THE IMPACT OF ANTECEDENTS AND OUTCOME OF ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH ON ONLINE AIRLINE TICKETS PURCHASE INTENTION BY MALAYSIAN

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by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CMB	Common Method Bias
CR	Composite Reliability
ELM	Elaboration Likelihood Model
et al.	et alii
eWOM	Electronic Word-of-Mouth
f^2	Effect Size
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations
IV	Independent Variables
DV	Dependent Variables
MDA	Malaysia Digital Association
p. or pp.	Page
PLS	Partial Least Square
Q^2	Predictive Relevance
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SNSs	Social Networking Sites
R^2	Coefficient of Determination
S-O-R	Stimulus-Organism-Response
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
WOM	Word of Mouth

IMPAK PENENTU DAN HASIL PERBUALAN ELEKTRONIK TERHADAP NIAT PEMBELIAN TIKET PENERBANGAN SECARA ATAS TALIAN OLEH RAKYAT MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti penentu kepada perbualan elektronik (eWOM) dalam konteks pembelian tiket penerbangan secara atas talian di kalangan pengguna Malaysia. Selain itu, kajian ini juga menilai hubung kait diantara eWOM dan niat pembelian serta mengusulkan model kajian untuk penentu eWOM dan kesannya terhadap niat pembelian. Model S-O-R dan ELM telah digunakan sebagai teori rujukan di dalam kajian ini. Model kajian telah dinilai menggunakan kaedah soalan kaji selidik dari 530 pengguna Malaysia menerusi kaedah pintasan di pusat membeli belah. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kebergunaan maklumat, kredibiliti sumber, ketepatan maklumat dan kesemasaan maklumat memberi kesan positif dan signifikan terhadap perhubungan dengan eWOM dan keterlibatan merupakan moderator kepada hubungan diantara eWOM dan niat pembelian. Walaupun kajian ini terbatas kepada eWOM dalam konteks pembelian tiket penerbangan secara atas talian di kalangan pengguna Facebook Malaysia, penemuan kajian ini dijangkakan bernilai kepada syarikat-syarikat penerbangan dan pelancongan di Malaysia serta menyumbang kepada penyelidikan ilmiah, terutama dalam kajian yang berkaitan dengan eWOM dan niat membeli. Kajian ini melanjutkan kebolehgunaan Model S-O-R dan ELM dalam lingkungan eWOM kerangka media sosial dengan pendekatan untuk mengkaji niat pembelian pengguna.

THE IMPACT OF ANTECEDENTS AND OUTCOME OF ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH ON ONLINE AIRLINE TICKETS PURCHASE INTENTION BY MALAYSIAN

ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study has been to identify the antecedents of electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) in the context of online airline ticket purchase by Malaysian consumers. In addition, this study also seeks to examine the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention and to propose a research model for the antecedents of eWOM and its impact on purchase intention. S-O-R Model and ELM Model were adopted as the referent theory for this study. The research model was examined by employing survey questionnaire method obtained from 530 Malaysian consumers through mall-intercept method. The findings revealed that information usefulness, source credibility, information accuracy, and information timeliness have a positive and significant relationship with eWOM, and involvement moderates the relationships between eWOM and purchase intention. Even though this study is limited to eWOM in the context of online airline tickets purchasing of Malaysian Facebook users, it is expected to be of value to airline and travel organizations in Malaysia as well as contribute to the scholarly research, particularly in studies related to eWOM and purchase intention. This study extends the applicability of S-O-R Model and ELM Model to the eWOM domain in the context of social media, with an approach to investigate consumer's purchase intention.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

In this chapter, a brief overview of the entire study is first presented. This chapter discusses the background of the research study which is then followed by the problem statement. The focus of the chapter then shifts to the research questions and the research objectives. The scope of the study is also elaborated and then followed by the significance of the study in terms of the theoretical, as well as the practical contributions. This chapter is concluded by the definition of the key terms and a summary of the chapter to follow. In a nutshell, this chapter provides an overall overview of the research study.

There is no doubt that technology is becoming part of most businesses. Technology has allowed communication to be faster and cheaper. The emergence of smart phones, smart devices such as tablets and various social networking sites and blogs have made way for more mobile and vocal consumers. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company which is made available to multitude of the people and institutes via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004. p. 39). eWOM communication research has received a lot of attention both from business practitioners and academic researchers (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

Kemp (2017) reported in Global Digital Report 2017 that more than half of the world population now uses the Internet. It is also interesting to note in the same report that in its global digital snapshot reported in early 2017, there were 3.77 billion global

Internet users and the fact that, up to 354 million compared to 2015 shows how drastic Internet is growing annually. Thus, this fact calls for more studies with regards to Internet and specifically, social media to be explored especially on its impact towards individual consumers due to the drastic increase in the number of global Internet users.

1.1 Background of the Study

1.1.1 Global View of Social Media

Social media has undoubtedly become a part of most people, globally everywhere. The growth of social media trends shows no signs of stopping and hence, the understanding of social media is indeed important. Social media is defined as " a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Additionally, social media are not only limited to social networks like Facebook, but include blogs, business networks, collaborative projects, enterprise social networks, forums, microblogs, photo sharing, products/services reviews, social bookmarking, social gaming, video sharing, and virtual worlds (Aichner & Jacob, 2015).

Globally, it was reported by Hootsuite that in 2019, there are 4.39 billion Internet users worldwide, 3.48 billion social media users and 5.11 billion unique mobile users. Marketers should be aware that there are a total of 3.8 billion social media users as of January 2020 and this figure has risen by more than 9 per cent (321 million new users) since January 2019 (Kemp, 2020). Nielsen Social, a global company that study consumers in more than 100 countries reported that social media is one of the biggest opportunities that companies across industries have to connect

directly to consumers (Sean, 2017) . The same report also mentioned that Generation X (ages 35-49) spends the most time on social media: almost 7 hours per week versus Millennials (ages 24-39), who come in second, spending just over 6 hours per week (Nielsen Social Media Report, 2016).

Kemp (2019) also highlighted that Eastern Asia region recorded the highest figure of social media users of 1.158 million, followed by South Asia (449 million users) and South East Asia (402 million users). It is noteworthy that in 2019, among the countries that were covered in Hootsuite's in-depth report on global social media report namely Special Report: Digital in 2019 (Global Overview), Asian countries dominate 3 of the top 4 positions in the social media penetration rankings, and Malaysia is one of the countries. It should be noted that social media penetration levels vary wildly across the region as a whole.

1.1.2 Social Media Usage in Malaysia

Since Internet was first introduced in Malaysia back in 1995, Malaysian has been using Internet widely and the number of users is increasing annually. Based on the first Malaysian Internet survey conducted from October to November 1995, one out of every thousand Malaysians had access to the Internet. In 1998, this number grew to 2.6% of the population. The total number of computer units sold, which was 467,000 in 1998 and 701,000 in 2000 indicated an increasing growth. Hootsuite (2019) reported as of January 2019, 25.84 million Malaysian population are Internet users with 72.2 per cent broadband households' penetration, 67.7 per cent social network penetration and 144.8 per cent mobile penetration in 2019 alone, Malaysians are not new to the social media world. The same report also revealed that Malaysians spent an average

of 5.1 hours a day on the Internet. Interestingly, 2.8 hours on average is spent on social networks and 47 per cent Malaysian accessed Internet from their mobile phones.

According to Katsingris (2018) 74 per cent of Malaysian population age 15 and above are Internet users which represent a whopping 12.8 million users. On average, the same report revealed that Malaysian spent approximately 15.8 hours weekly on smartphones. Katsingris (2018) also reported that the digital media consumption continued its year-on-year increase, with a total reach of 73 per cent and a growth of 4 per cent in 2017. Among Internet users, smartphone penetration in Malaysia was high at 98 per cent in 2017, while 93 per cent of those online subscribed to a mobile data plan. Increased Internet usage has also positively impacted Malaysia's e-commerce industry. Among the 17.4 million Malaysians aged 15 and above, 10 per cent have shopped for products or services online per month. Online shoppers tend to be younger (the majority are under the age of 39), and among the most affluent (with a household income of more than RM8,000) online shopping rises to a healthy 25 per cent.

This is a clear indication of an active involvement of Malaysian with regards to social media. Besides, consumers have the power to express their emotions, feelings, attitudes, and most importantly, opinions on the go, anytime, anywhere globally. For business to sustain and gain competitive advantage, consumers' opinions and views are very critical. In a marketing context, what consumers said, think and discuss with people around them are indeed vital. The traditional word of mouth has now been made mobile and faster through the use of social media which is also known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

1.1.2 eWOM in Malaysia

eWOM is not new to nearly 20 million Malaysian social media users. With the increase in the number of Internet users, the use of social media has expanded over the past decade from an individual level to the level of being a useful marketing tool in the world of business (Zainal et al., 2017).

Expedia (2019) reported in Global Flight and Hotel Etiquette Study that Malaysians is one of the most cost-conscious and technologically inclined avid travellers in Asia. With more than 600 Malaysian respondents surveyed online between 22 February to 29 March 2018, the study further highlighted that Malaysians are most likely to jump on a flight, landing them a top 5 global ranking with 5.5 average flights annually, with 83 per cent of them checking into flights online or via mobile.

Additionally, in April 2018, Malaysia Airlines Berhad allows travellers to make bookings on its Facebook page following its journey to digitization. MHfeedback apps is also now available for download, in which this mobile app allows customers to immediately share their feedback anonymously on their experience with Malaysia Airlines (The Star Online, 2018b). In addition, Visa Malaysia country manager, KB Ng, reported in The Star Online that travel booking has also evolved from traditional methods of calling or sending an email to a travel agent. The research shows that Malaysians spend more than five hours a day on their mobile devices and based on the Global Travel Intentions study conducted by Visa, 72 per cent of Malaysians use their mobile devices to look up information in planning their trip. Based on a statement made by Agoda's Chief Product Officer, in 2018, travellers expect to receive well-digested information quickly and they do not have time or patience to do things a service can do for them, whilst they also look for offerings that add value by

simplifying the way they travel, from researching destination to ordering room service (The Star Online, 2018a).

On top of this, as Visit Malaysia 2020 (VM2020) was launched, Tourism Malaysia is estimating 30 million tourists' arrivals and RM100 billion tourist receipts in year 2020. Local airlines such as Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia and Firefly reaffirmed their support and commitment to VM2020 by a stronger partnership with Tourism Malaysia in order to achieve these targets (Tourism Malaysia, 2019). More airline's promotional activities and packages were made available to both local and foreign tourists even though year 2020 has shown a rough start with the outbreak of Wuhan Coronavirus which affects travel industry at a global level.

Social media is being used as one of the channels and source of information utilized by Tourism Malaysia through the launching of Malaysia-ASEAN Tourism Influencers Key Opinion Leaders Programme (MAIKOL). MAIKOL is a programme by Tourism Malaysia to adopt regional social media influencers and their fan-base to support and promote VM2020. The effort by Tourism Malaysia fully utilized the power of social media like Facebook by featuring articles, live streaming, stories and posts on the influencers' social media page by promoting various travel destinations in Malaysia (Tourism Malaysia, 2019). This depicts that a careful and thorough study on Malaysian travellers' purchase intention is crucial to provide insights on what and how consumers use information in social media.

1.2 Research Problems

In view of the current trends and issues discussed earlier, it is important to focus on eWOM, the antecedents and its relationship with consumer purchase intention. Despite various studies on eWOM, research on antecedents of eWOM in the context of online airline tickets purchase intention has not been extensively explored. Shen, Zhang, & Zhao (2015) studied eWOM in the context of book review sites and found that information usefulness affect eWOM, whilst Hussain et al., (2017) focused their study on food products review sites and found the same result. Meanwhile Fang, (2014) focused on general eWOM reviews generated from users of Facebook and Chang & Wu, (2014) conducted their study on eWOM in the context of service (Starbucks). Yan et al., (2016) on the other hand carried out their study in the context of social commerce. These studies suggested that source credibility has a significant relationship with eWOM (Fang, 2014; Chang & Wu, 2014; Yan et al., 2016).

A study in the context of online customer community (i.e. Openrice.com) by Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn (2008) found that information usefulness is the antecedent of eWOM. Additionally, Lee & Koo, (2012) considered review credibility as the antecedents of eWOM in the context of instrument product (i.e. digital camera). On the other hand, Filieri & McLeay, (2014) suggested information accuracy, information value-added and information timeliness as the antecedents of eWOM in travel industry. Therefore, the unexplored research on antecedents of eWOM in the context of airline industry triggers the necessity to conduct a proper investigation.

To date, relationship between eWOM and purchase intention has shown inconsistent results in previous studies. Among studies that have tested the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention are Prendergast, Ko, & Yuen (2010), Jalilvand & Samiei (2012), Fan & Miao (2012) and See-To & Ho (2014). Prendergast et al.

(2010) studied online WOM (eWOM) in the context of online forums and tested its impact on purchase intention. eWOM in the context of forum's persuasiveness was found on purchase intention in the instance of forum's topic and user's interest.

On the other hand, an indirect relationship between eWOM and purchase intention was found in a study by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012). In addition, Fan and Miao (2012) study results showed that eWOM acceptance had a significant effect on purchase intention for both male and female customers, but eWOM acceptance had a smaller effect on purchase intention for female consumers than male consumers. However due to its limitation on small sample size, the study model did not provide strong evidence that gender differences had effects on eWOM and purchase intention (Fan & Miao, 2012). Meanwhile, See-To & Ho (2014) uses the theories in trust and value co-creation to analyse how eWOM affects purchase intention and their findings noted that eWOM has a direct impact on purchase intention and has an indirect impact on purchase intention which is moderated by consumers' trust on the underlying product. Recent study by Lee et al. (2020) asserted that Facebook users reactions & comments (eWOM) significantly influenced purchase intention. Also, another study by Park et al. (2021) found that eWOM positively influenced consumer's (luxury) purchase intention. Hence, with these evidence of inconsistent findings on the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention, it is necessary to conduct a further study.

In addition, most studies in eWOM and purchase intention has not tested on the strength of the relationship when a moderator is introduced. A moderator is originally defined as one that systematically modifies either the form and/or the strength of the relationship between the predictor and a criterion variable (Sharma, Duran & Gur-Arie, 1981). Based on the inconsistent findings discussed in previous paragraph

(Prendergast, Ko, & Yuen, 2010; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012a; Fan & Miao, 2012; and See-To & Ho, 2014), a moderator is needed to test the strength of the relationship. Although much research has been carried out on eWOM and purchase intention, little studies has tested the strength of the relationship by utilizing involvement as the moderator and this is crucial to be verified in this study.

Therefore, (1) the unexplored research on antecedents of eWOM in the context of online airline tickets purchase intention, (2) inconsistent results in previous academic literatures of the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention and (3) little existing studies testing the strength of these variables have led to the motivation to conduct a proper investigation in this study. These are the three gaps of extant literature which are then moulded into the following sub-sections which are the research questions and research objectives.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the issues presented earlier, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

RQ1: Does information usefulness influence eWOM?

RQ2: Does source credibility influence eWOM?

RQ3: Does information accuracy influence eWOM?

RQ4: Does information value-added influence eWOM?

RQ5: Does information timeliness influence eWOM?

RQ6: Does eWOM influence purchase intention of online airline tickets?

RQ7: Does involvement moderates the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention of online airline tickets?

1.4 Research Objectives

Based on the issues discussed earlier, this study aims to achieve the following:

RO1:   To determine whether information usefulness, source credibility, information accuracy, information value-added, and information timeliness influence eWOM.

RO2: To examine the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention.

RO3: To investigate the moderating effect of involvement between eWOM and purchase intention.

1.5 Scope of the Study

Based on the research questions and research objectives discussed earlier, this study employs a quantitative approach. This research methodology is further explained in the third chapter of this thesis. This section details out the scope of the study i.e. the research scope and direction as well as details on justification of the research scope chosen. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) emphasized that target population is important in deciding the target population of a study (p.236). In other words, the scope of study serves as the justification for any decisions related to the population of this study which will then affect the results which are discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

Research scope defines the research area of this study and the extent to which data is collected and the parameters of the study. In terms of duration, data collection of this study and the analysis of the data collected was conducted from June 2019 until February 2020. The scope of this study describes the nationality of the respondents, the geographical area covered, the social media chosen, and the justification of each of

these decisions. This is to ensure a better understanding of the research parameters and settings in which the study is conducted.

The research scope is confined to Malaysian adult Facebook users utilizing cross-sectional empirical examination to identify the relationship between the antecedents (i.e. information usefulness, source credibility, information accuracy, information value-added, and information timeliness) and eWOM, examining whether eWOM will lead to purchase intention (outcome) and to determine the moderating role of involvement between eWOM and purchase intention.

Two theories were adopted in this study, namely Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model an Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) which were further explained in the second chapter of the thesis. Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020) reported that as of February 2020, Malaysia population stands at 32.6 million. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Malaysia is listed in the top 5 global mobile social media penetration and in South East Asian region, Malaysia is the highest in the list of global mobile social media penetration (New Straits Times, 2019). Therefore, these justified why this study focused on Malaysian citizens as the target respondents. Geographically, to be specific, this study focused on collecting data from four main cities in Malaysia, namely, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Kota Kinabalu and Kuching.

This study adopted survey questionnaire method to collect data from respondents who fulfilled a set of pre-determined criteria. The respondents must be a Malaysian citizen, above 18 years old and owned at least one Facebook account. The justification of this age (18 years old) criteria is in line with the definition of a child by Child Act 2001 which is a person under 18 years old. Similarly, Age of Majority Act 1971 defined "age of majority" is above 18 years old. In other words, Malaysian under

the age of 18 is considered as minor (The Commissioner of Law Revision Malaysia, 2006, p.5). Since this study is aiming to seek for purchase intention of online airline tickets, minors or children may not be a suitable respondent due to their inability to think and make decision as an adult specifically in the context of online airline tickets purchases.

Facebook is chosen as the only social media as the focus in this study due to several reasons. First, statistically, Facebook is ranked as the highest (social category) of websites by average monthly traffic of 163,300,000 as of January 2019 by Hootsuite compared to other social media websites such as Twitter and Instagram (Hootsuite, 2019). Internet Users Survey 2018 by Statistics Department of Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) also reported that Facebook scored the largest social networking users with 97.3% out of 24.6 million social networking users in Malaysia compared to other social medias such as Instagram, YouTube, Google+, Twitter and LinkedIn (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, 2018). Both statistics justify the reason why the scope of this study is limited and focused to only Facebook users.

In short, this sub-section has described the general purpose of this study, the population and sample targeted for the data collection and duration of the study. Additionally, justification of choosing Malaysian adults (18 years and above) and Facebook users were also explained in details as well as the variables and theories that shaped the focus and scope of the study in order to better define the parameter of the study.

1.6 Significance of the Study

1.6.1 Theoretical Contribution

This study will provide several important implications for theory. Firstly, with regards to the growing body of knowledge in online information and Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model and Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) as the referent theories, this research extends the literature on antecedents of eWOM in the context of online airline tickets purchase intention. By adopting both S-O-R model and ELM as the referent theory, this research also contributes to the body of knowledge on how consumers' use information through online social media and how level of involvement moderate the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention.

Secondly, the eWOM antecedents' literature will be expanded through this research, which will specifically focus on eWOM and its impact on purchase intention. The academic researchers are well aware that studies regarding eWOM is emerging in the literature, but findings from Western data should not be generalised to other regions of the world including Malaysia (Charo et al., 2015; Erkan & Evans, 2016a; Goyette et al., 2010; Gruen et al., 2006; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012b; Nekmat & Gower, 2012). Scholars of eWOM and purchase intention may benefit from the findings and a clearer understanding on how consumer intent to purchase based on information they gain from social media like Facebook and the antecedents that contribute towards this behaviour.

Thirdly, with the combination of both S-O-R model and ELM in the research model, this study provides meaningful insights into how consumers gain information electronically through social media like Facebook. Findings from this study will be of benefit to more upcoming studies in the field of social media, eWOM and purchase

intention in the context of Malaysian consumer. Thus, this study is expected to contribute towards a new insight of findings from the perspective of a developing country.

Finally, the results of this study are expected to provide new findings to improve the current knowledge on eWOM and purchase intention. The theoretical insights gained from this study will hopefully alter the current understanding of eWOM antecedents and the effect on purchase intention. Hence, findings from this study conceptually and theoretically extends the current knowledge and contribute towards more beneficial studies in the field of eWOM and purchase intention specifically and social media generally.

1.6.2 Practical Contribution

Marketers need to identify the antecedents for eWOM in order to better understand what triggers consumers to look for information in various social media sites. Social media sites such as Facebook is definitely a powerful tool for marketers to reach their customers. However, unhappy and worried customers may expose negative image towards the airline through social media.

Travellers' WOM behaviour has evolved over recent years with the increasing use of online communication technologies (Lee & Youn, 2009). For travellers, eWOM is an important reference for related decision-making such as choosing tourism destinations and booking hotels and restaurants (Litvin et al., 2008; Simpson & Siguaw, 2008). Given that travel products are considered to be high-risk and high-involvement purchases, travellers tend to rely on the opinions of relatives, peers, and friends before making their decisions (Beldona et al., 2005). Furthermore, online travel companies such as TripAdvisor and TravBuddy offer what other travellers think about

travel-related products (e.g. transportations, hotels, restaurants). Thus, travellers increasingly rely on peer-to-peer recommendations instead of information provided by hotel quality schemes or commercial sources (e.g. print media advertising) because they regard consumer advocacy as more objective and trustworthy(Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Kozinets, 2002). While prospective travellers rely on eWOM to facilitate the decision-making process, practitioners treat eWOM as feedback to inform the improvement of their goods and services.

Hence, a detailed research on what drives consumers to look for information in social media (eWOM) is definitely going to benefit marketers in a way that they can make use of the findings to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy to turn the problem into a solution. Malaysian airline industry is in need to be aware of the current trends in social media and because what consumers wrote or share via social media is out of their control, the best they can do is to understand how consumers use information in social media.

Additionally, this study will provide answers to the question of whether eWOM will have impact on consumers' purchase intention. Understanding consumers' purchase intention will then contribute to the key development of various strategies to be developed in an effort to regain consumers' confidence in the context of Malaysian airline's consumer market. Malaysian tourism industry and specifically the government tourism organization may significantly benefit the findings of this study to plan and overcome issues with regards to Malaysian consumer eWOM in social media.

The antecedents incorporated in this study provide a better understanding on what causes and how consumer utilize information in social media. Firstly, understanding on how consumer perceived information to be useful (information usefulness) will be significant to social media entrepreneurs, tourism and airline marketers in terms of designing a better advertising campaign in order to ensure that the information they share in social media will be perceived as valuable, informative, helpful and instructive by their target market. Secondly, findings on source credibility will give advantage to airline marketers in considering a better strategy to create a more reputable, trustworthy, knowledgeable and believable information in online social media like Facebook.

Thirdly, information accuracy will assist in shaping marketers' strategy in the field of airline industry and tourism industry generally by knowing the perceptions of consumers that the information shared in social media are accurate, correct and reliable. Fourthly, information value-added will help in terms of understanding how consumers consider information they read or found in social media to be of benefit and advantage to them in their decision-making process.

Finally, discoveries on information timeliness will contribute towards new knowledge and help in a better strategy formation for marketers to create information in online social media about their products and services to be current, timely and up to date.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

In order to have a clear understanding of the concepts used in the discussion in this study, the definitions of the key terms that will be used throughout the study are as follows:

1.7.1 Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

eWOM refers to the user-generated content carrying positive or negative information about companies and product/services in which the content is frequently spoken and discussed in social media sites such as Facebook. (Goyette et al., 2010; Yichuan Wang & Yu, 2017)

1.7.2 Information Usefulness

Information usefulness refers to the extent to which an individual perceives the received information as valuable, informative, helpful and instructive. (Luo et al., 2018)

1.7.3 Source credibility

Source credibility is defined as "the extent to which the persons generating information in social media are perceived to be trustworthy, knowledgeable, and believable". (Zha, Yang, Yan, Liu, & Huang, 2018, p.230)

1.7.4 Information Accuracy

Information accuracy refers to the perceptions of an individual that information is correct, accurate and reliable. (Filieri & McLeay, 2014)

1.7.5 Information Value-Added

Information value-added is considered as the receivers' view of the benefits and advantages of an information. (Filieri & McLeay, 2014)

1.7.6 Information Timeliness

Information timeliness refers to information that is current, timely and up-to-date. (Filieri & McLeay, 2014)

1.7.7 Purchase Intention

Purchase intention refers to the customer's willingness and possibility to buy a product in the future. (Erkan & Evans, 2016)

1.7.8 Involvement

Involvement refers to the degree of information concern, importance and relevance the consumer has with a stimulus or stimuli. (Yan et al., 2016)

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The chapters of this thesis are organized as follows:

Chapter 1: This chapter explains a brief overview of the proposal. This chapter initially look at the background of the research study and followed by the problem statement. The focus of the chapter then shifts to the research questions and the research objectives. That is followed by the scope of the study and then followed by the significance of the study in terms of the theoretical, as well as the practical contributions. This chapter is concluded by the definition of the key terms and a summary of the chapter to follow.

Chapter 2: This chapter discusses a detailed literature reviews on various aspects and topics with regards to the research. Firstly, the definition and key differences of word-of-mouth (WOM) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is explained in order to differentiate both terms. This is followed by a detailed review of literatures on online social media, eWOM, antecedents of eWOM which includes information usefulness, source credibility, information accuracy, information value-added, information timeliness, purchase intention (outcome variable) and involvement (moderating variable). This particular chapter also discuss in detailed about theories that have been used in eWOM studies, describing each theory and the limitation of each theory and

finally, justification on adopted theory in the thesis. Finally, a hypothesis development is also elaborated thoroughly at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 3: The third chapter of this research contains a detailed description about research methodology, which started with the research design. This is followed by an in-depth explanation on target population and sampling frame, sample size, unit of analysis, sampling procedure, research instruments, pre-test and pilot study and data collection procedure. Finally, an elaboration on statistical data analysis is included.

Chapter 4: The fourth chapter discusses the results of the data collection and the analysis conducted to obtain the results based on the objectives of the study. Preliminary data analysis, response rate, test for non-response bias and respondents' profile and background, data analysis and results of measurement model (PLS-SEM) as well as the assessment of the structural model is contained in this chapter.

Chapter 5: The final chapter of the thesis discusses the major findings of the data analysis presented in Chapter Four. This chapter is divided into four main parts namely, recapitulation of the study, discussion of findings, implications of the research, limitations of the study, and directions of future research. The chapter ends with a conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discuss the relevant literatures on word-of-mouth (WOM) and eWOM. Initially, the key differences between WOM and eWOM is detailed out. Other discussions on literature reviews pertaining to online social media, eWOM, antecedents of eWOM, information usefulness, source credibility, information accuracy, information value-added, information timeliness, purchase intention, and moderating variables in previous eWOM studies is further discussed. The later part of this chapter is focused on the theoretical discussion whereby various theories that has been adopted in studies on eWOM is assembled, compared and each of the theory's weaknesses is extensively discussed to clearly explain the justification of adopting Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and S-O-R model for this study.

2.1 Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Jalilvand, Esfahani, & Samiei (2011) defined the phrase "word-of-mouth" (WOM) as "a process for consumers to share information and opinions about a product or service to others" (p. 42). Heriyati & Siek (2011) on the other hand referred WOM as a way consumer directly told other consumers about their experiences after using products and a marketer should pay close attention to the spread of such information.

When considering the impact of consumers' word of mouth, Heriyati & Siek (2011) summarized their research findings highlighting that it can positively influence consumer decision making regarding buying products. This especially happens to

teenagers and new generation consumers. Moreover, the study showed that gender differences did not significantly influence consumers' decision-making regarding purchasing products after receiving information through WOM channel. This is quite true especially when consumers find it difficult to make a decision about choices of services or when they are about to travel. This is because the consumers, themselves, cannot see or know before having actual experiences.

Goyette et al., (2010) and Wang & Yu, (2017) defined the term electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as the user-generated content carrying positive or negative information about companies and product/services in which the content is frequently spoken and discussed in social media sites such as Facebook. Gupta & Harris (2010) found that the development of Internet has led to eWOM. Since the golden period of the modern media era, many consumers have increasingly sent and received messages through the Internet. eWOM has, therefore, become one channel people use to share their opinions about products and services they bought. Since the era of Web 2.0, chat board, review websites, web blogs and many social network websites have been used by consumers to present and exchange ideas and information about items for consumption and services. It can be ascertained therefore that the advance of Internet technology has widely turned traditional WOM to eWOM.

WOM is defined by Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan, (2008) in which they defined WOM as "the communication between consumers about a product, service, or a company in which the sources are considered independent of commercial influence" (p. 459). Similarly, Charo, Sharma, Shaikh, Haseeb, & Sufya (2015) defined WOM as "non-commercial voluntary form of face to face exchange of information, which is usually based on consumers' direct experience with a product/service, opted" (p 41).

With the emergence of the Internet and Web 2.0, the traditional word-of-mouth has now been expanded to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Besides Goyette et al., (2010) and Wang & Yu, (2017) definition on eWOM discussed earlier, eWOM is also similarly defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company which is made available to multitude of the people and institutes via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004,p. 39). Similarly, Lee and Youn, (2009) defined eWOM as person-to-person, oral communication between a receiver and a sender.

Nonetheless, there are differences in both terms (WOM and eWOM). The key differences between WOM and eWOM can first be seen in terms of their privacy of exchanges (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Information in WOM is usually exchanged in private conversations or dialogs whilst eWOM communications involved multi-way exchanges or information in asynchronous mode (Hung & Li, 2007). Secondly, eWOM communications are more persistent and accessible if compared to WOM because most text-based information that can be found in the Internet are archived, can be searched using search engine such as Google and definitely available for a long period of time (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, Hung & Li, 2007; Sen & Lerman, 2007). Thirdly, WOM and eWOM can also be differentiated in terms of their measurability. Lee, Park, and Han (2011) and Park and Kim (2008) agreed that eWOM communications are more measurable if compared to the traditional WOM. This is due to the fact that the presentation format, quantity and persistence of eWOM communications that have made it to be more observable. Fourthly, WOM and eWOM can be differentiated in terms of their source of information (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). The source or the sender of information of traditional WOM are very well known to the receiver and in

contrast, eWOM communication can come from an anonymous sender or source. Thus, the credibility of the information is very well known to the receiver in traditional WOM compared to in eWOM communication.

Most commonly used variable associated with eWOM is credibility (Lis, 2013; Lee & Koo (2012). Lis (2013) examined the factors that affect the source credibility of consumer online recommendations. In general, most studies found a significant relationship between credibility and eWOM (Cheung et al., 2009; Lee & Koo, 2012; Lis, 2013; Zhang & Watts, 2008). Zhang & Watts (2008) found that credibility had a significant main effect on eWOM, whilst Lis (2013) found that publishing credible recommendations can be an effective way to raise eWOM. Among other variables that has been associated and tested with eWOM are information timeliness, information understandability, perceived accuracy of information, value-added information, information completeness, information quantity, product ranking, information quantity and product ranking (Filieri & McLeay, 2014), and information usefulness (Cheung et al., 2009).

eWOM has also been studied in various contexts and industries across many countries and types of business. These include studies in the context of travel and tourism (Albayrak, Dursun, & Ünal, 2018; Chang & Wang, 2019; Rizal, Yussof, Amin, & Chen-Jung, 2017; Leong, Hew, Ooi, & Lin, 2019; (Brochado et al., 2019), shopping/online shopping (Levy & Gvili, 2019; Mohseni, Jayashree, Rezaei, Kasim, & Okumus, 2018; Nuseir, 2019; Prasad, Garg, & Prasad, 2019; Zeng & Seock, 2019; Zhang, Ma, & Wang, 2019), online retailing (Anastasiei & Dospinescu, 2019), airline (Bigne et al., 2018; Brochado et al., 2019), fashion (Ananda et al., 2019), online reviews (Brochado et al., 2019; Chakraborty, 2019; Craciun & Moore, 2019; Lo &

Yao, 2019), online advertising (Chang & Wang, 2019), social media (Dedeoglu, 2019; Hossain et al., 2019; Kijek et al., 2019; Konstantopoulou et al., 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Mariani et al., 2019), firm performance (Nisar et al., 2019)

2.2 Antecedents of eWOM

Antecedents were defined as "underlying reasons" in a study by Sheth, Sisodia, & Arun, (2000). The same definition of antecedents was also adopted by Liang et al. (2013) in which antecedents were considered as "reasons" behind eWOM communication behaviour. Chan and Ngai (2011) defined antecedents as "inputs" of the "motives" and "drivers" whilst Matos and Rossi (2008) and Yeh and Choi (2011) described antecedents as "influencing factors". The definition of "antecedents" by Matos and Rossi (2008) and Yeh and Choi (2011) will be adopted in this study. Research on antecedents of eWOM has been done on studies related to travel industries (Filieri, 2015; Liang et al., 2013), automobiles (Yeh & Choi, 2011), online recommendations (O'Reilly & Marx, 2011), personal computer and mobile Internet (Okazaki, 2009), input-process-output (IPO) model (Chan & Ngai, 2011), brand feedback (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018), online reviews (Coursaris et al., 2018), social networking sites (Farzin & Fattahi, 2018;), e-services (Goyette et al., 2010), online third-party forums (Luo et al., 2018), and fashion clothing brands (Rahman & Mannan, 2018), and consumer-based brand equity (Sijoria et al., 2018).

Huang, Chou, & Lan (2007) tested perceived risk, message type and reading motives as the antecedents of eWOM whilst another study by Cheung et al. (2008) revealed that information usefulness is the antecedent of eWOM. On the other hand, Zhang & Watts (2008) found that argument quality and source credibility is related to eWOM. Similarly, Lee & Koo (2012) agreed that review credibility to be the