement while online shopping. The hypothesis rejection points to the lack of importance for Saudi users to perceive fun and entertaining qualities in eWOM messages that they encounter on social media. This finding disagrees with existent knowledge that entertaining eWOM content encourages users to frequent corporate or brand websites and social media pages (Dolan et al., 2016; Gvili & Levy, 2016; Thomas & Kanje, 2021). Differences in scholarly knowledge might be derived from different audiences targeted in research. The audience of the current project did not represent customers of a specific industry, much like the aims of the study did not include a specific age population,

even though most survey participants belonged to the 18–25-year age group. Ultimately, it is possible that the entertainment factor has the most significance for adolescents (Lou & Kim, 2019; A. Mishra et al., 2018) or customers interested in entertaining eWOM in specific industries, like tourism (Thomas & Kanje, 2021; Zhou et al., 2019) and fashion (Xanthakou & Antoniadis, 2019). Therefore, other factors might have affected the results for this study that employed a broad audience instead of age- or industry-specific samples.

The hypothesis was rejected, so the insights gained in interviews are particularly valuable for the discussion to understand how some Saudi users view entertainment from the perspective of gratification factors. The qualitative component revealed that participants appreciated entertaining posts if they followed the standards of positive attitudes, attractive features and innovative ways of expression. In other words, the qualitative phase demonstrated that Saudi customers take an interest in entertaining eWOM messages, but this interest may be limited because other factors exert a greater influence on them than entertainment does.

Consequently, the quantitative results demonstrate the entertainment hypothesis rejection, while qualitative results acknowledge that some entertaining qualities of eWOM might have weight in online communication. The difference in results might rest on the level of importance that Saudi customers place on entertainment. Although they might appreciate the fun component of eWOM engagement, this factor represents a weak gratification for them to use eWOM for the purpose of online shopping. This difference also reveals potential for future research that would expand the knowledge of the relationship between eWOM and entertainment among Saudi customers.

Finally, entertainment might be perceived differently by individuals from individualist and collectivist cultures. Whereas individualist values provide for social media messages out of context, collectivist cultures embrace “high-context communication” with abstract, implicit and indirect qualities that contribute to greater entertainment (Kitirattarkarn et al., 2019, p. 199). This information creates implications for the development of other studies that would illuminate the role of entertainment in eWOM messages in KSA.

6.2.6 Gratification factor: Social interaction and eWOM

As the final gratification factor under consideration, social interaction has gained a vast knowledge basis in scholarly literature associated with eWOM studies. Social interactions matter to individuals interested in the relational aspect of communication on social media because social networking platforms provide users with an opportunity to experience a sense of belonging, especially when brand pages create tools for individuals to interact and share (Dolan et al., 2016; Hsu et al., 2016). In some studies, it is specified that users might prefer social interactions without corporate intrusion to gain the maximum benefits of discussing products with other customers (Pihlaja et al., 2017). With this information considered, the current study depended on a hypothesis related to social interactions. The hypothesis suggested that the gratification of social interaction is positively related to intention to use eWOM for online purchases. The quantitative phase supported the hypothesis that enhances the existent knowledge about social interaction and its role for eWOM generation.

The acceptance of the hypothesis reveals the importance of social interactions for individuals in KSA. Saudi internet users interested in eWOM view social interactions as a benefit of eWOM engagement. The quantitative findings align with the extant literature that promoted the notion of social interactions to foster eWOM engagement (Carlson et al., 2018; Dolan et al., 2016; Hsu et al., 2016; Thomas & Kanje, 2021). Previous academic research discovered that the gratification of social interaction meets social needs of communication and connection (Dolan et al., 2016) that might extend to interactions with friends, family, peers, substitutes for real-life companions and other individuals (Thomas & Kanje, 2021). Although social media users may not gain the most trustworthy information from other members of brand or product communities, the gratification of social interaction maximises the enjoyment that people derive from participation in eWOM (Hsu et al., 2016) that enhances the depth, breadth and effectivity of information exchanges (Carlson et al., 2018). The hypothesis acceptance leads to contrasting and comparing quantitative findings with qualitative data.

The qualitative phase exposed participants to an opportunity to voice their opinions about social interactions and their role in eWOM engagement during online shopping experiences. Many interviewees admitted that their social media exchanges

were enhanced by social interactions that elucidated details about products, companies and brands. Some insights included the importance of helpful feedback from customers because spiteful reviewing received no support from participants, unlike constructive criticism that helps customers make informed choices and businesses improve service provision. The topic of spiteful reviews in eWOM has been under-researched, but some previous studies established that the presence of such reviews would not necessarily dissuade potential customers from using the product or service (Nicoli & Papadopoulou, 2017). The lack of scholarly knowledge about spiteful feedback has certain theoretical implications discussed in later sections.

Therefore, the quantitative findings matched the qualitative results in the identification of the essential role that social interactions play in eWOM for Saudi users. Whereas quantitative data resolutely confirms that social interactions matter to individuals on social media, the qualitative insights expand the knowledge of this gratification from the perspective of Saudi customers. In this respect, the two research phases complement each other, strengthening the foundation for practical implications and avenues for future research.

Last, the importance of social interactions corresponds with the collectivist needs and values of Saudi customers. The value of relationships for people from collectivist cultures has been well studied (Baldwin & Mussweiler, 2018), while relationships form based on the interdependence that individuals possess within their social groups (Kitirattarkarn et al., 2019). The endeavours to enhance social interactions in eWOM generation reflect collectivist qualities of the target population. The acceptance of the hypothesis and its corroboration by the qualitative component suggest that social interaction has been accurately described by existent relevant theories. Through the uses and gratifications lens, social interactions present users with a gratifying function (Whiting & Williams, 2013). The theme of social interaction has been important for the establishment of reasons that encourage individuals to use social networking websites, while this study emphasises that online reviewing and communication about products also rely on the gratification of social interaction. The acceptance of the hypothesis and its corroboration by the qualitative component suggest that social interaction has been accurately described by extant relevant theories. In the uses and gratifications outlook, social interactions present

users with a gratifying function (Whiting & Williams, 2013). The theme of social interaction has been important for the establishment of reasons that encourage individuals to use social networking websites, while this study emphasises that online reviewing and communication about products also rely on the gratification of social interaction. The confirmation of this knowledge strengthens the theoretical underpinnings of eWOM and its influences, while the collectivist nature of the Saudi enhances the necessity that users view in social interactions on social media, including brand and company pages and other spaces that drive eWOM messaging and posting.

6.2.7 eWOM and purchase intentions

The conceptual framework combined motivation factors with gratifications to examine their connections to eWOM in terms of online shopping, including the formation of purchase intentions. For this reason, the final hypothesis suggested that eWOM is positively related to purchase intentions. This hypothesis was proposed by considering previously gained knowledge in research that connects eWOM to purchase intentions (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Empirical evidence suggests that travel plans might be influenced by online messages that tourists encounter on social media (Lever et al., 2017), while the quality of content in eWOM messaging affects customer behaviours, potentially inciting behavioural change (Erkan & Evans, 2016). This portion of the study demonstrated no unexpected outcomes because the hypothesis was supported by the data gained from the sample.

The hypothesis acceptance means that Saudi customers indeed form purchase intentions under the influence of eWOM. In other words, practitioners should consider that purchase decision-making depends on social media interactions about products, brands and companies. The fact that the hypothesis was accepted aligns with the existent literature that links eWOM and purchase intentions (Hsu et al., 2016; Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Lever et al., 2017). It was established in the past that purchase intentions have a statistically significant relationship with eWOM (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Hsu et al. (2016) claimed purchase intentions to be outcomes of eWOM. Previous research also argued that the interconnected nature of social media increases the perceived value of eWOM feedback that affects purchase intentions and decisions (Teng et al., 2014). However, questions of credibility remain poignant in the

exploration of eWOM effects. It is anticipated that the discussion of motivations and gratifications shapes the perception of eWOM and purchase decision-making.

Aside from the hypothesis, the current study offers a platform for identifying insights from interviewed participants about their views on eWOM and purchase intentions. The qualitative phase revealed that Saudi customers are willing to use eWOM for purchase decision-making, but trust was a crucial instrument to ensure that eWOM messages are legitimate sources of information. However, interviews demonstrated different approaches to assessing trust because some respondents explained that some strangers present their online reviews as trustworthy. Thus, the style in which people describe their experiences with a product matters to individuals who form purchase intentions using eWOM. The qualitative phase had other revelations about this topic that are relevant to overall academic and practical knowledge. For example, some interview responses clarified that social media users read multiple reviews to form a specific perspective on a product and, subsequently, form a purchase intention if the contents of multiple reviews are persuasive and supportive of that product. The quality of reviews plays an instrumental role for a Saudi customer to determine whether a purchase should be made.

Therefore, the quantitative and qualitative phases have no disagreements, but it is apparent that the latter expands the understanding of the connection between eWOM and purchase intentions. The hypothesis confirmation in the quantitative component offers no details about the quality of the content for individuals to form purchase intentions, whereas the qualitative one introduces specific insights into factors that link eWOM and purchase intentions, namely, the importance of trust and the quality of feedback.

Finally, the results of the qualitative phase are anticipated in the view that individuals in collectivist countries have a requirement for trust. It was established that people with collectivist backgrounds tend to have little trust in out-group individuals with preference for opinions held by in-group members (Levy & Gvili, 2020). Rouibah et al. (2021) specified that trust of the internet and trust towards other people were part of Arab collectivist cultures. This alignment with existent literature reinforces the findings about the importance of trust to assess eWOM and form purchase intentions.

6.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter has been helpful in providing interpretation to quantitative and qualitative findings that expanded the understanding of motivators and gratifications exerting an influence on eWOM that generates purchase intentions. This discussion highlighted the collectivist settings of the study that recognises the singularity of KSA that differs from Western societies and, therefore, has a unique approach to factors influencing eWOM. This chapter summarises the hypotheses results and links them to scholarly literature, while offering additional explanations to cover seeming inconsistencies.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides information on the discussion of the objectives and research questions developed for the current research. Specifically, the researcher details the connections between the findings and initial research questions, aims and objectives. The section finishes with a conclusion that discusses theoretical implications, practical implications, study limitations and suggestions for future research.

7.2 Discussion of Research Objectives and Questions

The study had specific research objectives and questions that guided the process of research. The aims and questions were instrumental in determining the gaps in knowledge that the study anticipated. Table 7.1 provides an overview of research objectives and questions alongside chapters that covered each item.

Table 7.1 Chapters that address and cover research objectives and questions.

Research objective/question	Chapters
Objective 1	Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Objective 2	Chapter 2, 3
Objective 3	Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Objective 4	Chapters 4, 6
Objective 5	Chapter 6
Research question 1	Chapters 4, 5, 6
Research question 2	Chapters 5, 6
Research question 3	Chapters 6
Research question 4	Chapters 4, 5, 6

7.2.1 Objective 1

The first objective focused on the exploration the effects of eWOM on purchase intentions. This broad objective was achieved in the project because different factors affecting purchase intentions were considered in the research process.

Several chapters covered the research objective because Chapter 2 offered a literature review on the extant knowledge of the relationship between eWOM and purchase intentions, while Chapter 3 created a conceptual framework essential to hypotheses development. However, the most effective information was presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 because the methodology section detailed the process of data collection, the data analysis section offered specific findings about the effects of eWOM on purchase intentions and the discussion section provided an explanation of those effects alongside practical and theoretical implications.

The main theoretical implication of the study focused on this objective rests on the understanding that purchase intentions indeed depend on eWOM. However, this knowledge gains a deeper perspective because the conceptual framework recognises that eWOM, in turn, depends on the functioning of a range of factors with motivating and gratifying qualities. Prior research connected personal antecedents with both eWOM and purchase intention (Alhidari et al., 2015), but the present thesis contributes to knowledge because of the conceptual framework that distinguishes motivators from gratifications, thereby encompassing different factors that might influence purchase intention indirectly through eWOM.

7.2.2 Objective 2

The second objective aimed to investigate specific motivations and gratifications that participate in eWOM engagement. The attainment of this objective was possible with the help of the literature review that identified the already-detected factors classified as motivators and gratifications and the theoretical background chapter that conceptualised the process of eWOM engagement. The extant scholarly knowledge offered a foundation for further exploration. The combination of the uses and gratifications theory and the social exchange theory assisted in the development of a conceptual framework that considered motivations and gratifications. Specifically, the objective was fully addressed with the help of the conceptual framework that guided the quantitative and qualitative components. Motivations and gratifications were identified with the help of the literature, while the method, data analysis and its discussion contributed to comprehensive understanding of these factors. The completion of this objective has value from a theoretical perspective because the knowledge of factors involved in eWOM engagement has become well

rounded, while practical recommendations can be generated using new insights. Previous research identified up to 20 important factors that had motivating or gratifying qualities (Ismagilova et al., 2020), but this study contributes to literature by focusing on the most prominent influences identified in prior studies.

7.2.3 Objective 3

Further, the third objective stated that the research should explore the relationship between social media eWOM and customer purchase intentions. Similar to the first objective, the third concentrated on knowledge related to social media and was covered in the same chapters, including the literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, data analysis and discussion. Therefore, the attainment of this objective has significance for scholarly knowledge because the study establishes that the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention is mediated by motivations and gratifications that shape eWOM. This finding has value because its inclusion suggests that purchase intentions might be shaped by marketing professions when they pay attention to specific factors that influence eWOM.

7.2.4 Objective 4

The fourth objective was essential to the current study because the objective aimed to determine the most potent motivations and gratifications that shaped purchase intentions specifically in a collectivist society. Chapter 4 had a substantial role in the achievement of this objective because the method specified that only Saudi customers and internet users must be part of the research. Moreover, Chapter 6 offered a discussion that linked Saudi customers' views on eWOM, related motivations, gratifications and subsequent purchase intentions from the perspective of collectivism.

Consequently, theoretical contributions are substantial in terms of elucidating collectivist cultures. Collectivism has been a focus of attention for researchers exploring concepts related to eWOM (Levy & Gvili, 2020; Tao & Jin, 2017). However, this research extends the discussion by applying a unique conceptual framework based on uses and gratifications and social exchange theories. The rejection of some hypotheses emphasises the complexity of motivators and gratifications in collectivist societies, like the KSA. The unique results suggest that

future research might address these inconsistencies to ascertain that the collectivist nature of the Saudi society contributed to results that partially differ from the already existent academic knowledge, particularly in the quantitative component.

7.2.5 Objective 5

The final objective strived to synthesise and generate new theoretical contributions and managerial implications for researchers and marketers to employ in eWOM practices. Chapter 6 includes a comprehensive discussion and theoretical and practical implications that enable this research to contribute to existent knowledge. This information is fully discussed in the conclusion, which acknowledges the contributions of the conceptual framework that combines gratifications and motivations into a single model of influence on eWOM and, subsequently, purchase intention. The hierarchical position of motivations and gratifications might also become an important contribution because some factors have greater weight for Saudi consumers than other influences. A line between spiteful and constructive reviewing must also be drawn because the objective led to the identification of this theoretical implication.

7.2.6 Research question 1

The first research question aimed to reveal how eWOM influenced purchase intentions specifically in KSA. Few studies have focused on this country, so it was anticipated that the research would shed a light on the values and principles that guide Saudi customers in eWOM engagement connected to purchase decision-making. Chapters 3, 5 and 6 addressed the questions because the methodology included the relevant Saudi sample, the data analysis offered statistical and textual answers to the research question and the discussion chapter connected the new knowledge about Saudi customers to the previous knowledge about the global population.

This research question received confirmation that eWOM indeed exerts an influence on purchase intentions. The quantitative component of the study recognised that eWOM is a factor in purchasing behaviours of Saudi consumers. Moreover, the qualitative part revealed that trust was important to users; this knowledge was confirmed by recent studies on collectivists cultures (Levy & Gvili, 2020; Rouibah et

al., 2021). The research question received both numerical and textual data to enhance knowledge about the relationship between eWOM and purchase intentions.

7.2.7 Research question 2

Additionally, the second research question proposed to investigate specific motivational factors applicable to the setting of KSA. Chapters 5 and 6 provided resolute answers to this question because these chapters identified self-enhancement, social comparison and social interaction as statistically confirmed factors to drive the Saudi customers' use of eWOM. As for the final chapter, the discussion offered details about these factors linking them to previously gained and accepted scholarly knowledge. The answers to the second research questions have theoretical and practical significance because researchers can expand knowledge based on these findings and practitioners can use the identified factors to shape eWOM and purchasing behaviours of potential consumers.

7.2.8 Research question 3

The third research question strived to explain how eWOM motivates or discourages purchase intentions. This question was answered in Chapter 6, which provided insights into the purchase decision-making process by analysing the survey statistics and textual answers from interview participants. As with the second research question, the answers to the third research question revealed that practitioners in the KSA should specifically use self-enhancement, social comparison and social interaction as influences on eWOM. Prior research on motivations and gratifications offers information about the importance of these factors, while the current study grants a unique perspective made possible by the conceptual framework that acknowledges the interconnected nature between these factors, eWOM and purchase intentions. Nevertheless, the study mostly provided answers about motivators instead of barriers that discourage customers from buying. This gap in the knowledge offers a platform for ideation in future research.

7.2.9 Research question 4

Ultimately, the final research question suggested exploring how globalisation influenced attitudes to eWOM, motivations and gratifications among Saudi customers

with collectivist values based on their background. This question was answered partially in the findings section and discussion section because these chapters offered insights into the role of collectivism in shaping people's preferences in communication on social media. As with other collectivist cultures, the KSA relies on trustworthiness of interactions (Levy & Gvili, 2020; Rouibah et al., 2021). While globalisation is an integral part of social media communication, Saudi users approach trust in eWOM with caution. The topic of trust was identified, but more information should be collected and analysed to speak resolutely about the effects of globalisation on eWOM perception.

7.3 Theoretical Implications

The intention of the current research to contribute to knowledge has led to the development of certain theoretical implications. The development of the conceptual framework that combined the knowledge gained in uses and gratifications theory (Dolan et al., 2016) and social exchange theory (Alexandrov et al., 2013) demonstrates the importance of synthesising motivations and gratifications found in different frameworks to establish a list of factors that exert the greatest influence on eWOM and purchase intentions. The conceptual framework offers guidance to other researchers to follow the model of motivation factors and gratifications that exert an influence on customers' perception of eWOM and its role in the formation of purchase intentions. Notably, this conceptual framework is applied to the sample from a collectivist country, but the same model has the potential to elucidate eWOM and purchase intentions relationships for individualist societies.

Moreover, the study revealed that the motivation of self-enhancement might face barriers that diminish its influences. Whereas previous studies have focused on positive emotions that self-enhancement generates for social media users (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Vargo et al., 2019), the current study identified negative emotions to influence the functioning of self-enhancement in eWOM generations. Participants claimed that regret and other negative emotions affect the motivation of self-enhancement, so future conceptualising and theory modelling might include possible barriers to self-enhancement. In this regard, the current study adds to the extant knowledge by identifying negative emotions as factors weakening the functioning of self-enhancement. This theoretical implication

does not imply the weakness of the theory or its ineffectiveness in explaining social and behavioural phenomena, but rather calls for more attention towards the negative emotions with reference to the self-enhancement variables of the social exchange theory.

Particular attention should be devoted to the knowledge generated through this study, according to which the theoretical flexibility of uses and gratifications theory offers the opportunities for expansion and diversification of the theory itself. While being rather specific in core concepts and their definitions, the uses and gratification theory can be modified and transformed to include new variables that are more relevant to certain investigations. In other words, the current study unveils a number of weaknesses of the uses and gratification theories and necessitated the integration of additional variables into analysis, indicating the need for alternations in the theory itself and matching with the characteristics of countries and cultures under investigation.

Additionally, the research rejects the hypothesis that knowledge enhancement has value for Saudi customers. This information has value for further theoretical developments because the study suggests that social media interactions that contain eWOM place more benefit on relationship building than on knowledge pursuit, which aligns with the vision of KSA as a collectivist society (Baldwin & Mussweiler, 2018). Although knowledge enhancement serves as an instrument to engage people with eWOM campaigns in other contexts, collectivist countries take an interest in the relational aspect of eWOM interaction that theorists might find useful to include in future theoretical or conceptual modelling. Theoretically, the findings of the current study invite more research, not only to elucidate on the knowledge enhancement variable as the factor to explain human behaviours and preferences, but also to test its usability in conceptual framework development. With changing trends in the way people communicate and the decreasing value of the information exchanged online, the knowledge enhancement variable may appear obsolete in shaping behavioural patterns.

Further, theoretical implications must include an overview of differences between the perception of spiteful reviews and constructive feedback. The qualitative phase illustrated that Saudi customers have little tolerance for spiteful reviews,

expecting constructive reviews to provide them with optimal advantage. This contribution to academic knowledge has significance because few studies focus on spiteful reviewing, especially in collectivist contexts. Nicoli and Papadopoulou (2017) mentioned spiteful reviews to have little influence over purchase intentions, but more theoretical frameworks are needed to understand this phenomenon on social media. This study had not anticipated this topic to emerge, so the concept of spiteful reviews in terms of eWOM interactions received no comprehensive attention at the data collection stage. Future theoretical efforts should touch upon the topic of spiteful reviewing as opposed to constructive eWOM to gain additional insights.

On a theoretical level, the combination of the theories into a single conceptual framework suggested the need for the development of new theoretical assumptions adjusted to the behavioural science in the digital world. As Dwivedi et al. (2018) noted, the dominant role of social media in informational and communicational domains is accompanied by the loss of ownership and control of content on all three levels: private, public and institutional. The balance is not established, whereas many of the theories are not relevant and not suitable for the analysis of behavioural patterns, perceptions and thinking patterns in online environment. Whereas the combination of the social exchange theory and uses and gratifications theory was instrumental in addressing the shortcomings of the current theoretical knowledge, the results of the current study are indicative of the viability to reinvent theories exploring social behaviour in online environment in general and social media in particular.

Ultimately, the qualitative phase was helpful with the identification of the trend of multiple reviews needed for a potential customer to reach a purchase intention. Although the concept of multiple reviews is not new (Liu et al., 2019), future theoretical frameworks should include the factor of review multiplicity to explore eWOM and its effect on purchase intentions.

7.4 Practical Implications

The research enhances practitioners' understanding of the use of motivation factors and gratifications to encourage individuals to participate in eWOM creation. Through the statistics derived from the quantitative data, the study recommends focusing eWOM campaigns on the factors of self-enhancement, social comparison

and social interactions. Simultaneously, practical recommendations inform managers to use eWOM to shape purchase intentions because eWOM indeed has an effect on buyer behaviour.

As for specific practical recommendations, managers and marketers should use self-enhancement, social comparison and social interactions to corporate advantage. Specifically, more opportunities should be offered for Saudi customers to demonstrate their knowledge or experience that distinguishes them from peers (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2012). eWOM campaigns might create opportunities for discussing products from people's unique perspectives. As for social comparison, eWOM campaigns should similarly encourage social media users to compare their product experiences with peers' experiences (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Belarmino & Koh, 2018; Patil et al., 2020). eWOM engagement should address people's need for social interactions that matter to Saudi users. Social interactions enable individuals to foster connections with friends, family and strangers, but research suggests that companies should be careful to limit intrusion in such conversations because users might perceive them in a negative light (Dolan et al., 2016; Thomas & Kanje, 2021). Hence, the combination of self-enhancement, social comparison and social interactions promoted in eWOM might help practitioners achieve some of their marketing goals revolving around the cost-effective method of eWOM marketing.

On the contrary, helping others, knowledge enhancement and entertainment proved to be ineffective for the collectivist context of KSA. Although qualitative interviews demonstrated that respondents had an interest in these two gratifications and motivator, other factors prevent them from having substantial influence on eWOM, as discussed in previous sections. Therefore, the main practical recommendation connected to these factors rests on the necessity to decrease an emphasis on altruism, knowledge enhancement and entertainment unless related new findings emerge.

On a practical level, the conducted study and its results have provided a solid framework for companies to explore the potential use of the eWOM and social media as tools to manipulate online behaviour of consumers. In particular, the results are indicative of the observation that eWOM does play its role in shaping perceptions and

initiating behavioural changes among consumers. Companies selling online can rely on these findings to further test the attributes of their marketing campaigns based on eWOM, both negative and positive. Masouras and Papademetriou (2018) also added that uses and gratifications theory can be practically applied to evaluate the mediating role of audio-visual materials in eWOM and the interactivity module. The current study explored the issues of usability and knowledge enhancement attributes of eWOM, so these two additional variables used in combination with the generated findings may equip companies selling online with the unique insight into the approaches to manipulate purchase intentions and set the direction for online communication with regard to the marketed products and services.

Further, the confirmation of the hypothesis about eWOM shaping purchase intentions requires applying this knowledge in practical contexts to ensure that companies and brands build the most effective platforms for communication with customers and for customers to discuss purchasing experiences with other buyers. Such opportunities would be beneficial for companies to encourage internet users to form purchase decisions as a result of communication on social media websites. The findings of this study illustrate the importance of webpages on social media dedicated to specific companies, brands or separate products capable of generating sufficient buzz to maximise eWOM and customer interactions. Separate eWOM campaigns are also a solution because specific online events might generate buzz from customer eWOM.

Finally, particular attention should be paid to the idea of eWOM referral and recommendation. Although the current study did not directly explore the concept of referral or recommendation through eWOM, the social exchange theory underpinning the investigation contains the practical implications of the findings. The managerial recommendation is to capitalise on the sales opportunities that eWOM referrals through reviews and sharing of data may offer. According to Danniswara et al. (2020), eWOM referrals, especially in Instagram, may play one of the decisive roles in promoting purchase intention and actual purchase decision. Because of the assumption that recommendation or referral implies positive experience with the product or service, the eWOM, even if it is negative, may boost sales for a company. Organisations and marketing managers should explore the sales potential of social

median not only as platforms to display and promote products and services, but rather as user-generated marketing messages in the form of eWOM and the accompanying referral to a seller or a marketplace.

7.5 Study Limitations

Like any research, this academic project has certain limitations that might be addressed in future efforts. Study limitations point at potential issues that could be resolved in other projects to enhance the scholarly community's knowledge of the topic. Methodology and findings alike have limitations that reflect remaining gaps in evidence.

Although the methodology has the advantage of combining quantitative and qualitative research that complement each other, the sequence of the phases prevented the use of qualitative insights in the development of the survey instrument. In particular, the study would possibly render more comprehensive results in the case of the qualitative phase running before the quantitative one. In this scenario, insights from interviews would serve as a knowledge basis for the design of the survey questionnaire. This approach would change the composition of questions and would likely elicit new answers. For example, the topic of spiteful reviewing emerged in qualitative interviews, but surveys included no questions about this concept. Had the qualitative phase preceded the survey data collection, the research would have likely addressed this finding in the quantitative phase.

Limitations include the inability to generalise findings in quantitative and qualitative components. In regard to the quantitative element of the thesis, the method of nonprobability sampling decreases the chances for the findings to undergo generalisation (Sharma, 2017). As for qualitative findings, they represent only a few experiences that cannot reflect the experience of the entirety of the population. Although generalisability suffers because of the sampling method selection, the findings still provide researchers with singular information about Saudi experiences with eWOM.

Limitations must also acknowledge that age bias exists because of the sample. The lack of diverse age groups prevents the findings from offering information about

how the elderly individuals perceive eWOM. Although age bias limits the availability of such information, it is still anticipated that the study offers insights into attitudes of individuals who use social media most often, especially in the view that a staggering rate of 98.4% male Saudis and 97.6% female Saudis aged 15–35 years are active users of social media (Statistical Analysis and Decision Support Center, 2020). The findings of the study may be inapplicable to the older members of society in KSA.

In a similar vein, the recruitment of university students suggests that the findings might not apply to young individuals from other educational and socio-economic backgrounds. The homogeneity of the sample creates barriers to the identification of facts and insights into eWOM engagement that would be useful to understand how different young individuals interact with eWOM. At the same time, the homogenous sample enables this research to render results specifically related to young university students, thus expanding the marketing knowledge of the group.

Another important limitation refers to the big data management and the potential biases it may be accompanied with. While the present study did not collect big data and the scope of the investigation is limited to a relatively small sample within a single country, several socio-demographic factors were not considered. The previous studies established that higher socio-economic status predetermines the activity of individuals on social media (Hargittai, 2020). Consequently, respondents with higher socio-economic status tend to be over-represented in the samples. Internet skills are closely correlated with age of the respondents, leading to another age-related limitation because the voices of the older study participants are omitted. With more cultural diversity in the age sample, the results generated in the current study could lead to a different set of conclusions for both the qualitative and quantitative research phases.

Moreover, three hypotheses were rejected in the research, despite the existence of a comprehensive literature basis. The rejected hypotheses related to helping others, knowledge enhancement and entertainment. The qualitative phase identified these factors to have some influence on Saudi customers using social media. While the discussion sections offer possible explanations for these discrepancies, it is possible that the study overlooked additional factors that mediated the relationship between eWOM and helping others, knowledge enhancement and

entertainment. A study with a greater number of factors that might serve as mediator variables would address this limitation and confirm that helping others, knowledge enhancement and entertainment indeed have less value for Saudi customers than for customers from other cultural contexts or would offer explanations on factors that weaken the performance of these factors.

Additionally, the study aimed to explore the impact of globalisation on Saudi customers. Arab communities marked by collectivist values tend to pay attention to in-group opinions while rejecting out-group opinions (Levy & Gvili, 2020). This project could have distinguished between eWOM messages from Saudi sources and eWOM messages from non-Saudi sources to explore the effects of globalisation. The limitation about the lack of discerning eWOM from different Saudi and non-Saudi communities or users is, nevertheless, understandable for the reasons of time constraints and other resource considerations. The developed project already contains a number of variables, objectives and research questions. To ensure the efficacy of this study, it was important to limit the number of variables and other details. However, the identification of this issue lays a foundation for further investigations. While other ideas for future research are presented in Section 7.6, the limitations of the current study could potentially serve as encouragement for future efforts to expand on the knowledge gained in this study.

7.6 Suggestions for Future Research

The extensive nature of this dissertation guarantees that comprehensive ideation for future research might occur. Both phases of the study unveiled new concepts and ideas for scholars to target in further exploration. First, whereas the quantitative phase rejected the hypothesis about knowledge enhancement value for Saudi customers, qualitative interviews revealed that some respondents sought knowledge from influencers, while other participants voiced their mistrust for the fear of influencer bias. This topic is gaining momentum as social media platforms grow in popularity alongside the rise of multiple influencers who have become instrumental to marketing campaigns, including eWOM-related events (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). Questions of trust and mistrust toward influencers have already gained attention from scholars (Banchariya & Sharma, 2020; Bishop, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Therefore, future efforts might connect specific eWOM-related factors to influencer bias and integrity.

Second, it was emphasised that three hypotheses linked to helping others, knowledge enhancement and entertainment were rejected. It is possible to postulate that some barriers prevent Saudi customers from using the motivator of helping others and the gratifications of knowledge enhancement and entertainment in eWOM use. In other words, future studies might uncover reasons from these factors playing little or no role in the Saudi culture. Such an approach would bridge the gap identified in this research and contribute to the establishment of practical recommendations for managers and marketers to understand how to use these factors to incite effective eWOM communication. The factors featured in the rejected hypotheses are arguably important to all stakeholders, but certain issues prevent these factors from functioning in a productive way for Saudi users on social media.

Third, future research might uncover certain mediating factors that affect the three factors from the rejected hypotheses. The identification of differences between age groups that perceive helping others, knowledge enhancement and entertainment as either useful or useless could shed a light on reasons for hypotheses rejection. This classification might also present practitioners with ideas on how to appeal to different audiences. For example, younger audiences might recognise greater appeal in entertaining posts (Lou & Kim, 2019; A. Mishra et al., 2018), while older audiences might find greater value in eWOM posts that fuel their knowledge enhancement or altruism. An investigation would provide resolute findings about differences based on age. Similarly, differences based on an industry might also occur and have implications for stakeholders. The development of a systematic review could become a feasible solution to understand how eWOM factors differ for customers and their eWOM behaviour related to specific fields.

Last, the concept of spiteful reviews that has been identified in research serves as a foundation for future research. Potential research questions might focus on the role of spiteful reviews in eWOM perception, spiteful reviews perceived by people from collectivist cultures and spiteful reviews perceived by people from individualist cultures. The problem of spiteful feedback is harmful to companies and arguably

distracting to potential buyers. Therefore, addressing this gap in knowledge would benefit different stakeholder groups.

7.7 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

The chapter presented the practical recommendations that offer solutions to assist Saudi marketers in using eWOM to their advantage, while study limitations, theoretical implications and avenues for further research provide basic ideation for the continuation of knowledge pursuit on eWOM, its influences and purchase intentions.

To conclude, the study was conducted to explore the usability of eWOM as the communication strategy with the emphasis on purchase intention among consumers in KSA. The cultural characteristics of eWOM in KSA include the young age of eWOM creators, relatively low perceived value of eWOM in terms of knowledge enhancement and active social media interaction. The current study was the first scholarly work investigating eWOM in the cultural context of KSA, which produced an invaluable piece of new knowledge on differences in attitude to eWOM among the consumers in this country. Also, it is anticipated that the current study contributes extensively to the existent scholarly knowledge about eWOM, particularly its relationship with motivations and gratifications that shape purchase intentions. The previous discussion sections demonstrate anticipated results combined with surprising insights into the role of different factors to engage Saudi people with eWOM or disengage them from such social media messaging.

Generally, this thesis has taken an interest in the important topic of eWOM in the KSA because social media consumption in the country has been increasing, which encourages individuals to engage in eWOM on social networking websites. This topic has significance for management and marketing because stakeholders depend on the quality of information exchanged online. Practitioners, in particular, can find useful information in studies that connect eWOM with purchase intention (Awad & Fatah, 2015). Additionally, the literature search revealed that culture has an influence of eWOM and its antecedents (Izogo & Jayawardhena, 2018; A. Mishra et al., 2018). The unique position of the KSA as a collectivist culture makes the country and its residents an interesting focus from which to pursue knowledge about eWOM, its factors and purchase intentions.

Moreover, the thesis employs two theories to construct a useful conceptual framework that illuminates eWOM issues from a new perspective. The uses and gratifications theory and social exchange theory are instrumental to the development of a model to view how people perceive mass communication. In the modern reality of high internet penetration and social media popularity, these theories are helpful in determining motivations and gratifications. In fact, the conceptual framework recognises self-enhancement, social comparison and helping others as motivations, while knowledge enhancement, entertainment and social interaction represent gratifications. Through this conceptual framework, the rest of the research has solid foundations.

In particular, the thesis employs a mixed-methods design that combines questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews. This methodology ensures that both statistical and insightful data are collected and analysed. As for data analysis, a variety of tests and assessments ensure the quality of information. Descriptive analysis, sensitivity analysis, reliability analysis, SEM and CFA fill in the gaps for the quantitative part, while the thematic analysis of qualitative responses contributes to the expansion of knowledge from experiential perspective that invites researchers and practitioners to examine unique opinions of Saudi users affected by the collectivist culture of their home country. Ultimately, these methods lead to the generation of useful recommendations for scholars and marketing specialists to employ in professional research and practice.

The study confirmed the viability of using eWOM as an instrument to boost sales revenue and grow market share, especially among new consumers who rely on the opinion of others regarding products and services. The findings offer significant theoretical implications based upon the new conceptual model designed for this research as well as practical implications for marketing managers who can further explore the specific attributes of eWOM in communicating with consumers and manipulating purchase intentions, not only in KSA, but also in other countries. Although additional research is needed to validate the findings in other countries with individualistic cultures, the current study provided evidence on the significant impact of eWOM on purchase intention.

The conclusion offers theoretical implications that expand the theoretical knowledge of the topic. In addition, the conclusion offers practical implications that might serve as advice for managers and marketers that use eWOM in collectivist cultures. Although the study had limitations to the cultural and age-specific characteristics of the study participants, the findings have significant generalisability potential. Future studies should explore the country-specific barriers to eWOM and perception of its usability through systemic review of the scholarly works on purchase intentions. Ultimately, study limitations are identified with anticipation that future research efforts would target the issues that emerged in the current study.

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Appendix A

The Survey Instrument

Participant Profile

1. What is your gender?

- (a) Male (b) Female (c) Other

2. What is your age?

- (a) 18–25 (b) 26–45 (c) 46–65 (d) 66 and over

3. What social networks do you use? Select all that apply.

- (a) Facebook (b) Instagram (c) YouTube (d) Twitter (f) Other

4. How often do you use the social networks that you indicated above?

- (a) Once per week or less (b) Several times per week (c) Once per day (d)

Several times per day

5. Would please choose from the following categories which you believe this brand or product represents (keep this product in mind when answer this survey):

- Automotive
- Consumer electronics
- Fashion
- Food and beverage
- Hospitality and tourism
- Media and entertainment
- Beauty and personal care
- Social
- Sports
- Telecommunications
- Other (please specify)

Motivation: Self- enhancement		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	1. I want other users to see me as an important source of information.					
	2. I gain a sense of achievement when I use social media for making purchase decisions					
	3. I find it pleasing to use social media for making purchase decisions					
Motivation: Social comparison						
	1. I often compare my friends and family members with other people					
	2. I share feelings on brands to compare it with the views and feelings of other people about the same brand.					
	3. I have my opinion about brands to compare my own experiences with those shared by other people					
	4. I share my opinion about brands to compare with opinions of others					
Motivation: Helping others						
	1. I want to help others in making decisions on purchases because I want them to avoid the problems I encountered					

	2. I prefer sharing advice on how to address the issues associated with the purchase decision					
	3. I enjoy helping others by retaliating against the company if my consumption experience was negative					
	4. I have the inner desire to help a others make a better purchase decision					
	5. It feels good to help others on social media by sharing my opinion and experience					
Gratification: Knowledge enhancement						
	1. I believe in testing and identifying products implemented by certification organisations					
	2. I frequently read online reviews to be sure I make the right purchase intention					
	3. I frequently check reviews from previous customers to see whether products/brands have a positive reputation and are regarded worthy of purchase.					
	4. I frequently gather information from online consumers' reviews before I					

	decide to buy a certain product/brand					
Gratification: Social interactions						
	1. I feel it is easy to provide my opinion through brands' social media pages					
	2. I enjoy my online interactions with other buyers and users who are interested in the same product/brand					
	3. I feel a strong sense of belonging when I engage in social media interactions about products and brands.					
Gratification: Entertainment						
	1. I prefer websites and social media pages that are entertaining					
	2. I use social media for entertainment to spend my free time and have fun					
	3. I use social media for entertainment					
	4. I use social media to pass time when I feel bored					
eWOM						
	1. I tend to engage in "liking", sharing or commenting on negative					

	reviews shared by other users of social media					
	2. When I have a negative experience with a product or brand, I usually create a negative review on social media.					
	3. Social media is the platform that gives me an opportunity to share my emotions about product/brand experience with others					
	4. Telling others about my experience online is the way to let out my (positive/negative) feelings					
	5. I feel it is important write negative things online about brands on social media					
	6. I would advise against or in favour of brands when someone asks for my advice online					
	7. I would like to share my experiences with others on social media more frequently in the future.					
	8. I recommend my favourite brands and products to people who ask for advice online					

Purchase Intentions						
	1. I purchase products that have many positive reviews					
	2. When reading online reviews shared by friends, I will purchase that product if I need it					
	3. My awareness of the brand or product increases the chance that I would purchase it.					

Appendix B

The Interview Instrument Motivations Factors

Self-enhancement

1. What feelings do you have when using social media?
 - a. What positive feelings can you discern? What about negative ones?
 - b. Please recall a situation when you posted a positive review on social media, which created positive feelings for you.
 - c. Recall a situation when you posted a negative review on social media, which created positive feelings for you.

Social comparison

2. Have you ever felt that your online review or comment distinguished you from your friends or family?
 - a. Please recall a time when your review made you think that your experiences are different from the experiences of your friends or family.
 - b. For what purposes do you venture into reading online reviews and comments of your family and friends?

Helping others

3. Could you tell about moments when you wanted to reciprocate a company for a good product or service by posting a positive review or comment?
 - a. What qualities did your experience have that you decided to share it with others on social media?
 - b. Where there moments when the service or product was of such poor quality that you wanted to dissuade others from purchasing it?

Gratifications Factors

Knowledge enhancement

4. How do you learn about products and brands?
 - a. Do you find friends or brand community members as more trustworthy sources of information about certain products or brands? Why?

- b.** Have you ever thought that some opinions on social media can be biased? If yes, how do you avoid such biased opinions?

Social interactions

- 5. What is the best outcome of social interactions on social media about products and brands?
 - a.** Why would you stop using social media for this purpose?
 - b.** What would enhance your enjoyment from these social interactions?

Entertainment

- 6. On what occasions are you entertained by social media reviews or posts?
 - a.** Please recall a moment when you had fun by posting comments or reviews about a brand or product.
 - b.** What kind of qualities of a social media campaign would you call as entertaining?

Positive eWOM

- 7. What reasons encourage you to create positive posts about brands and services?
 - a.** Is there anyone, in particular, you would like to read your positive reviews? Who would your target audience be?
 - b.** Do you enjoy reading other people's positive reviews? Why or why not?
 - c.** Recall a specific positive experience with a purchase that encouraged you to create a positive post.

Negative eWOM

- 8. What reasons encourage you to create negative posts about brands and services?
 - a.** Is there anyone, in particular, you would like to read your negative reviews? Who would your target audience be?
 - b.** Do you enjoy reading other people's negative reviews? Why or why not?
 - c.** Recall a specific negative experience with a purchase that encouraged you to create a negative post.

Purchase intentions

9. Do you find online posts trustworthy for you to decide whether you would purchase a product or not?
- a.** Recall a situation when a positive review was decisive in making you purchase a product.
 - b.** Recall a situation when a negative review was decisive in dissuading you from purchasing a product.

Appendix C

Table 5.5 Descriptive statistics of variables

Descriptive Statistics										
		Std.								
		N	Min	Max	Mean	Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
							Std.		Std.	
Variables	Indicators	Statistic			Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Error	Statistic	Error
Self-enhancement	SE1	576	1	5	2.83	1.244	0.133	0.102	−0.966	0.203
	SE2	576	1	5	3.14	1.303	−0.190	0.102	−0.998	0.203
	SE3	576	1	5	3.45	1.260	−0.447	0.102	−0.746	0.203
Social comparison	SC1	576	1	5	2.98	1.260	−0.104	0.102	−0.982	0.203
	SC2	576	1	5	3.05	1.258	−0.204	0.102	−0.957	0.203
	SC3	576	1	5	3.58	1.226	−0.640	0.102	−0.486	0.203
	SC4	576	1	5	3.46	1.199	−0.496	0.102	−0.569	0.203
Help others	HO1	576	1	5	4.22	1.060	−1.377	0.102	1.278	0.203
	HO2	576	1	5	4.03	1.078	−0.927	0.102	0.074	0.203
	HO3	576	1	5	4.00	1.101	−0.968	0.102	0.307	0.203
	HO4	576	1	5	4.35	0.969	−1.599	0.102	2.195	0.203
	HO5	576	1	5	4.33	0.973	−1.373	0.102	1.165	0.203
Knowledge enhancement	KE1	576	1	5	4.16	1.049	−1.100	0.102	0.369	0.203
	KE2	576	1	5	4.29	0.980	−1.296	0.102	1.052	0.203
	KE3	576	1	5	4.26	1.005	−1.272	0.102	0.889	0.203
	KE4	576	1	5	4.14	1.032	−1.088	0.102	0.523	0.203
Social interaction	SI1	576	1	5	3.86	1.095	−0.676	0.102	−0.263	0.203
	SI2	576	1	5	3.51	1.238	−0.429	0.102	−0.790	0.203
	SI3	576	1	5	3.59	1.189	−0.509	0.102	−0.537	0.203
Entertainment	ET1	576	1	5	3.99	1.126	−0.921	0.102	0.008	0.203
	ET2	576	1	5	4.09	1.059	−1.016	0.102	0.319	0.203
	ET3	576	1	5	4.18	0.991	−1.075	0.102	0.555	0.203
	ET4	576	1	5	4.05	1.091	−0.911	0.102	−0.032	0.203

eWOM	EWOM1	576	1	5	2.88	1.355	0.094	0.102	−1.096	0.203
	EWOM2	576	1	5	3.27	1.355	−0.253	0.102	−1.079	0.203
	EWOM3	576	1	5	3.42	1.263	−0.353	0.102	−0.845	0.203
	EWOM4	576	1	5	3.13	1.372	−0.083	0.102	−1.169	0.203
	EWOM5	576	1	5	3.26	1.324	−0.258	0.102	−1.007	0.203
	EWOM6	576	1	5	3.63	1.244	−0.657	0.102	−0.475	0.203
	EWOM7	576	1	5	3.67	1.163	−0.540	0.102	−0.561	0.203
	EWOM8	576	1	5	3.85	1.104	−0.676	0.102	−0.334	0.203
Purchase	PI1	576	1	5	3.95	1.070	−0.887	0.102	0.286	0.203
intention	PI2	576	1	5	4.01	0.972	−0.889	0.102	0.509	0.203
	PI3	576	1	5	3.99	0.914	−0.687	0.102	0.141	0.203

Appendix D

Ethics approval

8/24/2021

Mail - Faisal Alsamaani - Outlook

⏮ Reply all ⏭ Delete ⏮ Junk Block ...

Quest Ethics Notification - Amendment Request Process Finalised - Application Approved



quest.noreply@vu.edu.au

Fri 9/6/2019 3:34 PM

To: thuy-huong.truong@vu.edu.au

Cc: Chitra.DeSilva@vu.edu.au; Faisal Alsamaani



Dear DR THUY HUONG TRUONG,

Your amendment request for the following ethics application has been formally reviewed and finalised.

- » Application ID: HRE17-191
- » Chief Investigator: DR THUY HUONG TRUONG
- » Other Investigators: DR CHITRA LOKUWADUGE, MR Faisal Alsamaani
- » Application Title: The Impact of e-WOM on Purchase Intention in Saudi Arabia
- » Form Version: 13-07

The amendment request for this ethics application has been accepted and deemed to meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)' by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been granted for two (2) years from the original approval date; 13/10/2017.

Continued approval of this research project by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) is conditional upon the provision of a report within 12 months of the above approval date or upon the completion of the project (if earlier). A report proforma may be downloaded from the Office for Research website at: <http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php>

Office for Research - Ethics & Biosafety

Human Research Ethics Ethical Conduct in Human Research. It is required that all research involving or impacting on humans is performed in an ethical manner.

research.vu.edu.au

Please note that the Human Research Ethics Committee must be informed of the following: any changes to the approved research protocol, project timelines, any serious events or adverse and/or unforeseen events that may affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. In these unlikely events, researchers must immediately cease all data collection until the Committee has approved the changes. Researchers are also reminded of the need to notify the approving HREC of changes to personnel in research projects via a request for a minor amendment. It should also be noted that it is the Chief Investigators' responsibility to ensure the research project is conducted in line with the recommendations outlined in the National Health and Medical

<https://outlook.office.com/mail/deeplink?popoutv2=1&version=20210815002.08>

1/1

Appendix E

Information to participants



INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled "Role of Motivation and Gratification Factors in Electronic Word of Mouth: Effects on Consumer Purchase Intentions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia". This project is being conducted by a student researcher Faisal Alsamaani as part of a PhD thesis at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr. Thuy-Huong Truong from the Business School.

Project explanation

The study will examine the relationship between eWOM on social media and the purchase intentions of Saudi citizens. The research aims to evaluate the impact of eWOM on purchase intentions among consumers in the KSA.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this project, you will be interviewed for 60 minutes. You will be asked to answer a set of open-ended questions apropos to your experiences on the electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and your purchase intention.

What will I gain from participating?

The information you provide, along with other participants, will contribute to the marketing theories about the relationship between eWOM and purchase intentions in Saudi Arabia. It will help the companies to provide better products and services to their customers.

How will the information I give be used?

This information will be used to published in my PhD Thesis titled "Role of Motivation and Gratification Factors in Electronic Word of Mouth: Effects on Consumer Purchase Intentions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia".

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

There are no risks associated with this study because all information that you provide will be kept confidential. The interview / survey questions will not elicit sensitive information.

How will this project be conducted?

The research will conduct interviews for exploring the relationship between the eWOM on social media and the purchase intentions of consumers in Saudi Arabia.

Who is conducting the study?

If you have any questions or would have further information, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor at:

Chief Investigator:

Dr. Thuy-Huong Truong
Lecturer
Business School, Victoria University
Thuy-Huong.Truong@vu.edu.au
Phone: (+61 3) 9919 5351

Student Researcher:

Faisal Alsamaani
Post Graduate Researcher
Business School, Victoria University
faisal.alsamaani@live.vu.edu.au
Phone: (+61) 420755216

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix F

Consent form



CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

We would like to invite you to take part in a study into the Role of Motivation and Gratification Factors in Electronic Word of Mouth: Effects on Consumer Purchase Intentions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The project will support dialogue about the diversification of the Saudi economy and will acquire relevant data from consumers. The study will also examine the relationship between eWOM on social media and the purchase intentions of Saudi citizens. The research aims to evaluate the impact of eWOM on purchase intentions among consumers in the KSA.

CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I,
of

certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study:
Role of Motivation and Gratification Factors in Electronic Word of Mouth: Effects on Consumer Purchase Intentions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia being conducted at Victoria University by: Faisal Alsamaani.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by: Faisal Alsamaani and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- The participant will be asked to answer a set of questions (Survey / Interviews)
- The interview will take approximately 1 hour to complete
- The majority of the interview questions are open-ended and will require you to best describe your experience
- There are no correct or incorrect answers to the questions

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher

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If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.