

**Impact of IT on Business:  
eWOM and the Three W's (Who, Why and What)**

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## ABSTRACT

Recent trends in technology and hypermedia has resulted in the increased use of internet as source of information by consumers. Electronic-word of-mouth (eWOM) is a non-verbal form of communication about product and/or services posted and accessed on websites by consumers around the globe. eWOM platforms are places where the actual non-verbal statements are shared which includes consumer-to-consumer sites (C2C), forums, blogs and social sites; typical examples are eBay, gittigidiyor.com and berbathoca.com. Nowadays eWOM is consider as the most trusted and influential source of information for consumers; because consumers like to hear the opinion of others especially those who had experiences with the product and/or service before purchase.

This study attempts to analyze the **three W's** (Who, Why and what). Who post/seek the eWOM? Why they post/seek eWOM? What kind of eWOM they post/seek? And the influence on consumer purchase intentions. Personal interview approach was used to collect data from a sample of 130 respondents, with varying levels of expertise with eWOM platforms and online communities. eWOM is a powerful marketing tool that allows marketing managers to reach and listen to customers. The main aim of this thesis is to help marketing managers develop strategies for their organizations to benefit effectively from eWOM platform opinions.

**Keywords:** Hypermedia, Electronic-word-of-mouth, Platforms, Online reviews, Poster, lurkers.

## ÖZ

Son yıllarda ki teknoloji ve hipermedya kullanımının tüketiciler tarafından arttığı internet kaynaklarında sonuçlanmıştır. Elektronik-, sözlü (eWOM) bir sözel olmayan iletişim biçimi olan ürün veya hizmetleri deftere nakledilen ve dünyadaki tüketiciler tarafından kolayca erişilebilen web sitelerinde kullanıcılar tarafından görüntülenebilen bir iletişimdir. eWOM platformları tüketici-müşteri siteleri (C2C), forumlar, bloglar ve sosyal siteleri içeren gerçek sözel olmayan ifadelerin paylaşıldığı yerlerdir. eBay, gittigidiyor.com ve berbathoca.com bu sitelere verilebilecek birkaç tipik örnektir. Bugünlerde eWOM tüketiciler için güvenilir ve etkili bilgi kaynağı olarak görülmektedir çünkü tüketiciler alacakları ürün veya görecekları servis karşısında daha önceden tecrübe sahibi olan insanlardan bilgi sahibi olmayı ve onlardan öneri duymayı istemektedirler. Bu çalışma **üç W** analizi olarak adlandırılan kim (who), neden (why) ve ne (what) sorularını analiz etmektedir. eWOM da yazarlar kim/okuyanlar kim? Neden yazıyorlar/neden okuyorlar? eWOM da ne çeşit bilgiler yazılıyor/okunuyor? Aynı zamanda tüketicilerdeki satın alma etkileri nelerdir? eWOM platformları için uzmanlık düzeyinde bir sonuç elde etmek amacıyla çevrimiçi topluluklar ile 130 katılımcının görüş ve yaklaşımları değerlendirilmiştir. eWOM müşterilere ulaşmak ve pazarlama yöneticileri sağlayan, güçlü bir pazarlama aracıdır. Bu tezin ana amacı, pazarlama Yöneticilerinin ve kuruluşlarının eWOM platformu görüşleri için işe yarar stratejiler geliştirmeye yardımcı olmaktır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Hipermedya, Elektronik word-of-mouth, Platform, Açık görüşler, Yazıcı, Okuyucu.

## **To My Family**



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*Experience is not what happens to a man, it is what a man does with what happens to him."*

*- Aldous Huxley*

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an insight of our research philosophy, aims and objectives of the thesis, as well as the overall contribution to marketers and consumers. In addition the chapter also presents brief information regarding other chapters.

Historically word-of-mouth (WOM) has been defined as face-to-face communication about products or companies between people who were not commercial entities (Arndt, 1967). WOM is also referred to as “a friendly communication between independent customers concerning the evaluations of products and/or services. The sole purpose of WOM communication is to pass negative or positive acknowledgement about a product and/or services to from “Sender” to the “Receiver”. WOM is a kind of intimate conversation which is perceived as non-profit motivated, because the sender transmit information to the receiver with the assumptions that it will be useful.

Effectively WOM is referred to as “informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers” (Westbrook, 1987, pg. 261). Arndt (1967, 1968) referred to WOM as Offline-WOM; he defined Offline-WOM as real time facial interaction between consumers. Hoffman and Novak (1996) Added that in Offline-WOM there is

need for the sender and the receiver to relate and exchange information in a real time atmosphere, he called this type of activities temporal synchronicity. In addition both the sender and the receiver must have some sort of social bonds; some sort of familiarity must exist and must use oral communication as the medium for exchange. Accordingly, after market intelligence has been acquired, the resender in offline-WOM must be able recall the information, before passing it to other consumers (Minxue, et al, 2011).

Godes and Mayzlin (2004) stated that apart from the power of market intelligence, elements concerning the intelligence itself are hardly accepted as saving, in offline communication channels, it is extremely difficult to analyze and process WOM messages. However, hypermedia has made this possible since the format of information is written. Marketing activities such as advertisement and promotion initiates the first purchase intentions and after the actual purchase, the consumption experience subsequently trigger customers to share their experience by the spreading WOM, (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). The diffusion of customers experience is called *Spillover*.

Research has proved that consumers rely on WOM to reduce their perceived risk derived from the uncertainty inherent in service purchase decisions (Murray, 1991). Considering the fact that the definitions and the motivation factors mentioned above were scripted some decades ago, the interpretation of WOM still remains the same, suggesting that the terminology has been widely accepted by researchers and academicians. Harrison (2001) described eWOM as a “casual customer-to-customer disclosure between a



noncommercial transmitter and a listener concerning, an organization, a product, a brand or a service”.

Hennig-Thurau et al, (2004, pg. 39) interpreted eWOM as:

[. . .] any positive or negative claims made by prospective, current, or previous customer about a company or their products/services; which is made available to other citizens of the community and various institutions using the web.

eWOM is also known as online WOM. “Online WOM is when sender searches for information on the web using search engines and then decides to evaluate the value of information acquired relative to his or her own needs as well as potential information seekers, who might require such useful information (Minxue, et al. 2011)”. However, studies regarding the credibility of eWOM are limited. In another finding Gershoff et al. (2003) defined acceptance as “the degree to which a transmitter/receiver trust the eWOM information and the probability to adopt the recommendations presented in the message”. Traditional WOM structure is perceived as non-profit motivated in contrast to eWOM which is anonymous in nature and thus the possibility of profit-motivated behavior may exist.

Hypermedia has created many opportunities for eWOM communication in the field of marketing; as information can be readily accessed online and thus affects purchase intentions. In contrast to the conventional WOM, eWOM diffuses rapidly because of its unique features; these features encompass the anonymous nature of eWOM, multiple

recipients and its availability anytime, anywhere (Litvin et al., 2008). Hypermedia has facilitated power shift in the marketplace from manufacturers to consumers (Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006), by providing useful information at the fingertips of consumers and at the same time reduce the cost, stress and barriers of information search process.

Consumers have become savvier using the internet to gather information about products and/or services, trust in traditional advertisements has decrease drastically and many firms are looking for alternative strategies to promote their brands/products/services. Instead of spending money to advertise on the web, (Rowley, 2001) recommended that firms should try to create and organize a feedback mechanism, in a way that their customers can relate with each other and thus creates a successful brand community. These developments consequently signaled that eWOM activities have gained ground in the marketing mix.

Subsequently, the potential impact of eWOM on customers' decision-making processes can be more powerful than that of conventional WOM (EunHa and Seocheong, 2011). A recent study noted that majority of online purchasers perceive opinions posted online more trustworthy than brand communities (ACNielsen, 2007). eWOM is considered more reliable than WOM because of its anonymous nature, and incentives attached to it like economic rewards and social values. The extant literature proves that eWOM is the modern WOM because parity exists between them and eWOM has become a permanent element of the online marketing mix because of the influence it has over consumers purchase intentions. Marketers can seize the opportunity in the platform to improve product/service quality, innovation and future product characteristics, in order to meet

consumer expectations. The eWOM platforms can be use as listening channel by marketers to get an insight of competitor's product/services.

eWOM platforms are (one to many and asynchronous), as they have high influential power (Buhalis and Law, 2008), and using information from these sites do not only reduces uncertainty but also enhances the quality of the choice (Fodness and Murray, 1999). Similarly in their studies Schiffman and Kanuk (2000, pg. 398) discovered that consumers use eWOM platforms due to “the expectations of receiving information that may decrease decision time, effort and contribute to the achievement of a more satisfying decision outcome”.

In light of the advances in technology and usage of internet, to fulfill business activities commonly known as e-commerce, one aspect of e-commerce that is influencing behaviors and judgement of shoppers is the eWOM. (Lee et al., 2008). Consumers rely on others consumer's views, ideas and propagandas; sometimes purchasers make conclusion based on intelligence gotten on the internet (Lee et al., 2008). Although research on eWOM is still relatively young but it can be consider as the extension of conventional social communications in the new age. The eWOM has attracted multitude marketing and consuming studies, peculiarly the motives behind exchanging eWOM and the effect of eWOM on buyer's consumption.

Our thesis aims to make several useful contributions to the marketing information system (MKIS). Kotler, et al. (2006) defined MKIS as "people, apparatus, and procedures to gather, sort, analyze, evaluate, and distribute needed, timely, and accurate information to marketing decision makers". Decision makers comprise of consumers and marketing managers. Accordingly, in this thesis we developed and test a model that examines the effects of eWOM on consumer decision making process and the three Ws (who, why and what they post/seek). This relationship was measured using a sample of respondents who had experience with eWOM platforms. The study questionnaire was prepared using well-established scales. It consists of twenty-six (26) questions a scale of five Likert response option was used to avoid the tendency of being biased. The questionnaire contains several demographic questions about the respondent such as age, gender, marital status, education and income. Other section of the questionnaires contains several questions on posting motives, seeking motives and consumers perceptions after reading online reviews.

## **1.1 Thesis Structure**

This thesis consists of seven (7) chapters. The first chapter is the introduction, which attempt to explain what the thesis is all about and evolution of the thesis topic. The second chapter is the literature review which attempt to explain our topic "eWOM" as well as previous research findings. The third chapter demonstrates the research model used in this study. The fourth chapter attempt to clarify the methodology used in this thesis, the sample size, data collection procedure, and questionnaire structures and data analysis. The fifth chapter shows results of our findings, regarding demographic profiles of posters/readers, posting motives, seeking motives and other important variables used

in this study. Chapter six presents the discussion of our findings and managerial implications based on this findings, in addition the chapter also contains limitations of this study. The last chapter presents our thesis conclusion and future research direction.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of eWOM has gained audience in the present-day due to the emergence of the web and the prevalence of e-commerce. Electronic word-of-mouth is an expansion of traditional interpersonal communications in the contemporary world (Yolanda and Ngai 2011). There are several definitions for eWOM among them are word-of-mouth (Goldenberg et al., 2001), online feedback mechanisms (Dellarocas, 2003), electronic referral marketing (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2004) and Internet WOM (Phelps et al., 2004). The theme eWOM is comparatively new in the research world, and the literatures at hand regarding eWOM appears incoherent and articles related with the study lack a complete frame of reference and a comprehensive report. Considering this, the inauguration of an organized taxonomy is needed in order to categorize this field of study (Yolanda and Ngai 2011).

Since eWOM is currently new and previous research in this field are rather limited, giving much space for additional research, this study attempts to examine the profiles of posters/lurkers(who), posting and reading motivations(why), message content and the influence of eWOM on consumers purchase intentions(what). In this study these elements are referred to as the **3 (W's)**.

Some decades ago [Hovland \(1948\)](#) discovered that social interaction involves four factors namely; the communicator (sender), the stimuli (message), the receiver and the reaction. In his studies he also pointed out that the receiver and their reactions were more challenging to study. To reflect his work in the new age, senders are the posters, receivers are the readers, stimuli refer to motivations and reaction explains the impact of eWOM on purchase intentions. This study used empirical methods to identify senders/receivers as well as their responses. In this study posters are referred to as **(writers, senders, contributors and opinion leaders)** whereas seekers are referred to as **(opinion seekers, receiver, lurkers, non-contributors and readers)**.

Accordingly, the power of word-of-mouth lies in the last stages of the buying process as it comforts buyers, decrease after-purchase uncertainty by giving them assurance regarding future exchange ([Martilla, 1971](#)). [Settle and Alreck \(1989\)](#) argued that word-of-mouth is widely accepted as the basic uncertainty reducer of several types of risk associated with purchase, which encompass social, functional, psychological, time and financial risks. These varieties of risk are categorized into two main subgroup, financial or functional risk, which focus on financial loss, products and their performances; the outcome of socio-psychological risk determined by vendee's interaction with their social atmosphere ([Von-wangenheim and Bayo'n, 2004](#)). Socio-psychological risk are not product-centered they are customer-focused. Existence of risk help better explains why vendees often adopt pre-purchase trials.

However, other findings suggested that if the market intelligence was requested by seekers then effect of WOM tend to be more influential than when they did not request

for it and the probability of acceptance is high (Gremler, 1994). WOM can be positive or negative, word-of-mouth is described as vivacious and innovative, positive word-of-mouth is associated with pleasant, memorable consumption experiences while negative WOM is associated with belittling, unpleasant, disgusting consumption experiences, rumors and internal complaining.

Balasubramanian and Mahajan (2001) stated that the eWOM is an important subject amid researchers and practitioners. People engage in eWOM activities due to certain beneficial reasons, for example they exchange knowledge with others because a genuine desire to rescue others consumers from negative experiences exist and to help them make a perfect purchase decision (Engel et al. 1993). In another study (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007; Hung & Li, 2007) reported that eWOM is one of the most attested source of information for consumers and it is twice more inspiring compare to traditional advertisements because eWOM has higher credibility, it is convenient and can be accessed anytime (Bickart & Schindler 2001).

eWOM participants may derive economic, utilitarian, or social value (Balasubramanian and Mahajan, 2001; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) and evaluation of service is quite difficulty due to its intangible nature and consumers are savvier, to reduce risk associated with purchase and cognitive dissonance, consumers actively seek information from other consumers via eWOM platforms.

Similarly, Bickart and Schindler (2001) reported that consumers' activities on eWOM platforms provide empathy, high credibility and relevance to other community members.



The activities are perceived as productive because online brand communities depend on customer to customer interaction rather than consumer to brand relationship, as such consumers' autonomy should be encourage in eWOM platform. Table 1 describes the differences between WOM and eWOM.

Table 1: Differences between WOM and eWOM

	<b>WOM</b>	<b>eWOM</b>
<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>		
<b>Communication Medium</b>	Talk, Letter, Telephone, Meeting.	Discussion forums, blogs
<b>Form</b>	Oral (Written) communication	Written communication
<b>Synchronicity</b>	Synchronous communication	Synchronous/ Asynchronous communication
<b>Type of interaction</b>	Direct-Real time interaction	Indirect- interaction is virtual
<b>Format</b>	One dimension communication	Multiple dimension communication
<b>Relationships</b>	Familiar each other/social ties/specific receiver pool	Generally anonymous virtual social bonds and relationships
<b>Ease of transmission</b>	Demanding	Straightforward
<b>Focus</b>	Persuasive communication	Persuasive & diffusive communication

Origin: Hoffman and Novak (1996).

eWOM is an unacknowledged mediated scripted communication. Because information are posted by anonymous contributors receivers have to carefully evaluate the

information on basis of reliability constructs. Rieh (2002) came up with certain meaningful factors to prove that cognitive authority can influence surfers in their searching and seeking process. He suggested six aspects of authority namely: reliable, scholarly, trustworthy, official, credible and amateurish. In another related, influential study the above mentioned factors were assembled into two categories. Reliable, trustworthy and credibility are referred to as authenticity signifying the validity of information and conceivable and secondly official, intellectuality and amateurishness are denoted as the universal authority indicating that the message emerge from a reliable and trustable source They also pointed out that authenticity influences readers trust to an unimaginable extent (Mitra and Watts, 2002).

## **2.1. Who post/seek on eWOM platforms?**

Previous research suggests that the varied applications of ICT increase and bolster the feasibilities of communication and reinforce the improvement of skills for synchronization or coactions between customers (Dede, 2006; Dieterle, 2009; Squire, 2003; Zurita & Nussbaum, 2004). The university-aged generation has grown up with access to the internet, use of multimedia devices and spends significant part of their free time in internet-related activities.

Individuals participating in virtual communities can be broadly divided into two groups namely posters and lurkers (Nonnecke and Preece, 2001). Among the vast research comparing posters and seekers (Harrison-Walker, 2001) confirmed that affective commitment of customers, may increase the likelihood of sharing WOM messages if they had an unpleasant service counter. Therefore we can say posters are experienced

consumers who have used the product and/or services and thus intend to give their feedback to other information seekers via eWOM platforms. [Harrison-Walker \(2001\)](#) also pointed out that consumers depend on WOM information due to difficulties assessing a product or service. The extant literature highlights that opinion seekers tend to lack knowledge, have some sort of uncertainty. In 2006, teens spent more than 26 hours online each week ([Moskalyuk, 2006](#)). In a survey of 4000 internet users, researchers at Stanford University found that virtually all internet users engaged in some form of information-seeking activity ([Stanford University](#)).

Opinion leadership theory from a pragmatic perspective; opinion leaders in eWOM platforms are those individuals who post their views, opinions and experiences rather than simply reading other's views whereas others read more, they contribute from time to time and sometimes never ([Preece et al., 2004](#)). Previous studies argued that opinion leaders' influence is limited to their immediate family and acquaintances, the internet greatly extends their potential scope of influence ([Lyons and Henderson, 2005](#)). Contrary to the previous empirical studies, a recent finding shows that opinion leaders actively broadcast informative and useful market intelligence to other consumers seeking advice ([Okazaki, 2009](#)). They are individuals and not experts; who enjoy high social status and influence consumers indirectly without advising them. Non-contributors usually look up to them as role models because they have less internet experience, and they opinion leaders tend to gather information through traditional paths.

Gilly et al. (1998) stated that: “they acquire most of their market intelligence through non-personal source, committed to products or services permanently or for long period of time and at the same time maintains high degree of enthusiasm in the product or service sector”.

Amongst vast empirical studies the definition of lurker in the context of online atmosphere and neighborhood are as follows:

Rafaeli et al (2004) defined lurker as a “frequent visitor to the community but restrain posting” and “a constant visitor but silent listener”.

Nonnecke and Preece (2001) defined lurker as “An individual who posts periodically or never but is known to read other peoples postings regularly” and “as someone who posts sporadically or not at all”

Two types of lurkers have been identified, the active and inactive lurkers. Active lurkers are members that reciprocate secretly to reviews posted on online and/or transmit intelligences to others for example using private chat or email while inactive lurkers are members that only read posted reviews, rarely reply and sometimes never take part (Bowes 2002 pg.74). Accordingly, Lurkers visit eWOM platforms to gather information yet rarely or never post their own views. Schindler and Bickart (2003) argued that “consumers with information motivations habitually depend on online conversations or written memos”. Similarly, Bronner and de Hoog (2010) discovered that desire for support and a sense of community is another motivation, and consumers motivated by this desire, often rely on conversions going on eWOM platforms. Eventually, this trend

has led to substantial participation inequality in which a small percentage of active contributors supplying the majority of the ratings on eWOM sites (Nielsen, 2006).

## **2.2. Why consumers post/seek eWOM?**

Yolanda and Ngai (2011) argued that the primary determinants for engaging in posting activities on eWOM platforms are concern for other consumers, need for social ties, economic incentives attached to it, and the potential for self-enhancement. Other objectives for contribution include self expression, extraversion and altruism; because they want to dispense their knowledge, opinions and previous consumption experiences.

Meanwhile lurkers seek eWOM due to ambiguity, uncertainty of buying and the need for social ties. Okazaki (2009) pointed out that the desire for social need; influences participation in eWOM platforms includes individual-level as well as group-level and opinion leaders tend to disseminate intelligence to other who needs it. Self-interest and personal satisfaction are the reasons that posters contribute to a virtual community (Wasko and Faraj, 2005). Self-confidence also determines whether a person posts, which is something lurkers may lack.

Yolanda and Ngai (2011) developed a conceptual framework for eWOM, they identify the motivation factors why writers and readers post or read eWOM. The table below consists of the motivational factors for posting and seeking.

Table 2: Conceptual Framework for eWOM

<b>Writers Motivations</b>	<b>Readers Motivations</b>
1. Social need and ties	Social need and ties
2. Opinion leadership	Opinion followership
3. Information exchange	Information need
4. Credibility	Preceding experience/knowledge
5. Experience/expertise	Uncertainty of buying and risk reduction.
6. Knowledge/education	

Origin: Yolanda and Ngai (2011)

Contributors post on eWOM platforms because of monetary incentives attached, their hope for social reciprocation, concern for fellow vendee and the latency to improve one's self dignity; This factors are affirmed and recognized as the basic stimulators for involvement in online reviews sites (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2003). Accordingly, Price et al (1995) argued that the principal domain where daily helping activities occur is the marketplace "Within our mindset the zeal that motivate us to render help is determined by mankind desires to be supportive" (Smith et al., 2007, pg. 387).

Lurkers seek information from eWOM platforms due to the fact that they see other consumer's referral as highly reliable compare to the referrals of specialist. They perceive the referrals as authentic and not profit oriented. Similarly, Feick and Price (1987) came up with a theory known as market maven; a market maven is a distinctive consumer who has prevailing market awareness and expertise. The way market maven guides consumers are contrary to that of an opinion-leader who has intelligence and

expertise regarding a particular product/service. Previous empirical findings suggested that vendees have the abilities to distinguish market maven amidst experts and other intelligent vendee's online referrals, differentiate them from individuals with product/service base skills and even utilize them in making consumption decisions.

For example, previous studies that focus on motivations behind online WOM are, the work of [Hennig-Thurau and colleagues Hennig-Thurau et al. \(2004\)](#), [Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Klein Pearo \(2004\)](#), [Bonaccorsi & Rossi \(2006\)](#), [Gretzel & Yoo \(2007, 2008\)](#) and [Hennig-Thurau & Walsh \(2003\)](#), Most of their work measures motivations for contributing to online communities or why people participate in a virtual community. [Bronner and de Hoog \(2010\)](#) “argued that the expectation is, for example, that in virtual communities the relaxation motivation—to escape from daily responsibilities and the need for entertainment and having fun—will be more important than on review sites, which are more linked to actual choices (a Harley-Davidson virtual community site will not often be visited by people who want to buy a motorcycle)”.

Generally, consumers believe that consumer-provided information online are reliable and trustworthy; interacting with others online provide some sort of amusements, escape from daily stress, they depend on certain group of the online shoppers who have vast marketplace intelligence or skills to guide them in their future buying decisions. As mentioned earlier [Mitra and Watts \(2002\)](#) added that the probability of a reader to adopt the recommendations posted online is determined by authenticity of the information.

### **2.3. Message Contents and the Influence on consumer purchase intentions?**

As stated earlier consumers can post or seek two forms of influential eWOM, one of them is positive and the other one is negative eWOM, in rare cases they tend to have a neutral attitude towards a product and/or services. Positive eWOM is when consumers hold positive feedback towards products/services to the degree that the consumers will actively broadcast their positive feedback regarding it using forums or blogs whereas negative eWOM is when consumers hold negative feedback towards products/services to the degree that the consumers will actively broadcast their negative feedback regarding it using forums or blogs.

Buttle (1997) stated two kinds of eWOM that may have influence on consumers; namely positive or pleasant and negative or unpleasant eWOM. Subsequently, Singh and Pandya (1991) suggested that unpleasant eWOM are referred to as a type of buyer's criticisms against firms while positive eWOM are type of buyer's compliments for firms. Positive eWOM helps firms to reduce cost associated to marketing and advertising activities, and may increase sales, profits and better image for the brand. Secondly pleasant eWOM means successfully attracting new customers through satisfied customers, while negative eWOM devaluate reliability exhibited in the firms marketing activities such as promotions and advertisements.

Biz Rate conducted a study with a sample size of 5,500 online shoppers, they discovered that about 44 percent of the participants had visited eWOM platforms before making a purchase decision and about 59 percent capitalize that reviews on eWOM platforms are



more helpful than expert reviews (Piller, 1999). Competence of the internet to influence consumers during information search phase, the amount, type of intelligence required and the value of the information acquired is quite impressive (Steffes and Burgee, 2009). Furthermore, in their paper Price and Feick (1984) stated that WOM has a notable effect on all the stages of consumer buying decisions processes and buying outcomes are controlled by specific external factors. Researchers have explicitly noted that negative WOM minify consumers' trust regarding a firm adverts and purchase intention.

When consumers acquire neither positive nor negative eWOM recommendations from an online community made by other customers, the person might convert such subconscious belief on the basis that first impression matters. Looking at the influential marketing ability of eWOM on consumer's perceptions and the obscurity of the web atmosphere, firms may maneuver the platform to shape customers' shopping activities and beliefs (Dellarocas, 2006).

Bickart and Schindler (2001) emphasized that eWOM posted online play an informant role; as such the posted memo's influences consumer's conformity. The eWOM mainly illustrates user-oriented reports characterizing a product in terms of price, usage circumstances, as well as performance of the product from user's perspective. This information usually results from actual usage experiences or online reviews.

# Chapter 3

## RESEARCH DESIGN



Figure 3.1: Pictorial research design for research question one.



Figure 3.2: Pictorial research design for research question two.



Figure 3.3: Pictorial research design for research question three.

## Research Question 1: Who post/seek on eWOM platforms?

- One objective of this research is to investigate the profiles of posters compared to other consumers. On the other hand the research aims to investigate the profiles of lurkers compared to others consumers. Who are posters? Who are lurkers? Are they younger, more highly educated, more likely to be single, high income individuals, who tend to post more and who lurk more.



Figure 3.4: eWOM platforms communication showing opinion leaders & opinion seekers.

Black = Opinion leader (posters/senders)

Blue = Opinion seekers (seekers/lurkers)

The extant literature on eWOM suggest that posters are members who actively participate in the community's discussions and are willing to help others (Huvila et al., 2010) while lurkers are silent participants who read the information contributed by posters but rarely or never post (Nonnecke and Preece, 2001). Lurkers and posters have distinct attitudes toward virtual communities (Preece et al., 2004). Lack of know-how, having less to share, finding it difficult to share, and lack of intention may explain why lurkers do not post (Nonnecke and Preece, 2001). In a related research, Nonnecke (2004) realized that 7.8% of the lurkers lack the ability to post to other group members. Posters believe that posting helps a community grow while lurkers prefer to satisfy themselves through observing and information skimming (Nonnecke et al., 2004), need for group commitment, altruism, interconnectivity and helping others are among the main reasons they contribute. Another study discovered that lurkers reveal a higher need for information acquisition from a virtual community than do posters (Mathwick et al., 2008).

### **Research Question 2: Why consumers post/seek on eWOM platforms?**

- Second objective of the research is to investigate motivations for posting information and motivations for seeking information on eWOM platforms. Are they interested in social ties? Are they after the economic incentives attached to it? Do they engage in eWOM behavior for personal reasons, entertainment and social concern (helping others)?

Table 3 summarizes the classification of consumers' motivations for participating in eWOM channels based on the literature mentioned earlier. These motivational factors were employed in previous studies and these factors were used as building block for this study.

Table 3: Classification of Consumers' Motivations for Participating in eWOM Channels<sup>a</sup>

General Motivation	Specific Motivations	Examples of items <sup>b</sup>
<b>1. Personal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-expression</li> <li>• Self enhancement</li> <li>• Status/Power/prestige</li> <li>• Extraversion</li> <li>• Venting negative feelings</li> <li>• Revenge</li> <li>• Gaining self-esteem</li> <li>• Self-discovery</li> <li>• Self-reference</li> </ul>	<p>I feel good when i tell others about my buying successes.</p> <p>The company harmed me, and I will revenge.</p>
<b>2. Social benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group attachment</li> <li>• Interconnectivity</li> <li>• Sense of belonging</li> <li>• Group commitment</li> <li>• Meeting friends</li> <li>• Group reference</li> </ul>	<p>It is fun to communicate with other members online</p> <p>I make friends this way.</p>
<b>3. Social Concern</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficacy</li> <li>• Concern for other consumers</li> <li>• Being helpful to others</li> <li>• Future exchange with others</li> <li>• Expectancy: providing but also getting advice</li> </ul>	<p>I want to help others with my own positive experiences.</p> <p>I expect to receive tips or support from other users.</p>
<b>4. Functional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time saving</li> <li>• Purposive value</li> <li>• Learning to consume</li> <li>• Getting information</li> <li>• Solving problems</li> <li>• Making decisions</li> </ul>	<p>Learning how to do things.</p> <p>Making better decisions</p>
<b>5. Quality assurance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumer empowerment</li> <li>• Enforcing service excellence</li> <li>• Influence on companies</li> </ul>	<p>Publicizing the matters encourage firms to be accommodating.</p>

<b>6. Economic incentives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remuneration</li> <li>• Getting rewards or incentives</li> </ul>	<p>I receive a reward for the writing.</p> <p>Brings me financial advantage.</p>
<b>7. Entertainment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun, amusement and relaxation</li> <li>• Need to unwind from daily responsibilities</li> <li>• Extending experience</li> <li>• Escape</li> </ul>	<p>To be entertained.</p> <p>To relax.</p>
<b>8. Helping the Company</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulate success of company</li> <li>• Good companies should be supported.</li> </ul>	<p>Because i am satisfied with company products, I strive to help the company succeed.</p>

- a. Based on a literature review: Hennig-Thurau & Walsh (2003); Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Klein Pearo (2004); Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004); Bonaccorsi & Rossi (2006) and Gretzel & Yoo (2007).
- b. Items taken from the literature.

### **Research Question 3: What consumers post/seek on eWOM platforms and the influence on consumer purchase intentions?**

- Third objective of the research is to investigate what consumers post/seek on eWOM platform? More of positive or negative comments and the influence on their purchase intentions.

Long and Ching (2010) proposed a conceptual model to measure how firm image and relationship marketing influence trust and how consumers trust depends on eWOM. Positive/Negative eWOM influences (increases/decreases) purchase intentions. In our study we adopted the model partially to measure how positive/negative eWOM encourage or discourage consumer purchase intentions (see figure 3.5).

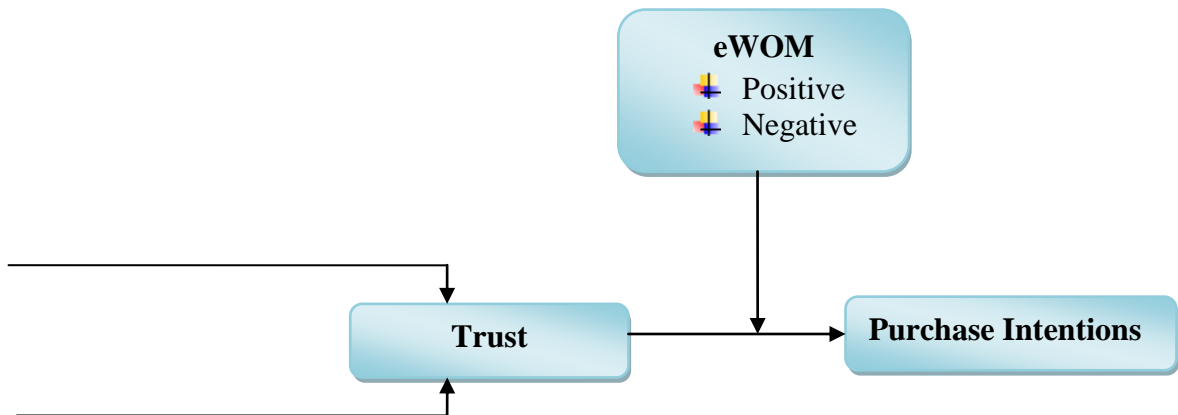


Figure 3.5: Partial conceptual model: Effect of eWOM on purchase intentions.

Similarly, other studies have pointed out that the higher the number of positive feedbacks indicates the extent to which product popularity will be perceived. Their studies also argued that the perceived popularity, for example ratings of a particular memo and informativeness of the memo have great impact on potential buyers purchase intentions.” With evidence from the above studies on eWOM we can conclude vice versa for negative eWOM. As [Sweeney \(et al 2005\)](#) stated that negative eWOM is more emotional, associated with dissatisfaction, and are almost twice as likely to influence the receiver’s opinion of the firm. However, [Sen and Lerman \(2007, pg. 92\)](#) suggested that firms producing or selling hedonic products should not bother about unpleasant reviews unlike firms producing or selling utilitarian products.

A simple unpleasant memo can cause harm to firms during customer product evaluation process; although, one unpleasant statement in a group of 10-messages will not be very dangerous and can be advantageous to firms based on eWOM framework (Doh and Hwang, 2009, pg. 197). To justify the above literature a similar study by Long and Ching (2010) noted that “when positive reviews aggregates are sufficiently large enough to quell the negative reviews; as such the unpleasant reviews helps balance the equilibrium and thus improve consumer purchasing intentions”.

Furthermore, other researchers suggested that it’s in human nature to conform to others because of our social desire; as such consumers periodically determine their behavior by monitoring the activities of others, to make sure that they assimilate the expectations of others (Zhu and He 2002). In addition to the influence of important individuals like partners, friends, and extended family members, consumers purchase decisions are often govern by the weight of favored and fashionable opinions (Rindfleisch and Inman 1998).



## Chapter 4

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter consists of information about the sample used in this empirical study. Accordingly, details regarding data gathering procedure, content of the questionnaire, measures and the analytic approach used include descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, independent sample t-test and one way ANOVAs. [Yolanda and Ngai \(2011\)](#) concluded that “Netnography study is effective in sorting and organizing web communication content. However, sound judgment, predictability and certainty are the shortcomings of this approach compare to quantitative approach. On the other hand quantitative method cannot produce comprehensive descriptive data. Forthcoming researchers are advised to integrate a mixed modus-operandi which would include both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to help achieve sustainable stability on neutrality philosophy, low-downs as well as the determinateness of the research”.

#### 4.1 Sampling

The study employed judgmental sampling. Judgmental sampling is when the sample selected approximately represents the target population. [Churchill \(1995, pg.582\)](#) explained that judgmental sampling procedure is when the “sample objects are chosen because it is believed that they are the nominated population of interest.” In this study the participants are heavy users of famous websites in North Cyprus and Turkey (e.g.

gittidiyor.com.tr, yemeksepeti.com.tr, hepsiburada.com.tr e.t.c.) to purchase items and they also represent the entire Sociodemographics setup of North Cyprus population.

## **4.2 Data Collection**

This study employed a pencil-paper based approach to collect data from the respondents; this method was used to help filter suitable respondents for the research and to increase data consistency. The sample size is n=130, respondent are asked the following filter question:

**“In relation to your previous purchase online did you post any comment, experience or suggestion?” yes/no**

Those respondents who answer yes are marked as posters ([Bronner and de Hoog, 2010](#)) while those who answered no were assumed to be lurkers, some of the participants were allowed to take the questionnaire home, to fill it at their convenient time. This informal approach enhances the reception rate, quality of data and eventually leads to reliable result ([Bronner and Kuijlen 2007](#)). The survey was carried out before the summer holiday (May, 2012), during this period majority of the population usually travels to see their loved ones abroad and thus online purchase rate tends to be very high due to promotions offered by various firms. Product and services purchased during this period includes gift items, flight tickets and hotel reservations and memories of previous purchase can easily be remembered. Then, the participants who took the questionnaires homes were contacted to get the questionnaires back.

In total we distributed 130 questionnaires, out of the 130 questionnaires, 7 had missing information and were therefore eliminated. As a result, 123 questionnaires were obtained at the end of this study and the response rate was about 98%.

### **4.3 Questionnaire Structure and Measurement**

The study questionnaire consist of twenty-six (26) questions to identify the profiles of who post/seek the eWOM, the motives of engagement on eWOM platforms and what they post or read as well as the effect on consumer's perception about the products/services. The questionnaire also contains demographic variables such as age, gender, education, income and marital status. Although, most items in the questionnaire were widely used by previous empirical studies, to increase data accuracy, a pilot survey of seven (7) participants was conducted, to make sure that respondent understood the questions; the result indicated that they understood the questions and no changes were made to the questionnaires.

#### **4.3.1 Posters versus Lurkers?**

Five (5) questions were asked, to identify posters and lurkers profiles based on several Sociodemographics variables (e.g. age, gender, education, income, marital status). A five (5) point Likert scale was used for three (3) of the demographic variables, while gender variable was expressed with a dichotomous code of (1=male and 2=female) and marital status variable was also expressed with a dichotomous code (1=single and 2=married) respectively.

#### **4.3.2 Posting Motives versus Lurking Motives**

The study employed the motivation factors used in previous empirical studies, as mentioned earlier in table 3; all the factors were used in our model to test posting and

seeking motivations on eWOM platforms. To measure posting motivations nine (9) items were included. The items were similar to the ones used by various studies (e.g. Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Klein Pearo (2004); Gretzel and Yoo, 2007). 5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree options were used as the response scale. To measure seeking motivations eight (8) items were included. This items were widely used by various empirical studies (e.g. Bonaccorsi and Rossi (2006); Gretzel and Yoo, 2007). 5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree options were used as the response scale.

### **4.3.3 Positive or Negative eWOM and its influence.**

Buttle (1997) stated that the outcome created by eWOM could be pleasing or displeasing. However, eWOM is argued to be more influential than its offline counterpart (WOM), due to its ability to reach a larger number of individuals instantly and on a global scale (Hennig- Thureau et al., 2004; Phelps et al., 2004). To examine the influence of eWOM on purchase intentions (what), four (4) questions were asked and 5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree options were used as the response scale, In addition, we took two (2) items from posting motives to examine the degree at which consumers post positive reviews compare to negative reviews. “I post positive opinions to express my satisfaction” and “I post negative opinions to express my dissatisfaction after purchase”. 5=strongly agree to 1=strongly disagree options were used as the response scale.

## **4.4 Analytical Methods**

Descriptive analysis was conducted; frequency analysis was used to generate respondents' profiles while with cross-tabulation was used to categorize posters and lurkers based on certain demographics variables, in addition chi-square was used to

determine the significance. Since the items in the questionnaire were widely used in previous studies, we subjected the twenty one (21) items to reliability analysis; the remaining five (5) items were demographics variables and thus were excluded from the analysis. Reliability “pertains to the consistency of a measure and is inversely related to the degree to which a measure is contaminated by random error (O’leary-Kelly and Scott, 1998, pg.394)”. Cronbach’s alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the study construct. Nunnally (1978) Specified that a minimum value of 0.70 provides evidence of reliability and above 0.70 signifies good construct. A correlation matrix was used to assess discriminant validity.

**Independent sample t-test** is used to test differences among two unrelated groups; significance level of less than 5% is assumed <sup>[1]</sup>.

**One-way ANOVA** is statistical approach used to analyze variation among at least three or more independent groups; the variation is basically analyzed using their mean post and ad hoc test <sup>[1]</sup>. Similarly, Olleveant et al (1999) stated that “The practical method to do the analysis is to use a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine whether the means of the three or more groups differs. If the ANOVA leads to a conclusion that there is evidence that the group means differ, we might then be interested in investigating which of the means are different. This is where the Tukey multiple comparison test is used”. Significance level of 5% is generally accepted as a cut-off point for a significant versus a non-significant result, p value is less than .05. Alpha is equal to .05

## **Chapter 5**

### **RESULTS**

This chapter explains detailed information about the results of the empirical study. Demographic characteristics of respondents are reported using frequency analysis. We conducted descriptive cross-tabulation analysis to examine whether there exist a significant difference between posters and lurkers based on their demographics variables, what consumers post or read eWOM platforms. The perception and influence on their purchase intentions was measured using independent sample t-test, seeking and posting motivations were measured using one way ANOVAs. The study questions were analyzed using SPSS version 18.0.

#### **5.1 Sample**

The results for respondents' profile are demonstrated in Table 4. 50% of the respondents are male and the other 50% are female. 2% of the respondent's ages were under 20, 47% between 21 and 30, 31% between 31 and 40, 16% between 41 and 50 while the rest are over 51. 61% of the respondents were single or divorced, while the rest were married. Monthly income is expressed in Turkish Lira, 27% of the respondents had monthly income under 999, 18% between 1000 and 1499, 28% between 1500 and 1999, 16% between 2000 and 2499 and the rest had over 3000. The literacy level indicates that 2% of the respondents had less than high school education,

12% high school, 31% some college education, 26% had bachelors degree while the rest had higher degrees.

Table 4: Demographic breakdown of the sample (n=123)

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	62	50.4
Female	61	49.6
Total	123	100.0
<b>Age</b>		
Under 20	3	2.4
21-30	58	47.2
31-40	38	30.9
41-50	20	16.3
Over 51	4	3.3
Total	123	100.0
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	75	61.0
Married	48	39.0
Total	123	100.0
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
Under 999	33	26.8
1000 – 1499	22	17.9
1500 - 1999	34	27.6
2000 - 2499	20	16.3
Over 3000	14	11.4
Total	123	100.0
<b>Education</b>		
Less than High School	2	1.6
High School	15	12.2
Some College	38	30.9
Bachelors Degree	32	26.0
Higher Degree	36	29.3
Total	123	100.0

The figure below demonstrates classification of the entire sample based on posters and lurkers, the result of the study specify that the sample consists of 34.1% posters and 66.9% lurkers respectively.

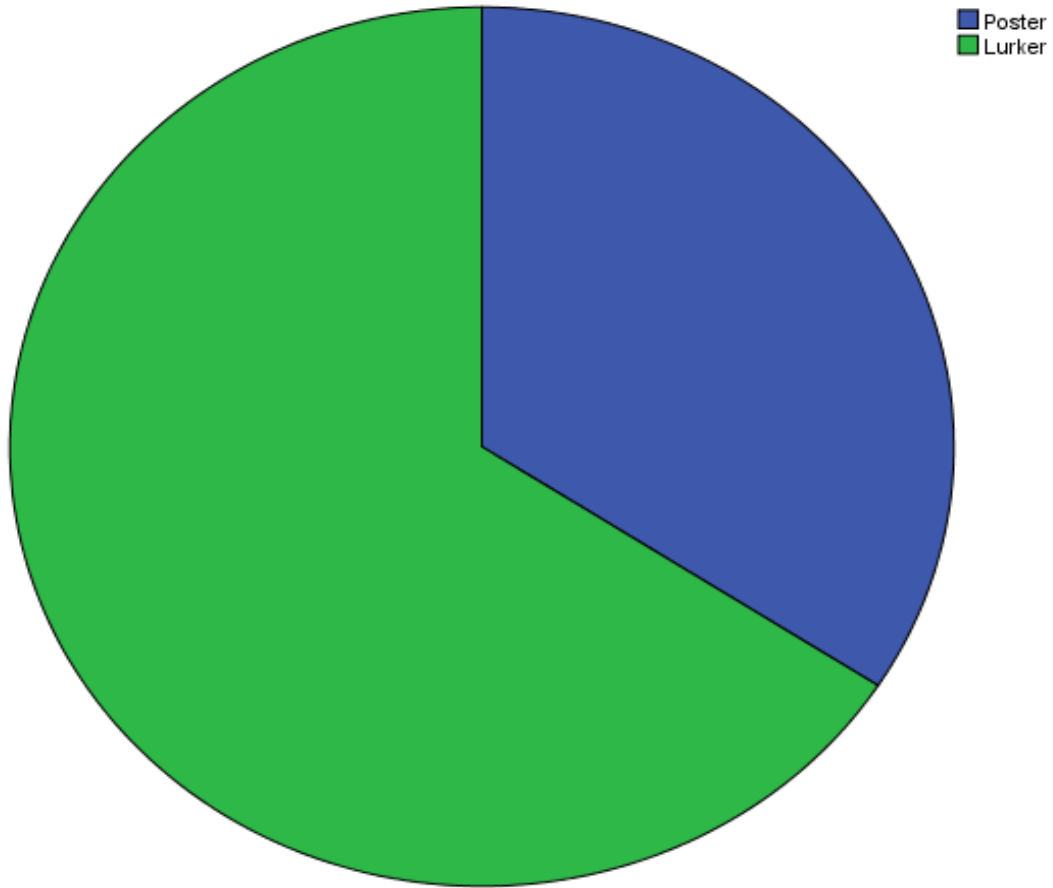


Figure 5: Percentage of posters and lurkers



Table 5: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.785	.795	21

Table 6: Seeking Motivations Correlation

		Inter-Item Correlation Matrix							
		Q1	Q2.	Q3.	Q4	Q5.	Q6.	Q7.	Q8.
1	I would seek information from eWOM platform because it is fun to communicate with other people in the community.	<b>1.000</b>		.543	.231	.284	.204	.309	.168
2	I would seek information from eWOM platform when I need information about a brand/product/service to help me make a buying decision.	.293	<b>1.000</b>	.285	.491	.256	.338	.294	.303
3	I would seek information from eWOM platform because I meet nice people there.	.543	.285	<b>1.000</b>	.308	.316	.288	.349	.336
4	I would seek information from eWOM platforms when I have some uncertainty towards a brand/product/service.	.231	.491	.308	<b>1.000</b>	.382	.274	.287	.442
5	I seek opinion of others from eWOM platform to learn how to do things better.	.284	.256	.316	.382	<b>1.000</b>	.247	.291	.184
6	I would seek information from eWOM platform to help me discover "hot" brand/products/service most people are buying at the moment.	.204	.338	.288	.274	.247	<b>1.000</b>	.259	.297
7	I would seek information from eWOM platform because it brings me financial advantage in general.	.309	.294	.349	.287	.291	.259	<b>1.000</b>	.414
8	I would seek information from eWOM platform because of its authenticity and reliability.	.168	.303	.336	.442	.184	.297	.414	<b>1.000</b>

Table 7: Posting Motivations Correlation

		Inter-Item Correlation Matrix									
		Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	
9	I want to help other consumers with my own experiences.	1.000	.523	.443	.250	.286	.426	.211	.457	.165	
10	I am satisfied with the company and its product that I want to help the company to be successful.	.523	1.000	.535	.339	.410	.322	.155	.498	.188	
11	I believe companies are more accommodating when I publicize the matter.	.443	.535	1.000	.234	.511	.340	.305	.414	.254	
12	I receive financial rewards from marketers for posting.	.250	.339	.234	1.000	-.025	.068	.041	.305	.226	
13	I post positive opinions on eWOM platforms to express my satisfaction after purchase.	.286	.410	.511	-.025	1.000	.597	.552	.147	.236	
14	I post my opinions to enable other consumers make better decision.	.426	.322	.340	.068	.597	1.000	.498	.210	.125	
15	I post negative opinions on eWOM platforms to express my dissatisfaction after purchase.	.211	.155	.305	.041	.552	.498	1.000	.072	.143	
16	I feel good when I can tell others about my opinions and buying successes	.457	.498	.414	.305	.147	.210	.072	1.000	.166	
17	I expect to receive tips or support from other consumers.	.165	.188	.254	.226	.236	.125	.143	.166	1.000	

Table 8: Perception Correlation

		Inter-Item Correlation Matrix			
		Q18	Q19	Q20	Q21
18	Negative eWOM decreases my purchasing desire toward a brand/product/service.	1.000	.430	.435	.221
19	Positive eWOM increases my purchasing desire toward a brand/product/service.	.430	1.000	.569	.097
20	I find eWOM platforms are helpful.	.435	.569	1.000	.305
21	I find the information and opinions on eWOM platforms trustworthy.	.221	.097	.305	1.000

## 5.2 Profile of posters and lurkers (Research Question 1)

Research question 1 addresses the question as to what characteristics do posters and lurkers possess. Of the entire sample, 42 respondents of the 123 (34%) can be characterized as posters while the remaining 66% respondents are characterized as lurkers (See figure 5). Previously, [Bronner and de Hoog \(2008b\)](#) found that 11% of the respondents posted comments on eWOM platforms. Two years ago (2010) in another related study they found that 14% of the respondent posted comments about their experience with a products/services on eWOM platforms. Our result is in line with what may be expected; except that there is an increasing trend. Analyzing posters as compared with lurkers on several demographics leads to the following results.

**Gender:** Of the entire sample, 61.9% of men are classified as posters while 44.4% of women are posters. On the other hand we found out that 38.1% of lurkers were men while 55.6% lurkers were women (See table 9). Therefore, we concluded that men post more than women and women lurk more than men. This result is consistent with what [Awad and Ragowsky \(2008, pg. 113\)](#) discovered that the male gender(men) strives to dominate the listserv conversations, do more self-enhancing activities; contributes detailed scripts and memo's that are more enlightening and instructive.

Table 9: Respondents categories and Gender cross tabulation.

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Participant	Poster	26 (61.9%)	16 (38.1%)	42
	Lurker	36 (44.4%)	45 (55.6%)	81
Total		62	61	123

$$(x^2 = 3.37, df=1, p= .006)$$

- Family composition:** Regarding family composition, 57.1% of posters are single while the rest were married. 63.0% of lurkers are single while the rest are married. The result is contrary to what [Bronner and de Hoog \(2010\)](#) found, this might be as a result national differences (See table 10). Therefore, we concluded that single consumers contribute and read more than married consumers.

Table 10: Respondents categories & family composition cross tabulation

		Marital Status		Total
		Single	Married	
Participant	Poster	24 (57.1%)	18 (42.9%)	42
	Lurker	51 (63.0%)	30 (37.0%)	81
Total		75	48	123

$$(x^2 = .39, df=1, p= .053)$$

- **Age:** The test revealed a statistically significant difference between ages of posters and lurkers. Based on the statistical reports we discovered that consumers younger than 40 contribute more than those older than 40, while consumers younger than 51 read more (See table 11). Similar to the findings in a comparable sample (See Bronner and de Hoog 2010).

Table 11: Respondents categories and Age groups cross tabulation.

		Participant		Total
		Poster	Lurker	
Age	Under 20	1	2	3
	21-30	<b>23</b>	<b>35</b>	58
	31-40	<b>13</b>	<b>25</b>	38
	41-50	5	<b>15</b>	20
	Over 51	0	4	4
Total		42	81	123

$(\chi^2 = 3.60, df=4, p= .046 )$

- **Income:** The test revealed a statistically significant difference between posters and lurkers based on incomes. Based on the statistical reports we found that consumers with high and low income groups contribute more while consumers with middle and middle-low income groups lurk more (See table 12).

Table 12: Respondents categories and Income cross tabulation.

		Participant		Total
		Poster	Lurker	
Income	Under 999	<b>11</b>	22	33
	1000 – 1499	6	<b>16</b>	22
	1500 - 1999	6	<b>28</b>	34
	2000 - 2499	10	10	20
	Over 3000	<b>9</b>	5	14
Total		42	81	123

$$(x^2 = 12.48, df=4, p=.014)$$

- Education:** The test revealed a statistically significant difference between posters and lurkers based on their education level. We also found out that 76% of posters have bachelors or higher degrees while only 44% of lurkers have bachelors or higher degrees (See table 13). Based on the statistical reports we concluded that posters are more educated than lurkers

Table 13: Respondents categories and education level cross tabulation.

		Participant		Total
		Poster	Lurker	
Education	Less than High School	0	2	2
	High School	4	11	15
	Some College	6	32	38
	Bachelors Degree	<b>11</b>	<b>21</b>	32
	Higher Degree	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>	36
Total		42	81	123

$$(x^2 = 16.47, df=4, p=.002)$$

### **5.3 Motivations for posting and lurking (Research Question 2)**

Compared with the categories in table 3, the following factors can be identified in the data in table 7 and 8 respectively.

- Factor 1: Social benefits
- Factor 2: Functional
- Factor 3: Personal
- Factor 4: Social concern
- Factor 5: Economics & quality assurances
- Factor 6: Helping companies and consumer empowerment.

The factor that is not included in the data of this study is entertainment, which is partly included in social benefits factors. In table 14 and 15 the “applicable %” column indicates the percentage of posters and lurkers for which the motivation is similar to their own.

Table 14: eWOM seeking motivational factors

Seeking factor	Indicator	%Applicable <sup>a</sup>
Social benefits	It is fun to communicate with other people in the community.	55
	I meet nice people there.	39
Functional	I need information about a brand/product/service to help me make a buying decision.	76
	I have some uncertainty towards a brand/product/service.	74
Personal	To learn how to do things better.	79
Social concern	To help me discover “hot” brand/products/service most people are buying at the moment.	59
Economics & quality assurances	It brings me financial advantage in general.	69
	It’s authentic and reliable.	53

a. Top two boxes from 5-point scale % (strongly agree) meaning very similar to my motivation.

Based on the summary in table 14, the low frequency of meeting nice people (39%) indicates that lurkers are not comfortable with eWOM communities; they don’t feel connected, improving the interconnectivity of the platform can encourage lurkers to contribute more. As mentioned earlier most of the online reviews are posted by posters, population of lurkers is larger than that of posters and it’s a promising market segment. The most mentioned frequency learn how to do things (79%) and help me make a



buying decision (76%) are related to functional and personal motivations. Indicating that eWOM is indeed an encyclopedic avenue for consumers.

A single scale was developed for each of the eWOM seeking motivation factors mentioned above. Items under each motivation factors were group together and used as dependent variable, while Sociodemographics were used as independent variable. A total set of 25 ANOVAs was performed using Tukey post-hoc test. Out of the 25 analyses conducted the following ones are significant.

- **Education:** Individuals who did not graduated from high school labeled as (less than high school) seeks eWOM more for social benefits ( $F = 4.38$ ,  $df = 4/122$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than the other groups.
- **Age:** Consumers under the age of 20, least seek eWOM for functional use ( $F = 4.37$ ,  $df = 4/122$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than those older than 20.
- **Income:** Middle-high (2000-2499) and middle (1500-1999) income consumers group seeks eWOM more for functional purposes ( $F = 4.90$ ,  $df = 4/122$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than the other groups.
- **Gender:** female seek eWOM more for functional purposes ( $F = 7.43$ ,  $df = 1/122$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than their male counterparts.

Considering the above information, the differences in terms of Sociodemographics variables for eWOM posting motivations is not critical. Suggesting that eWOM seeking motivations are similar.

Table 15: eWOM posting motivational factors

Posting factor	Indicator	%Applicable <sup>a</sup>
Social concern	To help other consumers with my own experiences.	54
	I feel good when I can tell others about my opinions and buying successes	50
Helping companies & consumers empowerment	I am satisfied with the company and its product that i want to help the company to be successful.	48
	I believe companies are more accommodating when i publicize the matter.	46
Economics & quality assurances	I receive financial rewards from marketers for posting.	26
Personal	To express my satisfaction after purchase.	59
	To express my dissatisfaction after purchase.	71
	To enable other consumers make better decision	69
Functional	I expect to receive tips or support from other consumers.	34

a. Top two boxes from 5-point scale % (strongly agree) meaning very similar to my motivation.

Based on the summary in table 15, the low frequency of i receive financial rewards from marketers for posting (26%) indicates that messages on eWOM platform can be trusted and that of I expect to receive tips or support from other consumers (34%) suggest that posters are knowledgeable, they post solely to help other consumers (69%) and to express their dissatisfaction (71%) the most mentioned frequency. In practice negative eWOM is dangerous to firms; perhaps, marketers need to take note of this to avoid losing customers and eventual decrease of their market share and revenue.

A single scale was developed for each of the eWOM posting motivation factors mentioned above. Items under each motivation factors were group together and used as dependent variable, while Sociodemographics were used as independent variable. A total set of 25 ANOVAs was performed using homogeneity of variance test and Tukey post hoc test. Out of the 25 analyses conducted the following ones are significant.

- **Gender:** Male gender post more information on eWOM platforms for social concern ( $F = 4.15$ ,  $df = 1/122$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than females
- **Age:** Less than 20 age groups are highly motivated while lower-middle age groups(21-30) are slightly motivated ( $F = 6.14$ ,  $df = 4/122$ ,  $p < .05$ ) to post information on eWOM platform for economic incentives received from marketers and those above the age of 30 are least motivated.
- **Income:** low income groups (under 999) are highly motivated to post information for economic incentives while middle income groups (1500-1999) are least motivated. ( $F = 3.66$ ,  $df = 4/118$ ,  $p < .05$ ) Middle-high (2000-2499) income groups are motivated to helping companies and consumers ( $F = 2.64$ ,  $df = 4/118$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

Considering the above information, the differences in terms of Sociodemographics for eWOM seeking motivations is not critical. Suggesting that eWOM seeking motivations for that lurker's are similar.

### 5.4 Type of eWOM and its influence (Research Question 3)

Research question 3 addresses the question what consumers post/read on eWOM platforms? Do they post/read more of positive or negative reviews and the influence on their purchase intentions?

Table 16: Respondents categories and positive eWOM cross tabulation

		I post positive opinions on eWOM platforms to express my satisfaction					Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
	Poster	1	1	8	11	21	42
	Lurker	0	14	27	29	11	81
Total		1	15	35	<b>40</b>	<b>32</b>	123

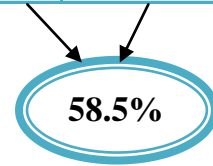
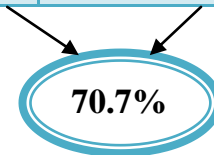


Table 17: Respondents categories and negative eWOM cross tabulation.

		I post negative opinions on eWOM platforms to express my dissatisfaction					Total
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
	Poster	1	3	8	12	18	42
	Lurker	2	7	15	37	20	81
Total		3	10	23	<b>49</b>	<b>38</b>	123



- **Positive eWOM:** The results in table 16 indicate that in general 58.5% of the consumers post positive comments to express their satisfaction about products/services while the remaining abstained. However, 76% of the consumers characterize as posters post positive comments while only 49.4% of lurker's post positive comments.
- **Negative eWOM:** The results in table 17 denotes that in general 70.7% of the consumers post negative comments to express their dissatisfaction about products/services while the remaining abstained. Surprisingly, 71.4% of the consumers characterize as posters post negative comments and 70.4% of lurker's post negative comments, emphasizing that a minor differences exist but not significant.
- **Influence of eWOM and perceptions:** The results below showed no significant difference between posters and lurkers in relation to the effect of negative eWOM on their perceptions and purchase intentions. Unlike lurkers, posters are savvier and thus, they are influenced with credible negative information. The result stressed that the degree of accepting negative eWOM is slightly higher in those that are categorized as posters.

(t = .996, df = 121, p = .321)

Posters (Mean<sub>high</sub> = 4.05, s.d = .936)

Lurkers (Mean<sub>low</sub> = 3.86, s.d = .984)

Secondly, we found no significant difference between posters and lurkers in relation to the effect of positive eWOM on their perceptions and purchase intentions. This result accentuate that the degree of accepting positive eWOM is relatively same both for posters and lurkers.

( $t_{\text{negative}} = 0.23$ ,  $df = 100$ ,  $p = .981$ )

Posters (Mean = 4.10, s.d = .726)

Lurkers (Mean = 4.10, s.d = .903)

Third, the result below shows no significant difference but stressed that both posters and lurkers believe eWOM platforms are helpful. One reason might be their desire for interconnectivity, need for information, self-expression, concern for other consumers and solving problem personalities.

( $t = 1.82$ ,  $df = 121$ ,  $p = .070$ )

Posters (Mean = 4.29, s.d = .708)

Lurkers (Mean = 4.01, s.d = .829)

Lastly, the result below shows that there is significant difference between the groups; indicating that posters perceived eWOM platforms more trustworthy than lurkers; one reason is that they post valid and trustable information, arising from their concern for others; while lurker's access and use the information with the assumption that it is somewhat reliable.

( $t = 2.52$ ,  $df = 121$ ,  $p < .05$ )

Posters (Mean = 3.79, s.d = 1.001)

Lurkers (Mean = 3.30, s.d = 1.030)

## Chapter 6

### DISCUSSION

This chapter presents elaborations of the findings demonstrated in the previous chapter. The section also provides brief explanations regarding managerial implications, limitations and implications for future research.

#### 6.1 Discussion

As an emerging field of study, the eWOM has received very little empirical attention. Many empirical studies attempted to throw light on the motivational concepts for reading online customer reviews (eWOM) but all failed to provide vibrant insights except that of [Hennig-Thurau and Walsh \(2003\)](#). Few years later, [Bronner and de Hoog \(2010\)](#) research project successfully described the motivational concepts for posting online customer reviews (eWOM). In addition these projects didn't put weight on lurkers and posters profiles as well as influence of eWOM on future purchase intentions. Hence, this thesis set out to examine eWOM and the three **(3 W's)**. **Who** implies to those involved in the eWOM platforms, **why** implies to their respective motives and lastly **what** they post, read and the influence on other consumers. These constructs were evaluated using data collected from consumers with varying level of expertise and vast experience with C2C websites, in North Cyprus. This thesis produced interesting and unexpected findings regarding the above mentioned elements.



**Research Question 1:** The result presents desirable demographics for marketers. Men post more than women and women lurk more than men. This result is consistent with [Awad and Ragowsky's \(2008, pg. 113\)](#) findings "that the male gender strives to dominate the listserv conversations, do more self-enhancing activities, contributes detailed scripts and memo's that are more enlightening and instructive. Similarly, [Gretzel and Yoo \(2007\)](#) found that "the tendency to post reviews is greater in men than women". Single consumers contributes and reads more than married consumers; one reason might be lack of family responsibility and free leisure time, second reason might be age which reflected in our findings emphasizing that consumers younger than 40 contribute more than those older than 40, while consumers younger than 51 read more, this finding is partly line with [Gretzel and Yoo's \(2007\)](#) study "The tendency of lurkers age to vary from 65 years and above is high while the tendency of posters age to vary from 35 and below is high". Furthermore, our findings denotes that consumers with high and low income groups contribute more while middle and middle-low income groups lurk more, In a related study [Gretzel and Yoo \(2007\)](#) also underlined that " The tendency of posters to have higher monthly income is high"; without the low income groups this result seems contradictory. However, the reason might be the size of our sample and differences in national wage. We also found out that posters are more educated than lurkers; as such they have skills to find information via personal means than lurkers.

**Research Question 2:** The motivations for seeking the eWOM can be set down in five categories: (1) Social benefits (2) Functional (3) Personal (4) Social concern (5) Economics & quality assurances. We found out that the less educated individuals are more motivated to seek eWOM for social benefits; they want to feel connected to the

society, have a sense of belonging. Moreover, building social relationships and desire to belong to a community is part of human behaviors. Lurkers and posters are generally very kind to each other. For instance, appreciating others efforts for giving remedies to their questions or for solving their problems are popular in online communities. Perhaps, consumers less than 20 years old least seek eWOM for functional use, middle-high and middle income groups are highly motivated to seek eWOM for functional purposes, lastly the female gender are highly motivated seek eWOM more for functional purposes than their male counterparts. People want to reduce risk and the time needed to make purchase by seeking reviews on eWOM platforms due to its availability and ease access than other means. Learning how to use a product is categorize as functional motivation, it takes place after the actual purchase of the products/services, this happens when consumers try to find instructions on how to use the product for example difficulties using their smart phones, software installation e.t.c. Consumers are curious to know if they are the only ones thinking of a product/service in a particular manner; they attempt to balance their assessments with that of others, therefore attempt to reduce dissonance by determining their social positions relative to others.

The motivations for posting information can be set down in five categories: (1) Social concern (2) Helping companies & consumer's empowerment (3) Economics & quality assurances (4) Personal (5) Functional. We found out that the male gender post information on eWOM platforms primarily because of social concern. Based on table 15, self-enhancement is related to social concern it is when consumers share their positive experiences with the aim of enhancing their image, to strengthen themselves as intelligent consumers. Usually these types of reviews are long and detailed and it's

common with male posters. Individuals above 30 years old are least motivated to post information on eWOM platforms for economic incentives; ages ranging from 21 to 30 are slightly motivated, while less than 20 age groups and low income groups are highly motivated to post information for economic incentives received from marketers. Economic incentives seems not to encourage consumers to post that much, the effect is only on small number of the population. But it is critical for marketers to take note of young and low income consumers, this segment are not profitable from certain perspectives but they pose risk to firms, they can easily spread negative eWOM and are likely to collect incentives from rival firms to spread negative information. Consumer empowerment motivation is when unpleasant consumer comments influences the manner a company and its reputation are perceived and are exploited by consumer to have a say over the company. Some might assume that the identification of consumer motivations for engaging in eWOM platforms is not beneficial to companies. But that's not true because eWOM produce lots of practical information in regard to consumer's buying pattern, discussion about several products/service/brands with the inclusion of positive and negative experiences can be beneficial to firms. Hearing criticism about own products/service or brands, would enable firms to innovate and develop their products/services based on customers' needs and thus this will definitely increase their revenue and possibility of increasing number of customer exist.

### **Research Question 3:**

Our findings showed that individuals categorized as posters, contributes irrespective of whether it's positive or negative feedback. Surprisingly lurkers contributes negative feedback more than positive, elaborating that unsatisfied customers can damage firms

image by spreading negative eWOM with the intention to harm the company. Venting negative feelings results from dissatisfaction after a consuming experiences and posting negative eWOM help them to ease their frustration and anxiety associated with the incident. Expressing positive feelings arises after having a good consumption experience and at a bargain price. Balance theory states that when the initial balance status changes to an unbalanced condition, mankind will strive to restore equilibrium.(Newcomb 1953). Looking at the theory from a pragmatic point of view, the unbalance condition originated from either an effective positive or negative buying experience related with a products or services. However, stability can be restored by openly discussing the matter online. The degree of accepting negative eWOM is slightly higher in those that are categorized as posters and the degree of accepting positive eWOM is relatively same both for posters and lurkers, and they believe eWOM platforms are helpful. Posters perceived eWOM platforms more trustworthy than lurkers, because of their altruistic motives they attempt to post authentic, reliable and encyclopedic information. Broadly speaking posters disseminate information in order to reduce consumption risk for others. eWOM has higher credibility, empathy and relevance to consumers than marketer induced sources of information and several websites have been launched to facilitate it (Bickart and Schindler, 2001)

## **6.2 Managerial Implications**

Information about prospective customers is of great importance to marketers, eWOM platforms provide detailed information about customer's based on their demographics and their activities can be monitored with automated servers, this can be use by firms for customer profiling and for advertisement purposes. Depending on the consumer segment

targeted and type of business, marketers can utilize these lucrative mediums to achieve best marketing results. People are kind of suspicious toward positive eWOM and they easily accept negative eWOM without cross checking other factors that might lead to it. For example, a competitor may decide to tarnish the image of rival firm with eWOM in order to have full control of the market place. Taken together, consumers are likely to put weight on the qualitative aspect for negative eWOM and the quantitative aspect for positive eWOM. Marketers need to recognize the growing acceptance of eWOM among consumers and invent marketing plans to provide their needs, hence encouraging a memorable and satisfying service encounter. Successful encounter means happy customer and a happy customer is a repeat customer, spreads positive WOM, the more satisfied they are the more the quantity of positive reviews for firms and the likelihood of increasing number of customers exist.

### **6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Although, this thesis has made a contribution to research stream of electronic word-of-mouth literature, there are several limitations and directions for future research to be addressed. The result from this thesis shows that research on interest eWOM is increasing day by day, due to existence of the web and online communities. Given this, doubtlessly this research area will be among the fierce and competitive research subjects, in the nearby future. Based on our findings, it is obvious that eWOM will receive more academic and managerial attention.

First we identified the profiles of senders and lurkers by collecting data from a sample in North Cyprus. This limits the generalizability of our findings; Cronbach et al (1963) defined the theory “generalizability as the basic statistical conceptual framework for evaluating, and designing reliable empirical findings. In other words it is an approach to figure out the validity of measurements. We noticed that the countries where previous studies were conducted are situated in Europe and North America; these regions are highly developed. There is an urgent need to expand the geographic and cultural scope of eWOM research, by focusing on developing countries in Asia and Africa. Secondly, this thesis examines the motivations for posting and seeking eWOM, however, posting and seeking motivations are intrinsic, as such reward seems not to encourage this action, therefore there is need to trigger posting and seeking motivations with the aim of attracting, gaining and keeping customers. More research needs to be done. Finally, eWOM may speed up marketing efforts within short period of time and may speed up the destruction of firm or brand images and well remarked reputations. Future research should address this issue.

## **Chapter 7**

### **CONCLUSION**

Online reviews are powerful managerial tool which enable marketing managers to get in touch and hear-out customers. A proactive approach to eWOM is by listening to customers, because listening to their opinions can help firms generate feedbacks, suggestions and complains database, as such they can improve future product features and services. One may ask why and how? Hearing what consumers are discussing concerning your firm's image, products/services could strengthen the firms decision makers' ability to innovate new as well as to enhance current products that would meet consumers present needs and forthcoming expectations, and eventually predict future sales. The eWOM is a strong competitive advantage agent which allows marketing managers to use information related to weakness and strength of rival firms, in order to develop counter strategic measures. Secondly significant amount of data can be retrieved by eavesdropping on potential buyers in their search stage of purchase process, for example what they are requesting for, their desires and expectation. This will illustrates what is valuable to them faced with choices and uncertainties. This information can be reflected in company-to-customer communication channel for example accentuating what is meaningful to prospective customers in their adverts and Frequent asked questions (FAQ) pages.

Marketers endlessly working with eWOM platforms may be able to analyze their strength, weakness, opportunities and threats, by assessing their firm's reputation and terms used to describe their products/services and which rival consumers compare their products/services with, given this the possibility of increasing customer equity and brand equity exist. The latter is important for brand positioning (Rust et al., 2000). The eWOM is cost-effective and convenient alternative to advertising. Online retailers have included eWOM as a supplementary feature on their sites (e.g. Gittigidiyor.com, Amazon.com and eBay.com). For instance, Amazon.com does not advertise through traditional methods but instead uses eWOM because of its perceived neutrality among consumers (Sen and Lerman, 2007). Majority of online consumers are lurkers listening to their views will inevitably increase revenues for firms. Marketers need to develop new strategies to improve community connectivity, so as to increase the incentives attached to social groups, fostering lurkers to feel comfortable with the community and thus contribute their views which can be used by managers. Motivating consumers to post is extremely difficult, because motivations are intrinsic. An economic reward seems not to encourage consumers that much; the effective strategy is to encourage them post is to reduce the barriers of posting. Creating user friendly website would encourage and enable people contribute easily without difficulties, reminding them that others assisted them and that they can now assist others; or by simply sending friendly reminder pop-ups or emails with links to the web page where comments can be written, this tactics would effectively increase contribution rates.



## 7.1 Notes

eWOM is consumer-to-consumer interaction otherwise referred to as C2C and should not be mixed-up with electronic referral marketing. Referral marketing refers to company-to-consumer interaction in other words business to consumers (B2C) motives are to pass awareness regarding a product or service, with the aim to speed up market adoption and it is cost effective. Electronic referral marketing is also referred to as viral marketing ([Krishnamurthy, 2001](#)).

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **SAMPLE OF QUESTIONNAIRE**

*A Case study: (The three W's).*

Dear respondent,

This research aimed to better understand who, why and what people post/read online and the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on consumer purchase intentions. eWOM simply means the comment you made online .You are kindly requested to fill out this questionnaire in a self administered manner.

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and you are not required to put your name on the questionnaire. We appreciate your time and participation in this research.

Thank you for your kind cooperation.

**Research Team:**

Assoc Prof Dr. Mustafa Ilkan  
A. Mohammed Abubakar


**Address:**


School of Computing and Technology  
Eastern Mediterranean University  
Gazimagusa, TRNC  
Via Mersin 10, Turkey.

Please read the following statement carefully and indicate your answer by crossing one of the alternatives.

*“In relation to your previous purchase online did you post any comment, experience or suggestion?” yes/no*

**Assessment scale:** 1 = Strongly disagree    2= Disagree    3=Neutral    4= Agree    5= Strongly agree.


<b>PART A</b>						
<b>What are your motives for seeking eWOM?</b>						
The following statements are about your motives for seeking information from eWOM platforms. Please read each statement carefully and indicate your disagreement or agreement by placing a [  ] in the appropriate alternatives.						
<b>1</b>	I would seek information from eWOM platforms because it is fun to communicate with other people in the community.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>2</b>	I would seek information from eWOM platforms when i need information about a brand/product/service to help me make a buying decision.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>3</b>	I would seek information from eWOM platforms because i meet nice people there.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>4</b>	I would seek information from eWOM platforms when i have some uncertainty towards a brand/product/service.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>5</b>	I seek opinion of others from eWOM platforms to learn how to do things better.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>6</b>	I would seek information from eWOM platforms to help me discover “hot” brand/products/service most people are buying at the moment.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>7</b>	I would seek information from eWOM platforms because it brings me financial advantage in general.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>8</b>	I would seek information from eWOM platforms because of its authenticity and reliability.	1	2	3	4	5

<b>PART B</b>						
<b>What are your motives for posting behavior on eWOM platforms?</b>						
The following statements are about your motives for posting information on eWOM platforms. Please read each statement carefully and indicate your disagreement or agreement by placing a [  ] in the appropriate alternatives.						
<b>9</b>	I want to help other consumers with my own experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>10</b>	I am satisfied with the company and its product that i want to help the company to be successful.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>11</b>	I believe companies are more accommodating when i publicize the matter.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>12</b>	I receive financial rewards from marketers for posting.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>13</b>	I post positive opinions on eWOM platforms to express my satisfaction after purchase.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>14</b>	I post my opinions to enable other consumers make better decision.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>15</b>	I post negative opinions on eWOM platforms to express my dissatisfaction after purchase.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>16</b>	I feel good when I can tell others about my opinions and buying successes	1	2	3	4	5
<b>17</b>	I expect to receive tips or support from other consumers.	1	2	3	4	5

**Assessment scale:** 1 = Strongly disagree    2= Disagree    3=Neutral    4= Agree    5= Strongly agree.

**PART C**

**[Perceptions]**

The following statements are about your purchase intentions after seeking information from eWOM platforms. Please read each statement carefully and indicate your disagreement or agreement by placing a [  ] in the appropriate alternatives

<b>18</b>	Negative eWOM decreases my purchase desire toward a brand/product/service.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>19</b>	Positive eWOM increases my purchase desire toward a brand/product/service.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>20</b>	I find eWOM platforms helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>21</b>	I find the information and opinions on eWOM platforms trustworthy.	1	2	3	4	5

**PART D**

**22.** What is your gender?

Male [  ]

Female [  ]

**23.** How old are you?

Under 20 [  ]

21-30 [  ]

31-40 [  ]

41-50 [  ]

Over 51 [  ]

**24.** What is your marital status?

Single [  ]

Married [  ]

**25.** What is your monthly income?

Under 999 ₪ [  ]

1000 – 1499 ₪ [  ]

1500 - 1999 ₪ [  ]

2000 - 2499 ₪ [  ]

Over 3000 ₪ [  ]

**26.** What is your level of education?

Less than High School [  ]

High School [  ]

Some College [  ]

Bachelors Degree [  ]

Higher Degree [  ]

**Thank you for your kind cooperation.**