

Antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication

Wan-Ju (Silvia) Liang (2013)

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**OXFORD  
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**Antecedents of Travellers' eWOM Communication**

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of Doctor of Philosophy**

Faculty of Business

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## Abstract

Development of the internet and electronic media provide a convenient platform for travellers to instantly share their experiences. Known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), it offers a powerful source of information and can also act as an effective marketing tool. Existing studies have focused on the conceptualisation and influences of eWOM communication, but limited attention has been given to the antecedents of it from the attitudinal perspective within the tourism industry. This study aims to fulfil that gap.

Data from international travellers having experience of eWOM communication was collected through online focus groups and survey questionnaire. Content analysis and structural equation modelling were employed for data analysis respectively. Based on the literature review and online focus group findings three key antecedents were identified, being: Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology, Motivation for eWOM Communication and Subjective Norm. Thereafter, a conceptual framework was proposed to bring these three antecedents together for the first time. This was empirically tested, particularly examining the influences of the overall attitude and behavioural intention of eWOM communication. Survey results showed that the overall attitude towards eWOM communication plays an important role in the understanding of the eWOM communication behaviour of travellers, serving as a mediator between antecedents and behavioural intention.

From the theoretical perspective, this study fulfils the research gap through exploring the antecedents of eWOM communication from the attitudinal perspective. A new conceptual framework is therefore empirically validated providing the basis for replication within future studies. Through employing the Technology Acceptance Model, Functional Theory of Attitude, Subjective Norm and Consumer Attitude, this study contributes to extending those theories in the context of eWOM communication within the tourism industry. Regarding managerial implications, this research identifies the antecedents of eWOM communication behaviour of travellers, which could help practitioners stimulate eWOM and further implement it as a strong marketing tool.

*Key Words: Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM); Antecedents of eWOM Communication; Attitude towards eWOM Communication; Structural Equation Modelling; Tourism Industry*

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

The advent of the internet and electronic media (a.k.a. social media) has changed the pattern of information dissemination and that of information searching (Lee *et al.*, 2005; Paris *et al.*, 2010). Traditionally, individuals tend to share their experiences and seek advice from family and friends. These interpersonal communications are called Word-of-Mouth (WOM) affecting consumers' decision-making process and businesses' operations. The internet and electronic media provide an extensive platform from which to exchange opinions with acquaintances and also strangers. The long-distance dissemination of the Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) makes it even more powerful and influential (Dellarocas, 2003). Therefore, eWOM has received far more attention than traditional WOM over recent years.

People mainly use the internet and electronic media for communication, sharing experiences, or recording memories (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009). Additionally, individuals can proactively search information to satisfy their questions and queries (Coker, 2012). The source of information is not limited by a specific person, time, or place. Online opinions can be expressed by individuals who have access to the internet services. Messages posted ten years ago or just yesterday will remain on the internet (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). The internet and electronic media eliminate the boundary of communication and reshape the pattern of communication. Given the broadcasting speed of online material, the dissemination of WOM via the internet is reported to carry significant influence on consumer behaviour (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003).

Opinions posted on the internet and electronic media are named as 'user-generated content' or 'electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)' (Daugherty *et al.*,

2008; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Litvin *et al.*, 2008; O'Connor, 2008). It is regarded as important and valuable information for both customers and businesses. eWOM is produced by fellow consumers who have less intention to bias their expression (Lee and Youn, 2009). Moreover, eWOM is usually anonymous (Lee and Youn, 2009; Sen and Lerman, 2007). Consumers feel more comfortable in expressing true comments without having to risk exposing their true identities (Phelps *et al.*, 2004). Thus, consumers increasingly rely on peer-to-peer recommendations instead of information provided by business quality schemes or commercial sources (e.g., print media advertising), because they regard consumer advocacy as more objective and trustworthy (Bansal and Voyer, 2000; Kozinets, 2002).

Not only customers but also businesses acknowledge the benefits produced by eWOM communication. It invokes buying intentions of potential customers and also develops long term customer loyalty (Bone, 1995). eWOM can be seen as feedback provided by existing customers. It helps managers resolve problems and maintain customer relationships (Canhoto and Clark, 2013) and improve product and service quality for the future (Litvin *et al.*, 2008). In addition, businesses can identify real-time trends of customer needs or market trends by monitoring online opinions. It can be regarded as a potential source of ideas to innovate products or services (Litvin *et al.*, 2008).

The popularity of eWOM is particularly emphasised within the travel and tourism industry (Canhoto and Clark, 2013). eWOM can inspire travellers in their decision making such as choosing tourism destinations and booking hotels and restaurants (Cox *et al.*, 2009; Litvin *et al.*, 2008; Simpson and Siguaw, 2008). Within the tourism industry, eWOM has gained much importance as travel products and consumption are perceived as high-risk activities and high involvement purchases (Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005; Tsaur *et al.*, 1997). Travellers heavily rely on intensive information to facilitate their decisions. Additionally, travel products or services cannot be tried before purchasing (Fodness and Murray, 1999). Relevant information reduces uncertainty regarding travelling to new destinations.

While prospective travellers rely on eWOM to facilitate the decision-making process, practitioners consider eWOM as feedback to enable improvement of

their goods and services. Recent research suggests that 60% of U.S. travellers take eWOM recommendations into account when booking vacations (Travel Industry Wire, 2011). About one-third of travellers share their experiences during their trips or vacations (O'Donnell, 2012). One of the largest travel sites, TripAdvisor, received more than 100,000,000 reviews in 2013. This has increased by 50% annually during the past few years (Hotelmarketing.Com, 2013). More than 80% of reviewers agreed on the usability and credibility of the reviews attained through TripAdvisor (Hotelmarketing.Com, 2013). Such critical numbers associated with TripAdvisor highlights the importance of eWOM and the influence upon existing and potential travellers.

Official tourism organisations such as national tourism offices or destination management offices utilise eWOM as a marketing tool to promote their country, city or destination (Hays *et al.*, 2012). eWOM also serves as a credible source for travel agencies, enhancing their reputation and prompting their products and services (Huang, 2012; Marchioria *et al.*, 2013). Expedia, a website initially intended for air tickets hotels, and travel-related products e-commerce, have extended their territory to provide an integrative platform for selling travel tickets and accommodation as well as generating information exchanged by their partners and reviews by customers (Shaughnessy, 2011). These studies and reports highlight the importance of eWOM within travel-related businesses and organisations.

The high efficiency and effectiveness of eWOM has received attention from both academics and marketing practitioners alike. Existing research has focused on either the conceptualization of eWOM communication (Brown *et al.*, 2007; Litvin *et al.*, 2008) or its influence on consumer behaviour (Lee and Youn, 2009; Riegner, 2007). Some studies investigate the motivation for eWOM communication within a different context. For example, Wang and Fesenmaier (2003; 2004) identify the motivation of contributing to online communities, whereas Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) and Yoo and Gretzel (2008) summarise the motives for eWOM communication. Recent studies explore the determinants of sharing opinions within social media by employing different theories such as the subjective norm (Kang and Schuett, 2013), brand involvement (Wolny and Mueller, 2013) and motivation-opportunity-ability

theory (Leung and Bai, 2013). Such studies confirm the academic interests and importance in understanding the consumer's intentions of eWOM communication behaviour.

Although past studies have explored motivation for eWOM communication behaviour, the understanding of eWOM behaviour in the tourism industry is limited. In addition to motivational analysis of eWOM communication, an attitude towards eWOM communication is another significant factor for understanding the traveller's eWOM behaviour which has not been explored yet. This study aims to fulfil this gap by establishing a conceptual framework in understanding the antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication. Accordingly, this study employs three constructs derived from the academic literature, namely the Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology, Motivation for eWOM Communication, and Subjective Norm as the antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication. All antecedents are proposed to influence travellers' overall attitude towards eWOM communication and, in turn, to impact on their behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Specifically, these three antecedents are independent variables, whilst behavioural intention serves as a dependent variable. The overall attitude is proposed as a mediating variable between the antecedents and behavioural intention.

## 1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the antecedents of traveller's eWOM communication behaviour in the tourism industry. In order to achieve the study aims, the following specific objectives are identified:

1. To review literature based upon eWOM communication behaviour and its antecedents, including the adoption of electronic media technology, motivation for eWOM communication, subjective norm and the literature on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication.
2. To propose a conceptual framework to explain the antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication.
3. To empirically validate the conceptual framework.

4. To draw theoretical contributions and managerial implications for academics and practitioners in regard to travellers' attitudes towards eWOM communication within the tourism industry.

### 1.3 Contribution of the Research

The present study explores the antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication. The role of overall attitude in the relationship between the antecedents and the behavioural intention is also discussed. Furthermore, this study employs theories developed within social psychology disciplines, of which are applied in the marketing and tourism field to understand online consumer behaviour. Theoretical contribution mainly resides within the following areas.

Firstly, findings contribute to a comprehensive understanding outlining the reasons why travellers like to post their opinions online. Current studies that explore reasons for eWOM communication are mainly from the motivational perspective. This study focuses on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. From an attitudinal perspective, several antecedents are identified based on theories.

Secondly, several theories from social psychological and marketing disciplines are employed to test online consumer behaviour. This extends the understanding and application of these theories. In total, three different theories are employed, namely Technology Acceptance Model, Functional Theory of Attitude, and Subjective Norm. This is the very first time these three theories have been brought together and examined within the context of eWOM communication.

Thirdly, a conceptual framework is introduced and tested by integrating three key antecedents that influences the travellers' attitude towards eWOM communication. The model will be informed by online focus group, thereafter empirically tested by web-based questionnaire.

Fourthly, measures for estimating latent constructs are revised. Measures are mainly adapted from previous study outcomes. They are further amended by the results of online focus group. Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis is



used to assess validity and reliability of the measures, of which can be further applied to future studies.

Apart from academic contribution, findings can also be beneficial to the future of the tourism industry.

Firstly, the influence of electronic media cannot be ignored. This research intends to understand travellers' adoption of electronic communication media. It should provide implications for the tourism industry in the provision of the correct usage of electronic media.

Secondly, eWOM is confirmed as an effective marketing tool which can promote the travel and tourism business effectively and efficiently. Further understanding of the reasons to facilitate eWOM communication can help businesses generate more eWOM enabling them to market their businesses even better.

Thirdly, by stimulating more eWOM communication, travel and tourism businesses can take the opportunity to improve their products and services further. This also provides the chance to observe their competitors, thus enabling them to prepare the future direction of their business.

#### 1.4 Structure of the Study

This thesis comprises nine chapters. The overall structure is organised as follows.

**Chapter 2** provides the background to the tourism industry and consumer behaviour within the industry. This chapter includes econometric analysis and development of the tourism industry. Additionally, key players and the portfolio of the industry are addressed. Marketing and e-marketing issues within the tourism industry are highlighted and echoed in the importance of this study. Justification in the choice of research context is also provided.

**Chapter 3** depicts a comprehensive literature review of eWOM communication, the focus of this study. This chapter begins by identifying the origins, definition and typology of both traditional and electronic word-of-mouth. The impact of eWOM and factors influencing the eWOM effects are also discussed. Because

eWOM communication is not only discussed within marketing and tourism disciplines, the research of eWOM communication within sociology and psychology are also considered.

**Chapter 4** firstly reviews the motivation for eWOM communication. As this study explores travellers' attitudinal perspectives towards eWOM communication, relevant theories of consumer attitude – behaviour are discussed. This includes the Technology Acceptance Model, the Theory of Reasoned Action, the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the Functional Theory of Attitude.

**Chapter 5** describes the development of the conceptual framework and hypotheses. This chapter firstly proposes a preliminary conceptual framework based on the S-O-R paradigm. It further outlines the definition of each construct and dimension followed by the relationship between each construct based upon different theories. In turn, the Technology Acceptance Model, the Functional Theory of Attitude and the Subjective Norm are integrated to build the research model. The mediation effect of the overall attitude towards eWOM communication is also addressed. A total of 19 hypotheses are proposed.

**Chapter 6** illustrates the research philosophy and research design, which enables the achievement of research aim and objectives. Several issues discussed clearly under the research design include the types of study, time horizon, units of analysis, research medium, data collection, sampling, research instruments and data analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques are employed. Therefore, the data analysis chapter will be divided into two chapters.

**Chapter 7** includes the results of qualitative data and the pilot testing. This chapter can be regarded as the preparation for quantitative data collection. Online focus group is employed to generate qualitative data. Results from online focus group are used to inform the conceptual framework as well as to amend statements within the survey. In addition, pilot tests are conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of questionnaire measures.

**Chapter 8** presents the results of the main survey and the related hypotheses. It explains the sampling background including demographic characteristics and

eWOM behavioural characteristics. Data screening is thereafter highlighted. Confirmatory factor analysis is conducted to assess validity and reliability of the measures. Given the data fits well into the proposed framework, hypotheses are examined by structural model analysis. Multigroup analyses are conducted to re-ensure validity of the research model.

**Chapter 9** discusses the preceding data analysis results, conclusions and the implications. The discussion section displays the performance of the model and latent constructs. It also compares findings from the qualitative and quantitative results as well as previous studies to highlight the similarities and differences. Theoretical, methodological and managerial contributions of this study are provided. Lastly, it acknowledges possible limitations and future research opportunities.

### 1.5 Summary

In brief, this chapter provides the background and rationale of the study. Research objectives are also identified to reach the aims of this study. Expected theoretical and managerial contributions are also addressed. Lastly, the structure of this thesis is summarised. This chapter provides the study basis and the flow of sequent chapters.

# Chapter 2

## Research Context: A Review of the International Tourism Industry

### 2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explain in more detail the research context of this study. It provides an overview of the tourism industry, particularly the behaviour of travellers and marketing issues within the industry. Finally, justification to conduct this study within the tourism context is provided, which shows the importance of this study to the tourism industry.

### 2.2 The Tourism Industry

Tourism is referred to as “a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business / professional purposes” (World Tourism Organization, 2013a, p. 1). The tourism industry is witnessed as one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world (Cooper and Hall, 2013; World Tourism Organization, 2013b). However, there is a debate on the definition of the tourism industry (Edgell, 2013).

There is no universally accepted term for naming this industry (Morrison, 2010). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) name it the ‘tourism industry’ (World Tourism Organization, 2013c) by defining themselves as ‘the leading international organization in the field of tourism’. ‘Tourism & travel industry’ is used by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) as shown in their title (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2013b). Being known as ‘the leading voice and authority on travel and tourism in the Asia Pacific region’ (Pacific Asia Travel Association, 2013), ‘the travel and tourism industry’ is also adopted by Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA). The British Hospitality Association defines it as ‘the hospitality industry’ described in their introduction

as it is known as 'the leading representative organisation within the hospitality industry' (British Hospitality Association, 2013). The U.S. Travel Association widely use the term 'travel industry' on their website to generally describe the industry (U.S. Travel Association, 2013). This study has adopted the name suggested by UNWTO to describe the industry, the 'tourism industry'. The reason for this is because the UNWTO, being the United Nations (UN) agency of the world, plays overall a key role for the industry of tourism.

Tourism can be viewed as a concept of the word 'market' which includes "the demands of consumers for a very wide range of travel-related products and the supply of services by a broad array of commercial and public sector organizations" (Middleton *et al.*, 2009, p. 3). The range of travel-related products covers the broader areas of transportation, accommodation and lodging, food and beverage services and restaurants, cultural, sports and recreational activities, attractions and travel agencies etc. Companies and organisations along with various facilities aiming to satisfy the needs of tourists are included within this broad market (Leiper, 1979). Because of the broad mix of goods and service providers, this can make the industry a more complex and difficult one to be defined.

The international tourist (overnight visitors) amounts to 25 million in 1950 and reached 1,035 million in 2012. 298 million people travel internationally between January and April 2013, which is an increase of 12 million in comparison to the same period in 2012. Table 2.1 presents an overview of international tourist arrivals from 1990 to 2012.

Table 2.1 International Tourist Arrivals

|                                       | International Tourist Arrivals<br>(million) |       |       |       |       |       | Market<br>share (%) | Change<br>(%) |       | Average annual<br>growth (%) |       |
|---------------------------------------|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------------------|---------------|-------|------------------------------|-------|
|                                       | 1990  | 1995  | 2000  | 2005  | 2010  | 2011  |                     | 2012*         | 2012* |                              | 11/10 |
| <b>World</b>                          | 436   | 529   | 677   | 807   | 949   | 995   | 1,035               | 100           | 4.8   | 4.0                          | 3.6   |
| <b>Advanced economies<sup>1</sup></b> | 297   | 336   | 420   | 459   | 506   | 530   | 551                 | 53.2          | 4.8   | 3.8                          | 2.6   |
| <b>Emerging economies<sup>1</sup></b> | 139   | 193   | 256   | 348   | 443   | 465   | 484                 | 46.8          | 4.9   | 4.3                          | 4.8   |
| <b>By UNWTO regions:</b>              |   |       |       |       |       |       |                     |               |       |                              |       |
| <b>Europe</b>                         | 262.7                                       | 305.9 | 388.0 | 448.9 | 485.5 | 516.4 | 534.2               | 51.6          | 6.4   | 3.4                          | 2.5   |
| Northern Europe                       | 29.8  | 37.7  | 46.4  | 60.4  | 62.8  | 64.0  | 64.9                | 6.3           | 2.0   | 1.4                          | 1.0   |
| Western Europe                        | 108.6                                       | 112.2 | 139.7 | 141.7 | 154.3 | 161.5 | 166.6               | 16.1          | 4.6   | 3.2                          | 2.3   |
| Central/Eastern Europe                | 33.9  | 58.1  | 69.3  | 90.4  | 95.0  | 103.9 | 111.6               | 10.8          | 9.4   | 7.4                          | 3.1   |
| Southern/Mediterr. Eu.                | 90.3  | 98.0  | 132.6 | 156.4 | 173.5 | 187.0 | 191.1               | 18.5          | 7.8   | 2.2                          | 2.9   |
| - of which EU-27                      | 231.3                                       | 267.7 | 326.8 | 356.1 | 371.0 | 390.9 | 400.2               | 38.7          | 5.4   | 2.4                          | 1.7   |
| <b>Asia and the Pacific</b>           | 55.8  | 82.0  | 110.1 | 153.6 | 205.1 | 218.2 | 233.6               | 22.6          | 6.4   | 7.0                          | 6.2   |
| North-East Asia                       | 26.4  | 41.3  | 58.3  | 85.9  | 111.5 | 115.8 | 122.8               | 11.9          | 3.8   | 6.0                          | 5.2   |
| South-East Asia                       | 21.2  | 28.4  | 36.1  | 48.5  | 70.0  | 77.3  | 84.6                | 8.2           | 10.4  | 9.4                          | 8.3   |
| Oceania                               | 5.2   | 8.1   | 9.6   | 11.0  | 11.6  | 11.7  | 12.1                | 1.2           | 0.9   | 4.1                          | 1.4   |
| South Asia                            | 3.1   | 4.2   | 6.1   | 8.1   | 12.0  | 13.5  | 14.1                | 1.4           | 12.6  | 4.4                          | 8.2   |
| <b>Americas</b>                       | 92.8  | 109.0 | 128.2 | 133.3 | 150.4 | 156.0 | 163.1               | 15.8          | 3.7   | 4.6                          | 2.9   |
| North America                         | 71.7  | 80.7  | 91.5  | 89.9  | 99.3  | 102.1 | 106.7               | 10.3          | 2.8   | 4.5                          | 2.5   |
| Caribbean                             | 11.4  | 14.0  | 17.1  | 18.8  | 19.5  | 20.1  | 20.9                | 2.0           | 3.0   | 3.8                          | 1.5   |
| Central America                       | 1.9   | 2.6   | 4.3   | 6.3   | 7.9   | 8.3   | 8.9                 | 0.9           | 4.4   | 7.5                          | 5.0   |
| South America                         | 7.7   | 11.7  | 15.3  | 18.3  | 23.6  | 25.5  | 26.7                | 2.6           | 7.8   | 4.8                          | 5.5   |
| <b>Africa</b>                         | 14.8  | 18.8  | 26.2  | 34.8  | 49.9  | 49.4  | 52.4                | 5.1           | -0.8  | 5.9                          | 6.0   |
| North Africa                          | 8.4   | 7.3   | 10.2  | 13.9  | 18.8  | 17.1  | 18.5                | 1.8           | -9.1  | 8.7                          | 4.2   |
| Subsaharan Africa                     | 6.4   | 11.5  | 16.0  | 20.9  | 31.1  | 32.4  | 33.8                | 3.3           | 4.1   | 4.4                          | 7.1   |
| <b>Middle East</b>                    | 9.6   | 13.7  | 24.1  | 36.3  | 58.2  | 54.9  | 52.0                | 5.0           | -5.6  | -5.4                         | 5.2   |

Source: World Tourism Organization (2013b)

It can be seen that the number of tourists shows consistent increases, particularly those from emerging economies. Such tourist growth amounts to US \$ 1,075 billion expenditure worldwide in 2012, as displayed in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 International Tourist Receipts

|                                       | International Tourism Receipts<br>Local currencies, constant prices |       |       |        | Market<br>share (%) | US\$<br>Receipts |             |           | Euro<br>Receipts |       |       |
|---------------------------------------|---|-------|-------|--------|---------------------|------------------|-------------|-----------|------------------|-------|-------|
|                                       | change (%)  |       |       |        |                     | (billion)        | per arrival | (billion) | per arrival      |       |       |
|                                       | 09/08   | 10/09 | 11/10 | 12*/11 |                     |                  |             |           |                  |       |       |
| <b>World</b>                          | -5.5  | 5.5   | 4.7   | 4.0    | 100                 | 1,042            | 1,075       | 1,040     | 749              | 837   | 810   |
| <b>Advanced economies<sup>1</sup></b> | -6.4  | 5.8   | 5.9   | 4.3    | 64.1                | 672              | 689         | 1,250     | 482              | 536   | 970   |
| <b>Emerging economies<sup>1</sup></b> | -3.8  | 4.9   | 2.8   | 3.6    | 35.9                | 371              | 386         | 800       | 266              | 300   | 620   |
| <b>By UNWTO regions:</b>              |   |       |       |        |                     |                  |             |           |                  |       |       |
| <b>Europe</b>                         | -6.3  | 0.1   | 5.2   | 2.3    | 42.6                | 466.7            | 457.8       | 860       | 335.3            | 356.3 | 670   |
| Northern Europe                       | -3.6  | 3.3   | 3.4   | 5.2    | 6.7                 | 69.8             | 72.4        | 1,120     | 50.1             | 56.3  | 870   |
| Western Europe                        | -6.6  | 1.3   | 4.3   | 3.0    | 14.6                | 161.6            | 157.0       | 940       | 116.1            | 122.2 | 730   |
| Central/Eastern Europe                | -8.0  | -2.9  | 7.8   | 5.2    | 5.3                 | 56.0             | 57.0        | 510       | 40.2             | 44.3  | 400   |
| Southern/Mediterr. Eu.                | -6.4  | -1.3  | 6.0   | -0.3   | 15.9                | 179.3            | 171.4       | 900       | 128.8            | 133.4 | 700   |
| - of which EU-27                      | -7.0  | 0.9   | 4.3   | 1.9    | 34.2                | 378.3            | 367.7       | 920       | 271.8            | 286.2 | 720   |
| <b>Asia and the Pacific</b>           | -0.7  | 15.4  | 8.0   | 6.2    | 30.1                | 298.6            | 323.9       | 1,390     | 214.5            | 252.1 | 1,080 |
| North-East Asia                       | 1.9   | 21.4  | 8.8   | 8.3    | 15.5                | 149.6            | 166.8       | 1,360     | 107.5            | 129.9 | 1,060 |
| South-East Asia                       | -7.0  | 15.1  | 12.8  | 6.6    | 8.5                 | 84.4             | 91.7        | 1,080     | 60.7             | 71.3  | 840   |
| Oceania                               | 4.2   | -2.9  | -5.7  | -1.5   | 3.8                 | 40.8             | 41.2        | 3,390     | 29.3             | 32.1  | 2,640 |
| South Asia                            | -3.2  | 16.3  | 12.1  | 5.2    | 2.2                 | 23.7             | 24.2        | 1,710     | 17.0             | 18.8  | 1,330 |
| <b>Americas</b>                       | -10.2   | 4.4   | 5.0   | 5.9    | 19.8                | 197.9            | 212.6       | 1,300     | 142.2            | 165.5 | 1,010 |
| North America                         | -12.2   | 6.0   | 5.9   | 6.7    | 14.5                | 144.2            | 156.4       | 1,470     | 103.6            | 121.7 | 1,140 |
| Caribbean                             | -8.0  | 1.3   | -0.5  | 2.0    | 2.3                 | 23.5             | 24.5        | 1,170     | 16.9             | 19.1  | 910   |
| Central America                       | -6.5  | 1.1   | 0.7   | 8.9    | 0.7                 | 7.1              | 8.0         | 900       | 5.1              | 6.2   | 700   |
| South America                         | 0.0   | -1.6  | 6.7   | 3.6    | 2.2                 | 23.1             | 23.7        | 890       | 16.6             | 18.5  | 690   |
| <b>Africa</b>                         | -5.5  | 2.3   | 1.6   | 5.8    | 3.1                 | 32.7             | 33.6        | 640       | 23.5             | 26.1  | 500   |
| North Africa                          | -4.7  | 0.2   | -5.5  | 2.4    | 0.9                 | 9.6              | 9.4         | 510       | 6.9              | 7.3   | 390   |
| Subsaharan Africa                     | -5.9  | 3.5   | 4.9   | 7.2    | 2.3                 | 23.1             | 24.2        | 720       | 16.6             | 18.9  | 560   |
| <b>Middle East</b>                    | 1.2   | 17.2  | -14.1 | -2.0   | 4.4                 | 46.4             | 47.0        | 900       | 33.4             | 36.6  | 700   |

Source: World Tourism Organization (2013b)

From 2010, international tourist receipts have grown steadily. The increases also match the growth within international tourist arrivals, being approximately that of 4%. These tourists and their expenditure create a significant impact on the worldwide economy.

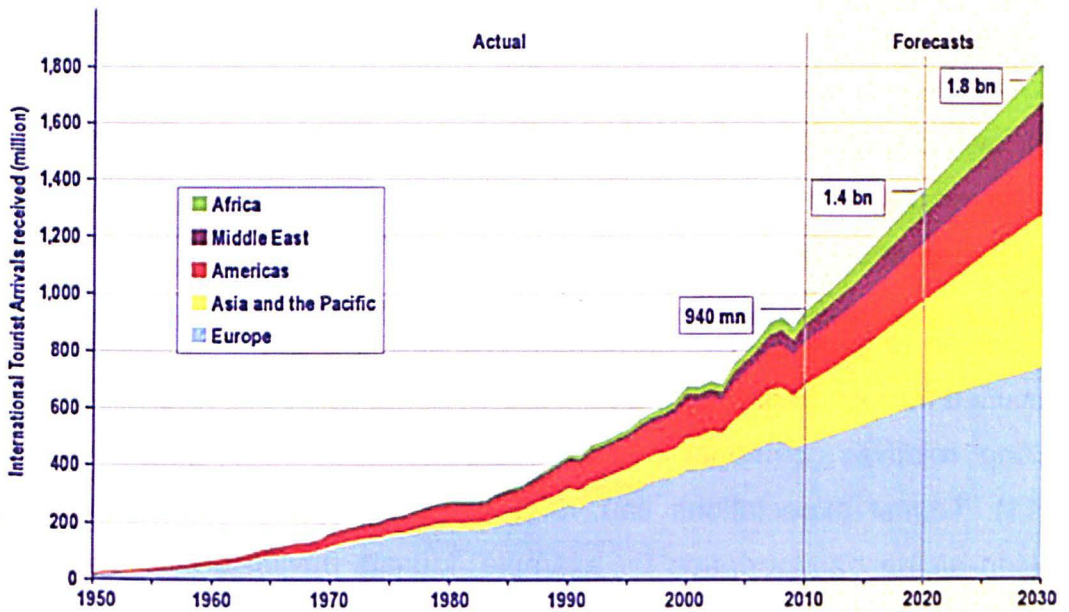
To address the significant changes within the tourism industry, several reasons have been mentioned (Page, 2011). From the consumers' perspective, travel and tourism has become associated with a life quality issue (Page, 2011). Once the basic needs of life are fulfilled such as food consumption and housing, individuals think about increasing their living quality. Travel has therefore become one activity which allows people to get away from their work and enjoy life more (Page, 2011). From the perspective of many countries, the tourism industry has become one of their major industries and contributes significantly to their economic growth, such as increasing economic incomes and providing working opportunities (Middleton *et al.*, 2009). As it tends to have a positive impact on GDP, governments encourage further development within this industry.

Another factor which increasingly plays a key role is technology as it makes travelling more accessible (Buhalis and Law, 2008). Technology helps to develop necessary infrastructure, such as airports and railways, making worldwide travelling much easier. Meanwhile, consumers also utilise the convenience of technology, e.g. the internet and electronic media, to generate travel information and make bookings. This technology feature allows travelling to be much easier to accomplish.

Based on the reasons for rapid changes within the tourism industry and the international tourist statistics from previous years, UNWTO provides a forecast of international tourist arrivals up to 2030, as shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Tourism towards 2030: Actual Trend and Forecast 1950-2030

UNWTO Tourism Towards 2030: Actual trend and forecast 1950-2030



Source: World Tourism Organization (2013b)

As can be seen in Figure 2.1, the forecast for international tourist arrivals is that of 1.8 billion in the year 2030 (World Tourism Organization, 2013b). In addition, the growth forecast is estimated to be 4.4% of the contribution to worldwide GDP on average per year over the next ten years (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2013a). By 2023, it is expected to reach US\$ 10.5 trillion in GDP. Given the significant increase in numbers of tourists and the economic contribution, this industry attracts more attention from both academics and practitioners alike.

### 2.3 Component Sectors within the Tourism Industry

There are two different ways useful to better explore the industry component sectors, these being the 'demand' and 'supply' (Middleton *et al.*, 2009). Two groups within the tourism industry represent the 'demand', being international tourism and domestic tourism. On the other hand, supply can be identified as having up to five main sectors, which compose the tourism industry.

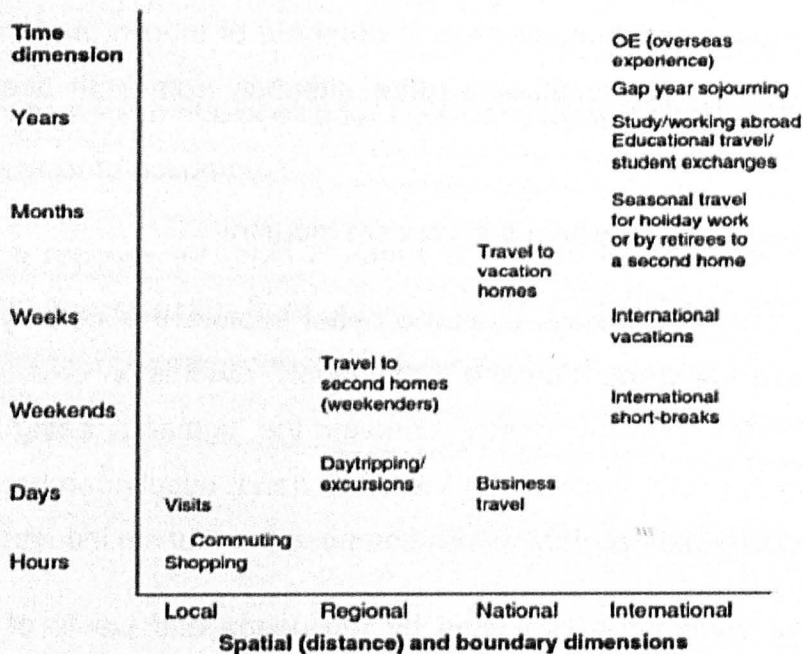
The industry demands are defined by the needs and wants of consumers. Tourism industry consumers can be identified as two different groups based upon their geographical movement for tourism activities: international tourism



and domestic tourism (Middleton *et al.*, 2009). International tourism is regarded as “visitors who travel to and stay in countries other than their normal country of residence for less than a year” (Middleton *et al.*, 2009, p. 5). It can be further divided into inbound international visitors and outbound international visitors. Domestic tourism is pointed to those visitors travelling within the boundaries of their own country (Middleton *et al.*, 2009). It can be further divided into same-day or overnight visits. Various types of tourists create the tourism industry and market demands, having rapid growth over recent years.

In addition to geographical movement and time consumption, tourists can be classified through their different purpose of travel: i.e., business, visiting friends, visiting relatives, personal business, pleasure and other purposes (Page, 2011). Tourist expectations can vary depending upon their travel purpose. Taking airline transportation for example, tourists having a pleasure purpose may expect more courtesy and service quality, whereas business travellers may put more attention on accurate flight times. Combining time and geographical dimensions, Cooper and Hall (2013) produced a diagram to show the purpose of travel with its related time and distance dimensions, which is shown in Figure 2.2.

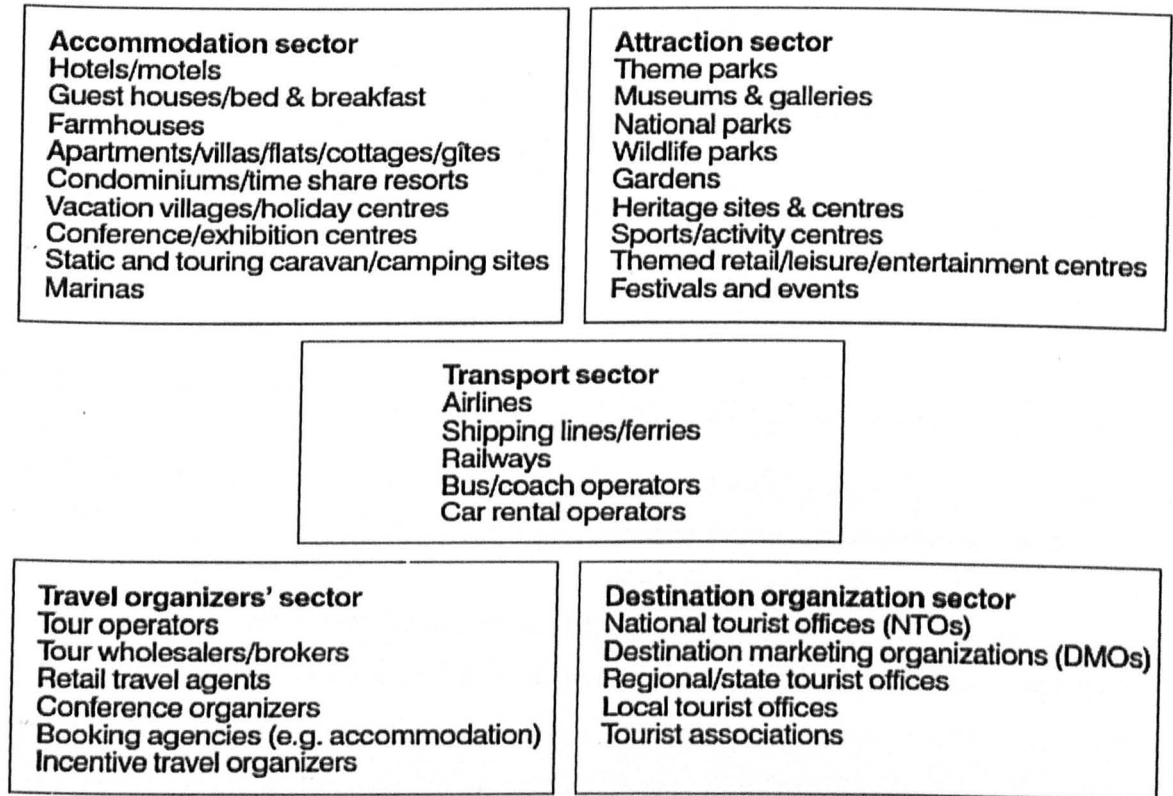
Figure 2.2 Purpose of Travel



Source: Cooper and Hall (2013, p. 16)

The supply element of this industry is more complicated. Figure 2.3 shows a loose classification of the main sectors within the tourism industry.

Figure 2.3 The Five Main Sectors within the Tourism Industry



Source: Middleton *et al.* (2009, p. 11)

The five main sectors provide the initial products which fulfil the demands of tourists to complete a trip. However, these sectors show difficulty in finding a similarity between themselves (Middleton *et al.*, 2009). For example, hotels within the accommodation sector are very different to railway services within the transport sector. These five sectors can be operated by either private enterprises or public businesses. Private enterprises may aim to achieve maximum profits, whereas the public sector may focus on development of the country. Additionally, some sectors do not only serve tourists. Taking the taxi industry as an example, their services provide for residents in their daily life, but also play an important role for tourists to travel between different places. They may or may not regard themselves as part of the tourism industry. From the tourists' perspective, they experience travel products from more than one sector during their trip. Travellers' overall satisfaction is therefore influenced by multiple service providers (Song *et al.*, 2011). Different classification of

consumers and suppliers within tourism industry makes it more difficult to manage the industry through marketing their products, providing satisfying products and fulfilling customers' expectations.

## 2.4 Marketing within the Tourism Industry

Each tourist may experience one or more tourism product provided by different providers during their trip (Cooper and Hall, 2013). The travel experience begins to be accumulated and evaluated throughout the experience of tourists once leaving home and returning to it (Middleton *et al.*, 2009). Some tourism products can be sold individually, while others can be combined as a new product. For example, hotel rooms can be sold individually, but can also be combined with food and beverage services as an overall accommodation experience. Tourists that consume different tourism products may have different expectations, which can become increasingly difficult to satisfy.

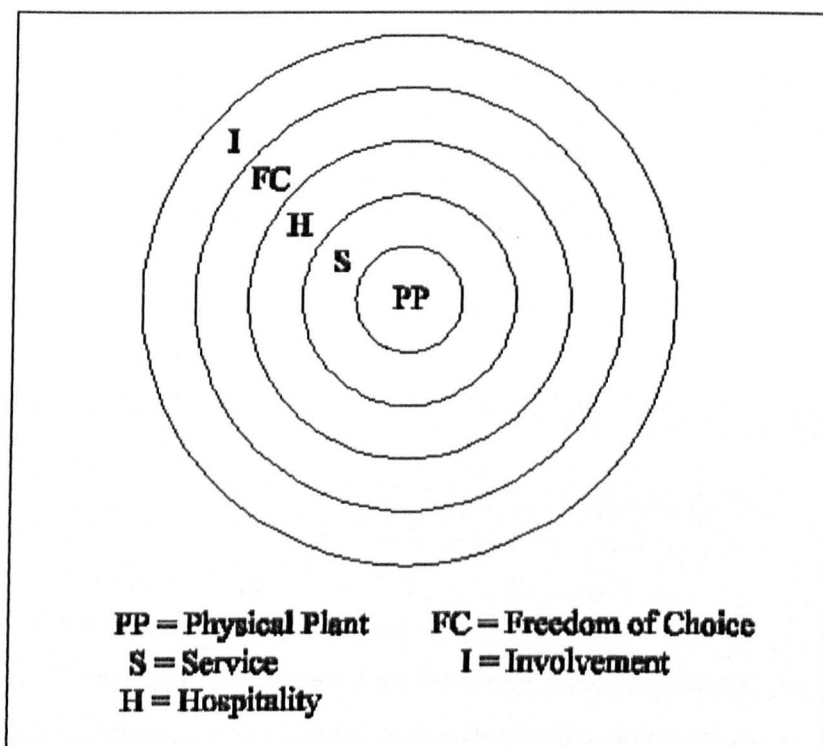
Tourism products normally comprise of a bundle of physical products (e.g. hotels, natural parks) and services (provision of physical products). The characteristics of tourism products can make marketing for the industry more challenging. Some features are essential to all service products, while others are unique to tourism products.

Intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability are general characteristics of service products (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1985). Service is intangible, being non-testable and difficult to access. Inseparability means the provision and consumption of the service are simultaneous requiring the consumer to participate in the production process at the same time. Following the concept of inseparability, service is perishable in that it cannot be stored or refunded. Heterogeneity refers to each service and can be unique without a standardised process to produce. Given that tourism products are normally combined with service, these four characteristics are innate within tourism products, but also increase the difficulties to produce, manage and market them. Consumers therefore perceive a higher risk when purchasing tourism products.

Smith (1994) further argues that the quality of physical goods and services are not enough to satisfy the expectations of tourists. As presented in Figure 2.4,

hospitality, freedom of choice and involvement are further addressed to compose the quality of tourism products.

Figure 2.4 Tourism Product



Source: Smith (1994, p. 587)

Within the tourism industry, consumer expectations are that of 'something more' (Smith, 1994). The 'something more' is an abstract attitude or style of 'performing' tourism products, such as friendliness, courtesy, or efficiency, etc. (Smith, 1994). This attitude is called hospitality, which is an important component within tourism products (Smith, 1994). Freedom of choice refers to "the necessity in which the traveller has an acceptable range of options in order for the experience to be satisfactory" (Smith, 1994, p. 589). If the tourist cannot choose the products they wish, it is difficult to fully enjoy the experience of travel. 'Involvement' is the last component, encouraging tourists to wholeheartedly engage in tourism activities and to reach the highest level of satisfaction (Smith, 1994).

These unique characteristics create a complex range of tourism products and also influence marketing of the same. For example, following the product components by Smith (1994), hospitality is seen to play an important role in

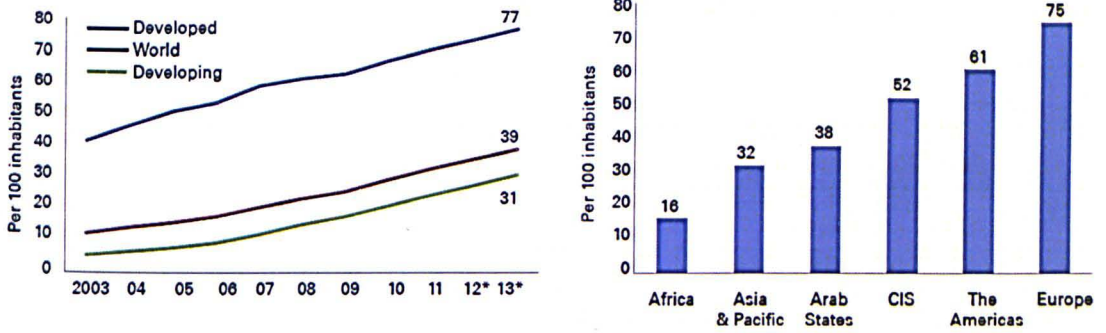
tourism. However, it is an abstract concept and difficult to standardise. Some physical products are easy to copy (Page, 2011), for instance, the function of hotels is that of supplying accommodation. Provision of a bed and duvet can fulfil the minimum function, but might not satisfy customers. Creating a unique hospitality experience is very important to any operator within the tourism industry (Smith, 1994). Additionally, the freedom of choice implies there is competition within the industry. From the product producers to distributors, a variety of tourism organisations allow freedom of choice for their customers, but this increases the difficulty in marketing and promotion thereof (Morrison, 2010).

Both the generic and unique characteristics of tourism products increases the consumers' uncertainty when making their purchase decisions (Middleton *et al.*, 2009; Morrison, 2010). To facilitate their decision making process when planning their trip, consumers need to access more information. Conventionally, individuals rely on information provided by travel-related organisations or businesses. Nowadays, individuals tend to search for information actively online as recommendations or opinions from fellow tourists are regarded as more reliable and trustworthy than any commercials etc. Tourism operators and organisations should therefore take notice of the increase in internet and electronic media influences through online opinions.

## 2.5 The Use of Technology within the Tourism Industry

The specialised agency for the United Nations for information and communication technologies, the International Telecommunication Union, estimates there are over 2.7 billion people using the internet. This accounted for nearly 40% of the world population during the first quarter of 2013. Approximately 77% of residents are online in developed countries, whereas only 31% are online in developing countries, presented in Figure 2.5. To explore individual regions, European users account for the highest proportion (75%) of the population, followed by America. The region with the lowest internet usage rate throughout the world is Africa (16%).

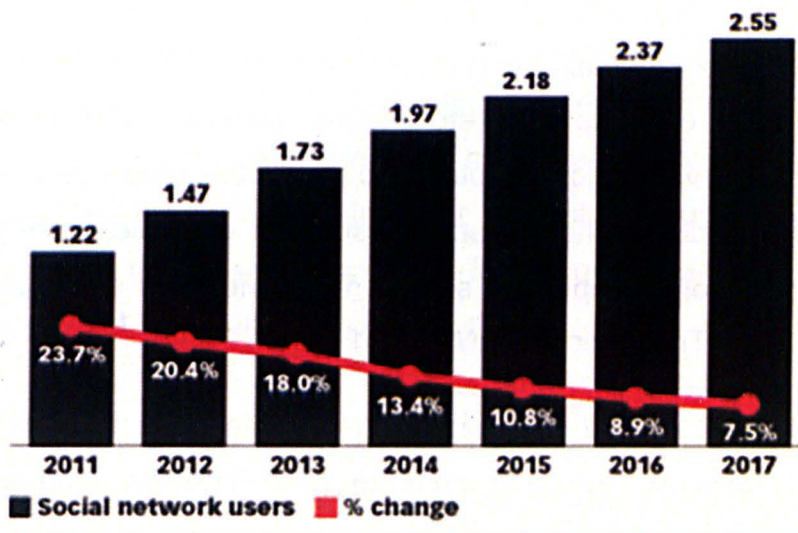
Figure 2.5 Internet Users by Development Level, 2003-2013, and by Region, 2013



Source: International Telecommunication Union (2013)

Through internet use, people can search information, send e-mails and perform online banking and shopping. A relatively new online activity is social networking (Zickuhr and Smith, 2012). One out of four people worldwide accessed electronic media to build up their networking during 2013 (eMarketer, 2013). eMarketer also summarises and estimates the number of social network users from 2011 to 2017, as presented in Figure 2.6. Although the increase in social network audiences will gradually decline, the total number is estimated to reach 2.55 billion in 2017.

Figure 2.6 Statistics and Estimations of Social Networks Users

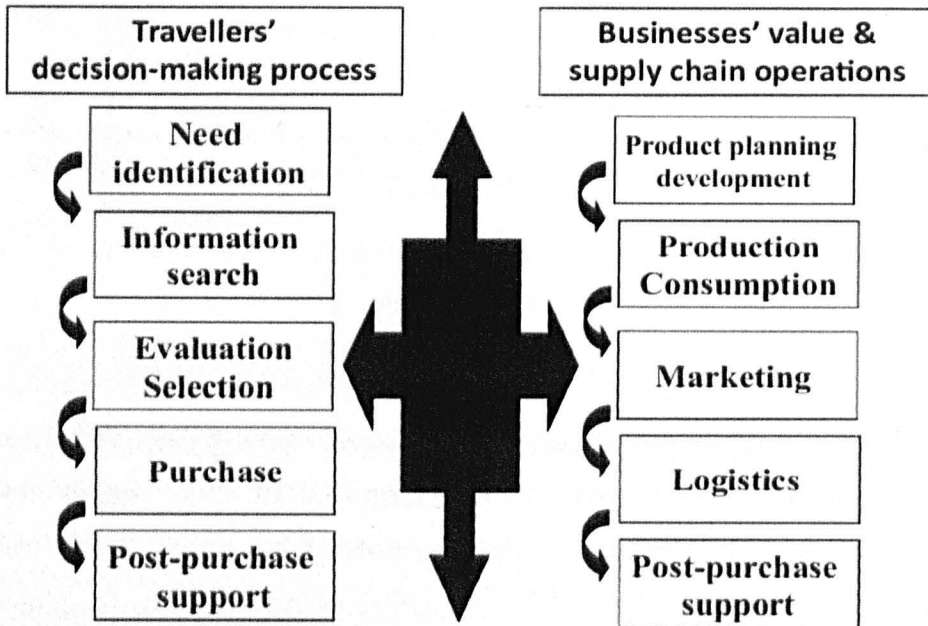


Source: eMarketer (2013)

The popularity of internet and electronic media usage influences changes to the behaviour of travellers as well as marketing methods within the tourism

industry (Sigala, 2012). The influences of WOM upon businesses and travellers are shown in Figure 2.7.

Figure 2.7 The Influence of eWOM on Travellers and Businesses



Source: Sigala (2012, p. 8)

As shown in Figure 2.7, online opinions can influence the whole decision-making process of travellers. The literature review chapter outlines how travellers utilise the internet and electronic media to generate travel information, book hotels, exchange and share photos, and post recommendations or complaints, etc. Figures summarised from the industry report within the introduction chapter also reveal the influence of the internet and electronic media on the tourism industry. For example, more than half of travellers accept online opinions as the main reference when planning and booking their trip (Travel Industry Wire, 2011).

On the other hand, eWOM communication also affects the tourism business in its ability to develop, sell, and promote their products. The internet and electronic media provide a new platform to sell tourism products as well as to promote it (Sparks and Browning, 2011). Increasing numbers of travellers book their trip online instead of purchasing from travel agencies or shops. Therefore, the tourism industry distribution channels become broader and more fragmented. Interactive communication between suppliers and consumers or

fellow consumers enables tourism businesses to target more specific market segments enabling them to create a niche market (Evangelos, 2012). Full information is easily accessed in that it can enable suppliers to analyse the whole market and also their competitors. Given the heavy usage and influences of eWOM, tourism organisations and businesses should carefully manage those online opinions, thus allowing eWOM to be treated as a new marketing tool to promote their products.

## 2.6 Justification in the Choice of Research Context

The tourism industry is evident as being the biggest and most rapidly growing industry worldwide. Many countries regard the tourism industry as their main economic source through providing various working opportunities. Because of the significance of this industry, it is important to understand the behaviour of consumers and suppliers which can further provide managerial implications for business development. Several tourism product characteristics are discussed to understand the behaviour of tourists and those of marketing issues uniquely relevant to this study. Planning a trip or shopping for tourism products is regarded as a high risk purchase decision whereby potential tourists rely upon opinions of others to facilitate their decision-making.

The development of internet and electronic media provides a large amount of useful online opinions which can enhance the influences of potential travellers by reducing the perceived risk and facilitating their decision making. Significant advantages and possible disadvantages have been recognised via eWOM communication within the tourism industry. This study therefore employs the tourism industry as the research context to further understand the antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication.

## 2.7 Summary

This chapter presents the research context – the tourism industry. This industry has been expanded steadily in recent years that receives high attention from both academics and practitioners alike. Additionally, this industry has its own unique characteristics such as the inclusion of multiple sectors and different purposes and expectations from any single traveller. Such characteristics create different marketing issues which are highlighted in this



chapter as well. With the advent of the internet and electronic media, the behaviour of travellers and business operations has also been changed. Based upon the importance of tourism industry and the unique phenomenon of travellers' online behaviour, this chapter provides the justification for choosing this research context.

# Chapter 3

## Electronic Word-of-Mouth

### 3.1 Introduction

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is an interpersonal communication and influential to both consumers and businesses alike. The internet and electronic media reinforce the impact of WOM and attracts much attention from academics and industries. This chapter firstly reviews the definition and typology of traditional WOM and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). It then discusses the consequences of eWOM and factors affecting the effects that WOM may have upon businesses and consumers. WOM within different disciplines is discussed at the end of this chapter.

### 3.2 Traditional Word-of-Mouth

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) is a form of interpersonal communication consisting of the consumption experience (Arndt, 1967b). It is conducted by consumers without a commercial purpose to express their consumption experience of products, services or marketing organisations etc. (Anderson, 1998; Richins, 1984). This exchange of opinion is most likely to take place within interpersonal networks such as friends and relatives, the neighbourhood and working colleagues (Brooks, 1957). Previous studies conclude that WOM serves as the most influential marketing force and a powerful information source (Sen and Lerman, 2007; Sweeney *et al.*, 2012).

Credibility is a significant feature of WOM because the source of WOM is traceable. WOM senders, who are fellow consumers, diffuse the information willingly without specific intention or interest in manipulating the truth (Arndt, 1967b). It is believed that WOM is less biased and independent to the manufacturer or service providers. On the contrary, advertisements produced by market controllers or market experts, imply a manipulation of information regarding certain goods and services (Richins, 1984). Therefore, WOM, as a

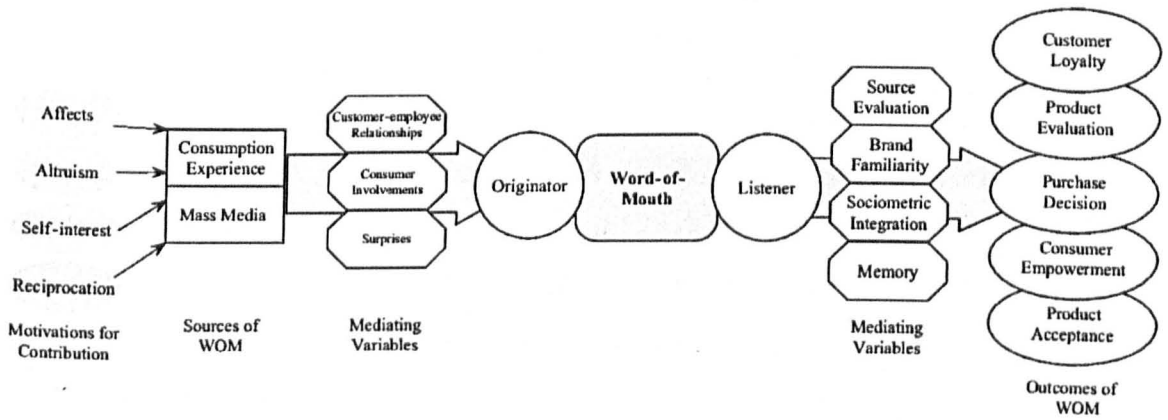
non-marketing dominated source, is more reliable and factual, gaining much more influence and persuasiveness.

The flexibility and accessibility of interpersonal communication enhances the influential power of WOM (Day, 1971; Herr *et al.*, 1991). Consumers make their purchase decisions by referring to other peoples' opinions, which is easy to achieve through personal networks. WOM is therefore regarded as a free-advertisement and powerful marketing tool in the promotion of products and services (Bone, 1995). Additionally, WOM is a statement of products or service consumption experiences. It can be treated as an indicator for determining the success or failure of products or services. Manufacturers and service providers can provide good honest feedback based on WOM given by their consumers (Sen and Lerman, 2007; Wetzer *et al.*, 2007). WOM not only influences consumers' attitude, intention and actual behaviour towards products, brands and businesses, but also attracts the attention of marketers when developing their marketing strategy.

WOM is easy to produce and accept when introducing a new product or form of innovation (López and Sicilia, 2013; Mahajan *et al.*, 1984). With previous limited experience or information of a new product, the customer's first experience or innovator's opinion is relatively important (Brooks, 1957; Engel *et al.*, 1969). Arndt (1967a) identifies several factors of the WOM process when experiencing a new product. Having less confidence in new product consumption, consumers express their WOM communication to seek recognition to enhance their purchase decision. Seeking recognition becomes as a motivation for WOM communication which is later concluded by Sundaram *et al.* (1998). In addition, Engel *et al.* (1969) show that innovators tend to produce more WOM than the general public. They find that amongst four different WOM motivators: product-involvement, self-involvement, concern for others and dissonance reduction, product involvement is the most significant in explaining why innovators express their opinions online. Innovators who have a better understanding of the product are more willing to share this information with others.

Litvin *et al.* (2008) propose a conceptual framework to understand the process of producing WOM communication, as presented in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Conceptual Model of Word-of-Mouth



Source: Litvin *et al.* (2008, p. 460)

As can be seen in Figure 3.1, the production flow of WOM communication has been indicated. In addition to studies of WOM itself, important issues related to eWOM communication can be identified as the following: 1) why do consumers engage in eWOM?; 2) where do consumers post their eWOM?; 3) What are the mediating variables of eWOM?; and 4) what are the expected consequences of eWOM communication? (Litvin *et al.*, 2008).

### 3.2.1 Valence of Word-of-Mouth

WOM can be divided into three valences, *positive*, *neutral*, or *negative* (Anderson, 1998). Positive WOM results from a satisfying experience and includes recommendations, vivid and novel experience sharing and endorsement. Denigration, complaints and rumours, on the other hand, are examples of negative WOM which comes from the unpleasant experience. Regarding neutral WOM, this is a viewpoint regarding previous consumption experiences which is shared with others without specific emotional responses.

When having a satisfactory consumption experience, individuals present a positive review and recommend the specific product or service to others. Potential consumers rely on recommendations and testimonies which facilitate their purchase decision (Duhan *et al.*, 1997). A recommendation can not only prompt a purchase decision of fellow consumers but also contributes to build up a reputation for the product, company or brand (Brown *et al.*, 2005). From the business perspective, such recommendations serve as a very powerful

marketing strategy with a very low cost (Anderson, 1998). Manufacturers and service providers can expand their market share and build their reputation upon positive WOM. Previous studies conclude that positive WOM serves as crucial information within service sectors including the medical care (Williams and Hensel, 1991) and banking services (File and Prince, 1992). Within the physical products, i.e. automotive industry, Swan and Oliver (1989) confirm the positive relationship between customer satisfaction, equity, and positive WOM. More specifically, when customers perceive fairness and satisfaction with their car, they do not only recommend goods such as cars, but also praise the service providers, (e.g. the salesperson or dealer). Similar results are generated in the professional service industry. Within medical care, WOM is a very important source among physicians (Williams and Hensel, 1991). It is considered as being of more credible and reliable information than any advertisement or promotional strategy. Later research concludes similar findings in the banking industry (File and Prince, 1992). Recommendation, praise and positive WOM, does not only disseminate and influence customers, it is also regarded as important information among colleagues.

With reference to negative WOM, several studies address its relationship with customer dissatisfaction (e.g. Cheng *et al.*, 2006; Richins, 1983; Singh, 1990; Wetzer *et al.*, 2007). One third of customers complain to friends or relatives when their needs are not satisfied with consumption of goods (Diener and Greyser, 1978). In the service industry, the complaint rate might be slightly higher. This is because the quality of service is intangible and difficult to standardise. Consumers have less information about how to assess the quality and set up their expectation. Therefore, service providers may feel challenged to satisfy expectations from their consumers.

Three different industries were compared in relation to complaining behaviour by Singh (1990). The results showed that within the auto-repair industry and the medical care industry, more than half of respondents produced negative WOM; whereas only 28% of respondents from the grocery industry expressed negative WOM. One possible reason for the lower complaint rates in the grocery industry is the characteristics of the high competitiveness. Customers find it easy to switch to other service providers. This result echoes previous

research regarding complaining intentions of personal care product consumption (Diener and Greyser, 1978). Within the highly competitive markets and full information industries, it is easier to assess the product quality. Customers, therefore, have less intention to produce complaints or disseminate negative WOM. They tend to switch to another service provider or manufacturer quickly when experiencing any negative event. Additionally, any information available about the products helps consumers predict and assess the quality more easily. In the auto-repair and medical care industry, where the service has restricted information, consumers may feel challenged to assess the quality (Singh, 1990; Williams and Hensel, 1991). With limited information, consumers perceive a higher risk when choosing the service provider and making their purchasing decision. Once they encounter a problem or failure during the consumption process, customers are more sensitive and tend to voice their opinion about their dissatisfaction. Through informal communication, negative WOM is not only venting negative emotions but also releasing uncertainty about the consumption. Several different factors can influence the customers' intention to complain or publish negative WOM such as the perceived risk of purchase decisions, market competition and quality assessment difficulty, etc. Therefore, it is important to discuss the antecedents of WOM to have a better understanding of it.

Another argument is given to address whether dissatisfied customers express more negative WOM; or whether positive WOM is more easily generated by satisfied customers. By investigating female consumers regarding instant coffee consumption, Holmes and Lett (1977) declared that individuals are more willing to publish positive WOM when they have a favourable experience of the product. However, later research reveals that more than half of customers complained to their relatives and friends about dissatisfying appliances and clothing shopping experiences (Richins, 1983). Based on the debate between positive and negative WOM, Anderson (1998) investigated the relationship between customer satisfaction and WOM by employing a utility-oriented model. Through the application of an asymmetric U shape for customer satisfaction, the WOM relationship is concluded. A greater amount of WOM is produced by non-satisfied customers, making negative WOM slightly easier to generate than positive WOM.

Different factors influence the intentions of individuals to produce WOM comments. Söderlund (1998, p. 173) proposes that “pleasantness predominates in communication”. It implies that the pleasant experience is easier to deliver through the individual’s unconsciousness. Thus, more positive WOM is produced and delivered through relatives, friends and even strangers. On the contrary, Taylor (1991) finds that individuals are more sensitive to negative events as negative events stimulate a stronger reaction and psychological arousal. Individuals decide to attack or to escape when experiencing a negative event. Different psychological responses are aroused which determine their complaint behaviour or remaining silent. Some researchers have proven that individuals are reluctant to transmit bad news because of their personality and concerns regarding the possible harm it may do to the service / product producer (O’Neal *et al.*, 1979). This worry does not exist when delivering a positive message. To sum up, the individual tends to disseminate positive experiences through unconscious behaviour. They may vent their negative emotions when feeling threatened or withhold their negative comments because of being more considerate. Inferring from previous research, there should be several factors that influence the willingness to deliver WOM. The aim of this research study is to identify the factors that drive individuals to express WOM.

### 3.2.2 Types of Word-of-Mouth

Richins and Root-Shaffer (1988) discuss different types of WOM. They group the WOM expression into three types: personal experience, advice giving and product news. The personal experience is disseminated actively by communicators. Advice giving, on the other hand, is passively produced by communicators. Individuals give their suggestions upon requests from others. Consumers are likely to seek advice before making a purchase decision. The difference between personal experiences and advice seeking is who initiates the WOM. When studying WOM, it is important to understand the factors that stimulate the intention to produce opinions. Some people intentionally publish more about their feelings and experiences, while others are more willing to make suggestions when being asked for opinions. However, very little attention has been paid to the factors driving individuals to express their

eWOM communication that this study aims to fulfil such research gap. The final type of WOM is product news, which is easier to produce and is one of the best ways in which to advertise and sell new products (e.g. Andreassen and Streukens, 2009; Mahajan *et al.*, 1984). WOM helps the company build up their product or service image very quickly. As it is a new innovation, the first opinion is weighed as being very important to customers and the business should pay more attention to it.

Patti and Chen (2009) investigate different types of WOM within higher education. The types proposed are service information gathering triggers and guidance, subjective personal experience, and personal advice. This classification is quite similar to the research outcomes by Richins and Root-Shaffer (1988). However, Patti and Chen (2009) argue that within the consumer oriented service industry such as higher education, WOM receives more emphasis because the service is intangible and difficult to assess, even after purchase. Consumers therefore rely heavily on WOM to minimise their psychological concerns in prompting their purchase decisions. The higher the demand for WOM, the more willing people are to produce opinions for others. The characteristics of industry affect the motivation of individuals to publish WOM which is taken into account in this study.

As an interpersonal communication to share experiences and opinions, WOM can create a huge impact on potential and current consumers, whereas businesses regard it as a powerful marketing tool. The development of technology, computer and the internet provide alternative disseminative channels for WOM. Technology also changes the characteristics, format, and influences of WOM. The next section will comprehensively review literature regarding electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

### 3.3 Electronic Word-of-Mouth

The advent of the internet has brought a revolution to WOM communication. 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 a multitude of people and institutions via the internet” (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004, p.39).



Given the broadcasting speed of online materials, WOM is disseminated with unprecedented speed and reaches countless audiences (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Huang *et al.*, 2011). Blogs, e-mails, online forums, electronic bulletin boards, instant communication software and newsgroups, are different types of electronic media, providing a platform for consumers to exchange resources and information. With the popularity and considerable impact of eWOM, academics and practitioners, therefore, place more focus on eWOM and related topics including its characteristics, motivations, application and consequences.

The internet was first designed to share information between institutes sited at different locations (Liu, 2000). It is now regarded as a tool to expand business boundaries, lower operating costs and to produce higher profit margins (Zviran *et al.*, 2006). By changing traditional communication patterns between businesses and customers, the internet has a double-edged function which facilitates transactions and reaches customers at a low cost (Huang *et al.*, 2011; Lee *et al.*, 2005). It offers a platform for consumers to exchange personal experiences and knowledge about different companies, brands, products, and services (Armstrong and Hagel, 1996). The WOM within offline environments can be delivered on a one-to-one or one-to-many basis, whereas the online environment enables online opinions to be disseminated to many users (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). All opinions expressed online can therefore be reached by millions of receivers and can produce extraordinary effects. Moreover, as the format of online opinion is in written form, they are more easily traced and accessible by both consumers and companies. Online communication is one of the remarkable phenomena of the world-wide-web, of which embraces much attention.

### 3.3.1 Characteristics of Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Asynchronicity, anonymity, easy accessibility and traceability are several important characteristics that mark eWOM as being more powerful and influential than traditional WOM (Dellarocas, 2003; Huang *et al.*, 2011; Sen and Lerman, 2007; Sun *et al.*, 2006). Traditional WOM heavily relies upon the social proximity of communicators, whereas receivers who read online information often have little or no relationship with the opinion-leaders who

share or exchange their experiences online. Strong social ties limits the traditional WOM disseminative effects; yet, eWOM breaks this boundary to affect more audiences (Wirtz and Chew, 2002). According to past studies on the influence of WOM and eWOM, the traditional form of WOM can only reach around ten people (Kurtz and Clow, 1992), whereas one online opinion can cause a company to lose as many as 30 customers (Shannon, 2009).

eWOM can happen in a real-time conversation, such as communication via the chat room or via instant messenger (Litvin *et al.*, 2008). It can also be asynchronised communication. For example, eWOM is disseminated asynchronously by the posting of articles on personal blog, electronic bulletin boards or forums. Asynchronicity is thus identified as one of the features of online communication (Pitta and Fowler, 2005). Disseminators post opinions first; then receivers will surf, search, read, and respond online at their own convenience. Individuals can actively search and read information online, sometimes reaching an opinion that was posted more than 10 years ago. This feature allows eWOM to reach a wider audience but can create a new problem. Receivers should have the ability to justify the validity of that particular information (Hu *et al.*, 2011). Otherwise, the information may not be valid after a period of time and may mislead customers to make the wrong decision.

Anonymity is another characteristic of eWOM. This characteristic makes customers feel more comfortable in expressing their comments without exposing their identities. Without face-to-face contact, people feel less pressure to share, to vent, and to present their true perspectives (Phelps *et al.*, 2004). The individual appreciates the anonymity of cyberspace (Armstrong and Hagel, 1996) in that an increasing number of eWOM is expressed and then multiplied by the increasing coverage of eWOM readers. The persuasive effect of WOM is therefore enhanced within the online environment. The anonymity also produces a negative side-effect of WOM communication. Without exposing their identity, individuals feel less responsibility for the content of expression which can result in fictitious eWOM (Bickart and Schindler, 2001). Gossip and rumour can also be disseminated through cyberspace. Businesses can pretend to being a customer in publishing positive eWOM as a commercial means to reach the public and increase their reputation (Chatterjee, 2001).

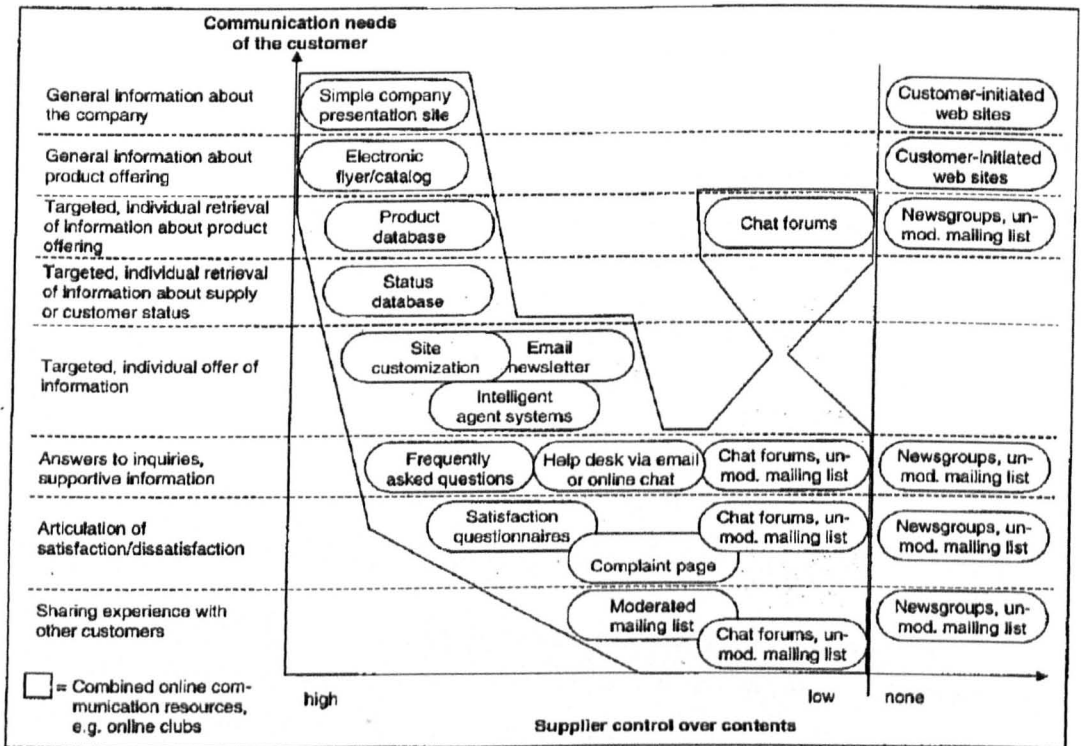
This behaviour damages the credibility of eWOM and makes it a potential problem when utilising eWOM (Hu *et al.*, 2011).

Easier accessibility is a well-recognised characteristic of eWOM (Dellarocas, 2003). Receivers find it easier to extract specific information to satisfy their needs. Through the internet, individuals can break geographical limitations. All information is stored in cyberspace and can be reached by different audiences based in different places at any time. From the customer's perspective, owing to easier accessibility, eWOM obtained from websites may contain an immense volume and variety of information including positive and negative valence (Chatterjee, 2001). The receivers should pay more attention in identifying whether the information is trustworthy and reliable. With almost zero cost, opinions are easier to publish online and be discussed to by others. By means of the internet, businesses also find it much easier to manage their customers and give proper feedback based on online opinions of customers (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). Traditional WOM is held within a private conversation which is difficult to respond to; yet, businesses find it easier to follow up negative eWOM and provide feedback, explanation or even recovery to create a positive influence via eWOM. In the meantime, competitors can also retrieve the eWOM to differentiate their capability. From the business point of view, eWOM becomes an opportunity to communicate with customers, but also reveals more information to their competitors. These advantages and disadvantages serve as different factors to promote the intention of individuals to express opinions online.

### 3.3.2 Typology of Electronic Word-of-Mouth

eWOM are the words published on the internet and can be classified into different types. Stauss (2000) groups electronic communication based on two criteria: communication needs of the customer and supplier control over content as shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 Different Types of Electronic Communication



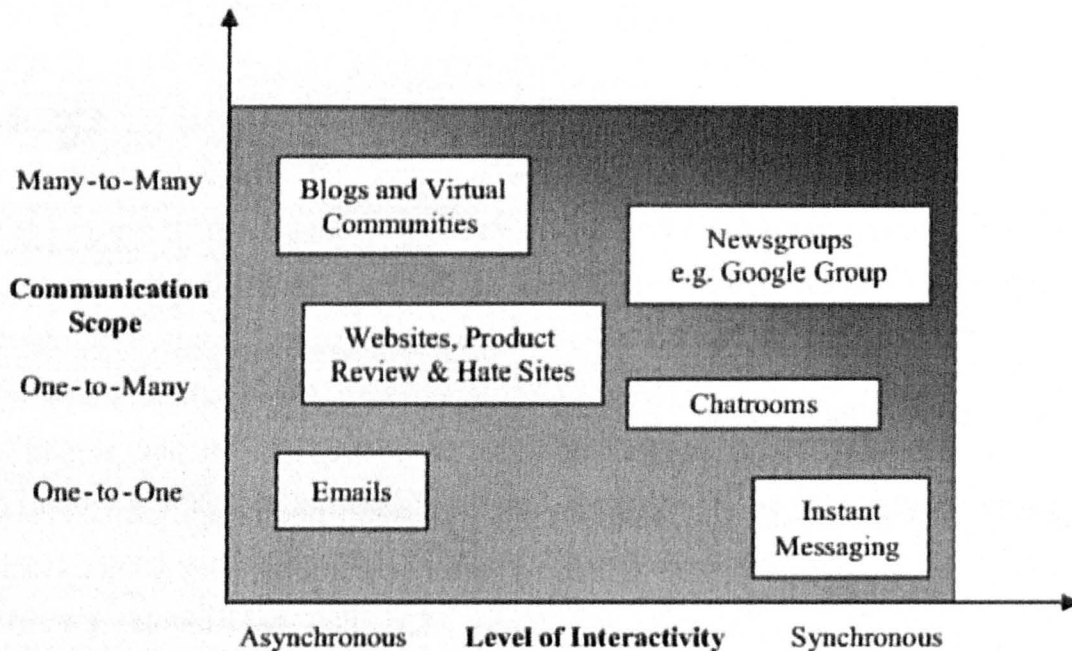
Source: Stauss (2000, p. 236)

According to Stauss (2000), customer communication needs are identified by their different expectations and concerns when communicating with others. There are eight levels of classified areas. The first two levels, general information about the company and general product information concentrates on the release of information. However, this electronic information is more likely to be that of one-way communication in providing more information to customers. Suppliers have the higher controllability about the contents. Then, the next three levels - individual retrieval of information about product offering, individual retrieval of information about supply or customer status and individual offer of information - refer to a database provided that people can search specific information based on their requirements. Regarding answers to inquiries and supportive information, this can be that of a database where customers search for their particular query or it can be a two-way form of communication via e-mail or online chat. The last two forms of communication require that the customer is mainly focused on other customers' responses. It should include a satisfaction survey, experience sharing, and complaining. Each type of communication requirement can be initiated by the business who can take full or partial control. Individuals can also provide similar electronic

communication with consumers whereby the supplier has no controllability over the content.

In a later study, Litvin *et al.* (2008) employ the level of interactivity and the communication scope to sort the typology of eWOM channels, which is shown in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 A Typology of eWOM Channels



Source: Litvin *et al.* (2008, p. 462)

Interactivity ranges from asynchronous to synchronous to determine whether the communicators interact with each other at the same time. Regarding communication scope, the purpose of this is to calculate the number of individuals who are involved in the communication, from one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many more.

E-mail is the most commonly used method for internet and eWOM activity (Litvin *et al.*, 2008). It is not only used for personal communication with friends, family, and colleagues, but by businesses who widely use e-mail to disseminate promotional information by taking advantage of convenience and low costs of the e-mail system. E-mail provides an easy and accessible platform to spread eWOM. Blog (also called weblog) is defined as “websites

that contain online personal journals with reflections by the writers and the opportunity for visitors to comment" (Thorson and Rodgers, 2006, p.40). Bloggers publish their personal perspective, experiences and reviews with acquaintances and strangers. Through vivid and accessible characteristics of photos and words, they attract more bloggers and readers to create countless journals in cyberspace every day. Since the popularity of blogs and bloggers, marketers have invited them to express reviews of their new products in order to increase market attention (Kaikati and Kaikati, 2004). By developing a 'blogging network', a company can promote its new products successfully.

The online forum or review websites provide a platform for individuals to publish their opinions (Litvin *et al.*, 2008). It can be managed by a company or organised by a third party. Individuals can share their knowledge, experience and evaluation with others through a forum. Potential customers can also search related information from a different point in time. Additionally, it is a mechanism for business to provide feedback and foster the relationship between customers and businesses (Armstrong and Hagel, 1996). Not all opinions posted on the online forum are positive. Some websites managed by third parties focus on 'anti-' topics (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009).

The online chat room is the most interactive channel providing a platform to share synchronous opinions and gain immediate responses (Litvin *et al.*, 2008). Not only can the poster initiate the conversation, but also the receiver, in which they can raise the issue and discuss with other participants. Different to other platforms, the online chat room is more difficult to record and trace. Only participants who are involved in the chat room can follow the conversation.

Different platforms include different features of communication. Individuals can engage in one or many platforms to fulfil their needs. In other words, different features can affect the choice of a particular platform on which to publish eWOM communication. This becomes one of the factors to influence eWOM communication, which is one of the focus of this study.

### 3.4 Consequences of Word-of-Mouth

Scholars agree that the influence of WOM communication is more powerful and persuasive than any advertisements, endorsements or commercials,

produced by manufacturers (e.g. Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003; Lee and Youn, 2009; Park and Lee, 2008). When current customers face difficulty in making a purchase decision, positive WOM is a trustworthy cue to prompt their decision-making process (Riegner, 2007; Senecal and Nantel, 2004). For potential customers, WOM communication positively influences their attitude towards the manufacturers or service providers (Bickart and Schindler, 2001). Bone (1995) argues that WOM communication not only influences the customers' short-term product judgement but also formulates their long-term perspective. These findings are echoed by Gruen *et al.* (2006) in that positive WOM will invoke the customers' value and long-term loyalty.

Obviously, negative WOM produces a negative effect on the attitude of customers and positive WOM facilitates the customers' intention in a positive way. Negative WOM reduces the credibility of commercials (Smith and Vogt, 1995) and decreases brand reputation (Laczniak *et al.*, 2001). Negative WOM, however, can also produce some positive effects. The dissemination of negative WOM increases the familiarity of the new brand to the public (Burke, 1996). In addition, should customers perceive a justified response or recovery, or they attribute the negativity to the disseminators, negative WOM can turn into a positive and even have a powerful influence (Richins, 1983). The business, therefore, should give feedback to negative WOM which can create a further opportunity to embrace positive impact.

Most studies discuss the relationship between the effect of WOM associated with consumers' attitude and intention. Wangenheim and Bayón (2004) fulfil the information gap through exploring how WOM affects the actual switch of behaviour by customers. Wangenheim (2005) further examines post-switching behaviour after negative WOM. He concludes that the effect of negative WOM is much stronger than price fluctuation in the post-switching behaviour of customers. Furthermore, negative WOM is regarded as a form of retaliatory action (Cheng *et al.*, 2006). To explain one of the motives in expressing negative WOM (Sundaram *et al.*, 1998), a situation arose whereby 19% of a company's dissatisfied customers complained to their new service provider as a form of vengeance against the previous seller (Wangenheim, 2005). This

actual behaviour can damage the well-known name of the company and also lose potential customers.

WOM can create a considerable impact, especially within the service industry (Haywood, 1989). It is regarded as a primary and reliable information source for service consumption (Wirtz and Chew, 2002). In comparison to physical goods, service is intangible and difficult to standardise. The production and consumption of the service takes place at the same time which makes perception by customers difficult to evaluate before consumption (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). As a result, it forces consumers to rely on other's WOM to appraise prior purchases. In the movie industry, the diffusion model is employed to discuss WOM implications for newly released movies, along with promotion strategy and moviegoers' intentions (Mahajan *et al.*, 1984). This research confirms that negative WOM encourages the moviegoers' intention to decline in going to see the movie. Individuals with a high-risk perception are also highly influenced by WOM. For instance, within the pharmaceutical industry, WOM from colleagues becomes more important to physicians as a non-commercial source (Williams and Hensel, 1991). The nature of the products makes that pharmaceutical companies can rarely use advertising. Pharmacists regard WOM as being critical information of the new product release. Therefore, producers should put more effort into WOM as part of their marketing strategy. It is a similar situation within the tourism industry. WOM serves as an influential factor for travellers when choosing their travel destination (Simpson and Sigauw, 2008). As travel is always regarded as a high-risk consumption (Tsaur *et al.*, 1997), consumers may search for more information before they make a purchase decision. Also, high-involvement forces the tourist to search for more information when planning their itinerary (Gitelson and Crompton, 1983). Tourists may seek opinions from other people to prompt their choice because of limited knowledge or information about unfamiliar destinations. These reasons force WOM to become more important in the tourism industry.

eWOM communication generates greater influences because of its features: asynchronicity, anonymity, easy accessibility, and traceability (Dellarocas, 2003; Huang *et al.*, 2011; Sen and Lerman, 2007; Sun *et al.*, 2006). Individuals



rely on ranking and comments from others as worthy information to prompt their decision making. Online opinions are easy to reach by countless receivers worldwide and on a longer time basis (Senecal and Nantel, 2004). In addition, asynchronicity and anonymity allows more people to publish more reviews online without concerns about privacy exposure (Phelps *et al.*, 2004). Empirical studies confirm that online reviews can significantly influence the sales of products within the camera retailing industry (Zhang *et al.*, 2013), help prepare marketing tools within the tourism industry (Hays *et al.*, 2012), and consumers consideration of the hotel industry (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009).

Regarding benefits to the organisation, positive eWOM is regarded as a free advertisement in which to promote products or services between customers (Lee and Youn, 2009). Businesses should create an official channel for customers to express their opinions, including positive and negative WOM (Chiou and Cheng, 2003). The positive messages, having higher credibility and persuasiveness can attract more customers, whereas negative opinions give the company a chance to change and improve for recovery. Both types of information serve as an advertisement for the company to disseminate their information of products, services, brands, and company itself.

Most consequences are similar between WOM and eWOM, but there is one special function which only aligns itself to eWOM, which is social network building. Traditional WOM is the sharing of opinions with others you are familiar with. Via the internet, the opinion can reach strangers too (Buffardi and Campbell, 2008). The internet provides a platform for individuals to discuss their arguments, share their personal viewpoints and build relationships. Through these virtual communications, individuals ultimately develop their networks with friends, family and also strangers.

### 3.5 Influential Factors on the Effects of Word-of-Mouth

One of the most important consequences of WOM is to affect the purchase decisions of customers (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003; Sun *et al.*, 2006). When receiving negative WOM, potential customers may lower their purchase intentions and existing customers may switch to an alternative brand. Advertising can mitigate the negative effects of negative WOM (Smith and

Vogt, 1995). Comparatively, they also find that the customers' attitude towards the advert and the credibility perception of advertising are significantly influenced by negative WOM communication. Another solution for such a negative effect is the responsiveness to the product or service providers (Lee and Song, 2010). Proper and rapid response toward non-satisfied customers, such as correction or recovery may create a higher recovery of satisfaction and therefore produce positive WOM. The conclusion is confirmed by several recovery studies, in that when customers perceived justice during the recovery, negative feelings will turn into satisfying emotions and then produce positive WOM (Bitner, 1990; Firnstahl, 1989). Furthermore, when receivers regard WOM as a personal preference, the effect of WOM may be reduced (Sen and Lerman, 2007). The same result happens with hedonic product shopping which is more related to personal preference, in that the evaluation of this behaviour produces less impact than shopping for utilitarian products.

Apart from the efforts made by businesses, some scholars discuss the factors of WOM from the individuals' perspective. The most popular discussed dimension when addressing WOM is the social tie (Duhan *et al.*, 1997; Wee *et al.*, 1995; Wirtz and Chew, 2002). Resources from a person with stronger social ties receive more credibility than those with weak social ties (Bone, 1992). Thus, WOM from families are regarded as being highly reliable information; and people may doubt the information from the internet. Customer' knowledge, self-confidence and purchase involvement are also stated as having a moderating effect on WOM (Lau and Ng, 2001). When the customer has better knowledge, stronger self-confidence, and is more involved in the purchase decision-making process, the effect of WOM will be moderated.

More recently, culture receives attention when discussing the effects of WOM (Fong and Burton, 2008; Money, 2000). Money (2000) hypothesises that different cultures may affect customers in the use of different information. By comparing Japanese and Americans, the former are more likely to use referral sources than the latter. However, when consumers purchase within a foreign country, e.g. the American consuming in Japan, they will try to seek referral sources before making their purchase decision. Cultural differences will influence how customers use information to process their decision-making

(Fong and Burton, 2008). To illustrate this, WOM as a cue to facilitate the buying decision is also affected by the difference in culture. The cultural individualists are willing to post their opinions online; on the other hand, those from a collectivist culture are more likely to seek and respond to posts by others.

When evaluating the effect of information, content is the most important factor in that the presentation of it also affects the customers' assessment. Customers more easily accept colourful and vivid presentations, which also significantly influence the effects of WOM (Herr *et al.*, 1991). This is particularly the case for eWOM presentation online, whereby browsers are more easily attracted by the brilliant and interactive blog or webpage (Thorson and Rodgers, 2006).

Accessibility is another factor to affect the WOM effect. Traditional WOM is only spread within acquainted relatives or friends and only carries limited influential power. In relation to eWOM, countless online surfers can access the internet and millions of readers browse articles resulting in a surprising amount of influence (Dellarocas, 2003; Sen and Lerman, 2007; Sun *et al.*, 2006). Lee and Youn (2009) further identify the different effects of eWOM via different communication channels. When posting on personal blog or a private channel, eWOM users locate both positive and negative experiences. On the other hand, customers are more willing to post positive opinions on the official company website to recommend the product; and less want to express negative messages.

The target product or service characteristics also influence the effect of WOM. Customer involvement is not only the motivation to facilitate customers to produce WOM (Engel *et al.*, 1969) but also as a moderator affecting their behavioural intention when buying a different involvement of products (Park and Lee, 2008). Moreover, when making risky purchase decisions, customers rely on external information such as WOM (Wangenheim and Bayón, 2004). WOM is relatively important for intangible service shopping rather than buying physical goods (Mangold *et al.*, 1999). Given the fact that travel and tourism is perceived to be a high-risk and high involvement industry, WOM is regarded as an important source of information for customers and marketers (Litvin *et al.*,

2008). On the contrary, within the movie industry which involves a lower-risk purchasing decision, movie goers are less influenced by WOM.

### 3.6 Electronic Word-of-Mouth within the Tourism Industry

eWOM is an important information source for decision-making within the tourism industry, as well as on choice of travel products such as travel destinations, hotels and restaurants etc. (Litvin *et al.*, 2008; Simpson and Siguaw, 2008). Existing travellers engage in eWOM to share their experiences, send recommendations or post complaints (Rosenbloom, 2013; Tse and Zhang, 2013). They also use eWOM as standard to assess service quality they have experienced (Browning *et al.*, 2013). Prospective travellers rely on eWOM to facilitate their decision making process (Beldona *et al.*, 2005; Sparks and Browning, 2011; Tham *et al.*, 2013). From the business perspective, the internet and electronic media firstly act as a marketing tool in the promotion of products (Kimmel and Kitchen, 2013). They also serve as a platform not only for their product management and marketing but also to generate first-hand information directly between travellers, tourism organizations and private enterprises (Buhalis and Law, 2008; Leung *et al.*, 2013).

Litvin *et al.* (2008) identify three reasons why eWOM is critical to the hospitality and tourism industry: Firstly, tourism and hospitality products are normally intangible and perishable which is difficult to access before consumption. eWOM provides a reference for evaluating the product quality. Secondly, hospitality and tourism are perceived as a high-risk consumption. eWOM provides further information to reduce impulse buying and prompt decision making. Thirdly, the hospitality and tourism industry is very competitive. eWOM serves as an effective marketing tool at a very low-cost.

WOM is believed to be the most reliable and valuable information source for travellers to use when planning their vacations (Gitelson and Crompton, 1983; Nolan, 1976). With the development of the internet and electronic media, eWOM is easier to access and generate information. An increasing number of studies place much attention on understanding how eWOM facilitates travel planning behaviour and the decision making process (Cox *et al.*, 2009; Mohammad Reza and Neda, 2012; Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009; Xiang

and Gretzel, 2010). Additionally, various topics have been explored to understand eWOM communication in more depth within the tourism industry, including the content of eWOM (Bosangit *et al.*, 2009), the platform for posting eWOM (Bronner and Hoog, 2011), and the motivation to express eWOM (Leung and Bai, 2013). Practitioners within the travel and tourism industry have also noticed the trend in eWOM communication. Both hoteliers and travel agencies use eWOM as a marketing tool to promote their products (Chan and Guillet, 2011; Huang, 2012). National tourism organisations also utilise the influence of eWOM to disseminate propaganda regarding the destination (Hays *et al.*, 2012). Evidence and studies support the fact that eWOM communication plays an important role in the tourism industry.

### 3.7 Word-of-Mouth Discussions from Other Disciplines

Word-of-Mouth is a fascinating and popular topic of research within the discipline of marketing. This section will discuss WOM from a different perspective covering other subjects.

#### 3.7.1 Word-of-Mouth from the Psychological Perspective

One of the functionalities of WOM is to release anxiety and uncertainty. It is also a way to find the possible solution or gain recognition from others. During the world wars, rumour was flourishing because of the intensive public emotional life (Knapp, 1944). Being similar to WOM, rumour expression is the way the public vent emotions and tensions; and it is an informative channel to discuss a particular person or event. From the psychological view to discuss rumour, Knapp (1944) proposes that rumour functions are those of cognitive clarification and emotional expression. Rumour is created and disseminated when the occasion is ambiguous or ill-defined. Individuals try to clarify their cognition during interaction with others. By employing the Uncertainty Reduction Theory, individuals can reduce uncertainty during their computer-mediated communication (Tidwell and Walther, 2002). In comparison to face-to-face communication, respondents perform more reduction of direct and intimate uncertainty behaviour when using online communication. These findings have been echoed by later studies (e.g. Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Sundaram *et al.*, 1998) in that consumers express WOM or eWOM because

they intend to solve conflict and clear their understanding. They also seek cognition during the expression process.

After consumption, people perceive different product quality and service quality which produces satisfaction or dissatisfaction. According to the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory, when perceived quality does not meet the expectations of consumers, feelings of dissatisfaction and negativity are produced (Oliver, 1980). In order to deal with dissatisfaction and release their negative emotions, the consumer will take action such as complaining to others, expressing their anger or staying silent by doing nothing (Day, 1977). When discussing the response to service failure, some researchers have involved the psychological perspective to discuss the customers' behavioural intention. For example, Knapp (1944) confirms that by expressing the opinion it will prompt individuals to release their negative feelings. During World War II, people relieved their tension and anxiety by talking to each other.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory is commonly applied to discuss customers' reactions when the product or service quality is not satisfactory (e.g. Anderson, 1998; Cardozo, 1965). Once the perception of product or service performance has been inconsistent within their expectations, dissatisfaction is produced with several negative emotions such as anxiety, anger or frustration. Publishing WOM is one of the coping strategies to release these negative emotions of cognitive dissonance (Sundaram *et al.*, 1998). In the meantime, individuals can reduce their discomfort from the cognitive dissonance by seeking WOM from others (Buttle, 1998).

Bonifield and Cole (2007) employ the Appraisal Tendency Framework to discuss responses by customers when facing service failure, particularly addressing the emotional impact. The Appraisal Tendency Framework is proposed to explain how the emotions of customers influence their evaluation of specific objects. Through the conceptual model of Appraisal Tendency Framework, emotional responses, including anger and regret, have been confirmed to serve as a mediator between the perception of service failure and post-purchase behavioural intention. On the other hand, Stephens and Gwinner (1998) applies Cognitive Appraisal Theory to discuss 'Why don't some people complain?' The intentions of individuals to remain silent without

any particular action, echoes the second reaction concluded by Day (1977). By establishing a cognitive-emotive process model of consumer complaint behaviour, three different coping strategies have been identified: problem focused, emotion focused, and avoidance (Stephens and Gwinner, 1998). The study has been illustrated through different reactions when consumers encounter dissatisfying experiences, which gives the implications for further research into WOM behaviour.

From the psychological perspective, online behaviour research has highlighted further research of disinhibition. The online disinhibition effect is defined in that people "loosen up, feel less restrained and express themselves more openly" on the internet (Suler, 2004, p.321). Based on the anonymous characteristics of the internet, online behaviour is regarded as a high-level of self-disclosure (Joinson, 2007). Individuals who surf online tend to be less inhibited and more talkative (Suler, 2004). There are many online groups of communities that individuals can join if they have a similar interest and wish to do so. The anonymity protects their personal privacy and allows sufficient freedom to express personal opinions. With the same interests, participants within the virtual community can more easily share opinions and publish more from their personal perspectives. By comparing face-to-face and computer-mediated communication, a higher self-disclosure is confirmed in that people are more willing to talk about themselves through the online environment (Tidwell and Walther, 2002). The internet moderates face-to-face interaction, e.g. facial expression or body language. Without physical interaction, communicators put more emphasis on the context and content instead of annoying others by non-verbal behaviour. Thus, the context within computer-mediated communication is deeper and more intimate.

The expression through eWOM by participating in the virtual community is because people seek to belong (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). This psychological sense similarly exists through the use of cyber space. Individuals express their voice online to seek others' acknowledgement, attention, approval, and appreciation (Koh and Kim, 2003). Moreover, they may feel more a part of the virtual community in that they are not alone. Through the

internet, people without high social ties can still communicate to each other by sharing the same interests.

### 3.7.2 Word-of-Mouth from the Sociological Perspective

Social tie strength is an important issue when researching WOM from the sociological perspective. Because WOM is an interpersonal conversation, the reliability of the WOM producer will influence the WOM credibility. Therefore, the closeness between the speaker and listener influences the evaluation and perception of WOM (Wellman and Wortley, 1990). Individuals are more likely to take the opinion on board if it is from relatives or friends with whom they have a strong tie (Brown and Reingen, 1987). WOM is easier to disseminated and generate within groups with strongly tied relationships (Bone, 1992). According to the social identity theory, individuals derive their identity by differentiating themselves from others within the group to which they belong (Tajfel, 1974). They are more willing to share information with each other when having a concrete entity perception. Therefore, within a stronger socially tied group, the norm of 'communal sharing' exists in that WOM is easier to produce and exchange with others (Sohn, 2009).

Through cyberspace, discussions within strong socially tied groups prove different findings in relation to eWOM communication compared to WOM. One argument suggests that the individual counts their personal gains or losses when their feeling of belonging becomes blurred. Because of the weaker connection with others through the online community, individuals may lower their eWOM intention (Sohn, 2009). The credibility of eWOM is also held lower because of weaker social ties. Information is much easier to gather from the internet, but individuals may doubts its source and truthfulness. On the other hand, individuals with similar interests or tasks develop their network via eWOM publishing and exchange of information. The internet becomes a platform for networking and reinforces the connection between these groups of people (Cavanagh, 2007). The internet is not only a channel for eWOM travelling but is also regarded as a platform for networking. It serves as a bridge in making information much broader within the social system (Brown and Reingen, 1987). At the macro-level of society, traditional WOM is disseminated to more audiences through referral actors having only a weak-tie



relationship with one subgroup to another. Such WOM from acquaintances or strangers is only regarded as a reference. Therefore, it does not have any significant influence over the decision-making process (Wirtz and Chew, 2002), but it does serve as a different function from the sociological viewpoint, in building of the larger social network.

Whilst the strong social ties of WOM provide positive relationships and good networking structures, it has a negative influence on eWOM. None-the-less, eWOM communication provides an opportunity for social networking (Cavanagh, 2007). Individuals join Facebook or Twitter to build their personal networks. Facebook, which is one of the most popular and largest social network websites, enables individuals to interact with others by presenting themselves, posting comments on others' pages, or joining any group with common interests. More than 94% of undergraduate students produce their personal Facebook profile to meet new people or connect with existing offline contacts (Ellison *et al.*, 2007). Traditional WOM, sharing opinions with your close friends or family, cannot function as the online platform in building other personal connections.

Online identity is another key issue when discussing online behaviour from the sociological perspective. A single person may have multiple identities (Suler, 2002). Because of their anonymity, a shy person may be outgoing online. Within cyberspace, individuals may express one identity through one online group and reveal another through the other community. They can even create a persona or avatar through online fantasy, which is separated from their true identity in reality (Suler, 2004). This persona or avatar, like a protector, allows the individual to share more viewpoints which they may not normally express in real life. The anonymity creates more space and privacy for people to discuss things about themselves. Therefore, individuals normally have a higher self-disclosure through their online behaviour than when off-line (Joinson, 2001). Behind the shroud of internet anonymity, the individual can express more emotional opinions without long-term planning and rational consideration (McKenna and Bargh, 2000). They also care less about what others may think of their behaviour or opinions. Cyberspace creates a free space for people to

present what or how they would like to be (Turkle, 1995) in that their online identity can be those of many, transitory and continuously developing.

### 3.8 Summary

This chapter aims to present a comprehensive analysis of existing literature on WOM and eWOM, taking into account different perspectives including marketing, sociology and psychology. The nature of WOM is to express ones' feelings and opinions regarding consumption experiences. It creates a remarkable impact on the attitude, intention and behaviour of customers, receiving much attention by academics and industry alike.

This chapter firstly reviews the concepts of WOM and eWOM. Having a high credibility, WOM becomes influential in its information to customers and a powerful marketing tool for businesses. The influence becomes even greater through the innovation of the internet and electronic media. Via these electronic platforms, countless messages have been posted on the internet and continue to influence the increase in readers worldwide every day. The consequences of WOM and its effects and moderating factors are also addressed within this chapter, followed by WOM discussions within other disciplines. The conceptual WOM model proposed by Litvin *et al.* (2008) (see Figure 3.1), have the most relevant issues reviewed in this chapter, apart from the motivation for WOM communication. The next chapter will focus on this point and discuss possible theories to address why travellers engage in eWOM communication.

## Chapter 4

# Antecedents of eWOM Communication

### 4.1 Introduction

The influence on both businesses and customers from Word-of-Mouth (WOM) is well recognised. The internet provides a platform for communication which enhances the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Given that consumer travel products and services are perceived as a high risk purchasing activity, consumers will search for more information before making their purchase decisions. Therefore, eWOM serves as a useful information source for travellers to facilitate their purchasing decisions for holidays, accommodation, and restaurants etc. eWOM is a relatively new phenomenon, having attracted much attention from academics during the past 10 years. Some studies focus on either the conceptualisation or influences of eWOM communication, but merely pay attention to the reasons for engaging in eWOM communication. This study intends to explore the research gap by identifying antecedents of eWOM communication. Initially, this chapter reviews previous studies that have researched the motivation for eWOM communication. Thereafter, several possible relevant theories are employed to discuss eWOM communication.

### 4.2 Motivation for eWOM Communication

Motivation is a "driving force within individuals that impels them to action" (Schiffman *et al.*, 2010, p. 106). Motivation theories explain why people behave in a particular way. Every individual has needs which they expect to be fulfilled (Maslow, 1943). The unfulfilled needs produce a state of tension. In order to release the tension, individuals are driven to perform particular actions to achieve several goals that are anticipated to satisfy their unfulfilled needs. The motivating force can be aroused by an inner drive, an unfulfilled need or personal goals (Arnould *et al.*, 2004). Motivation has its own direction.

Individuals are motivated when they have the desire to satisfy a particular need, but are de-motivated when trying to avoid achieving a specific goal or its consequences. Individuals may be de-motivated when they perceive no inspiration or stimulus to perform.

Needs are the most important component to arouse motivation and drive specific behaviours. Needs can be divided into two types, innate needs and acquired needs (Jansson-Boyd, 2010; Schiffman *et al.*, 2010). Innate needs, known as primary needs, refer to the biogenic needs of humans such as food, water and air, which provide the basic conditions for survival. Acquired needs, known as secondary needs, include friendship, self-esteem and prestige, which reflect the psychological human state in response to the environment or culture. The famous theory of Maslow's hierarchy of needs model is shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Source: Jansson-Boyd (2010, p. 119)

As can be seen from Figure 4.1, there are five levels of needs which postulate the priority of lower to higher level needs. Each need has its own corresponding motivation. Once the lower needs are satisfied, higher needs are aroused to become a driving force to behaviour. This theory is widely accepted within social disciplines and is employed to discuss human motivation. However, previous studies find that this theory is difficult to employ

and test empirically. Several limitations are mentioned, for example, the definition of self-actualization need is not clear (Jansson-Boyd, 2010); also, how to be sure that the higher need is aroused after the lower one is satisfied (Schiffman *et al.*, 2010). Although several limitations are highlighted, this model still provides the inspiration for marketers to understand the motivation of consumer behaviour when developing promotional strategy for new products.

Motivation can also be divided into extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is "a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome" (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p.60). Intrinsic motivation is defined as "the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequences" (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p.56). Individuals behave in a particular way because of the consequences, such as rewards, benefits or instrumental value, which is regarded as extrinsic motivation. By contrast, an activity is performed to satisfy their inner feelings such as enjoyment and pleasure, which is regarded as intrinsic motivation. Several studies employ this classification of motivation to explain consumer behaviour. For example, Davis *et al.* (1992) employ perceived usefulness as extrinsic motivation and perceived enjoyment as intrinsic motivation to explain the adoption of software in the workplace. Lee *et al.* (2005) apply a similar research approach in which to predict the acceptance of internet-based learning medium. Alternatively, Liao and Lin (2007) argue that utilitarian and hedonic motivation influences the online shopping behaviour of consumers. Their theory suggests that utilitarian motivation refers to extrinsic motivation, whereas hedonic motivation refers to intrinsic motivation.

By applying the motivation theory, Dichter (1966) identifies four different forms of motivation for positive WOM communication: product-involvement, self-involvement, other-involvement and message-involvement. These four motivations explain why the individual produces their recommendations. Such recommendations could be based upon sharing the experience of product use, seeking emotional support, fulfilling inquiries from others, or exchanging product information generated from advertisements or media. Richins (1983), on the contrary, discusses the determinants of negative WOM communication.

The problem severity of the products causes customers dissatisfaction and stimulates intention to produce negative WOM. In addition, perceptions of blame for the dissatisfaction and perceptions of retailer responsiveness influence consumers' tendency to engage in negative WOM. Sundaram *et al.* (1998) comprehensively investigate the motivation of both positive and negative WOM communication by employing Critical Incident Technique (CIT). Around 360 stories regarding positive and negative WOM are generated respectively. These are classified into four motivations relating to positive WOM communication and another four for negative WOM communication. These studies provide a fundamental understanding of the motivation for WOM communication and for further research.

The internet provides different channels that disseminate WOM communication as well as influencing the motivation for WOM communication (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Litvin *et al.*, 2008). By considering the utility function of eWOM, Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) identify 11 motives for eWOM communication from previous studies, which assess the validity and relevance of the 11 motives. From a sample of 2000 participants taken from a web-based opinion platform, eight motives are identified: (1) platform assistance, (2) venting negative feelings, (3) concern for other consumers, (4) extraversion / positive self-enhancement, (5) social benefits, (6) economic incentives, (7) helping the company, and (8) advice seeking. They further employ the eight motives as independent variables to predict eWOM communication behaviour. The research finding of Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) is later replicated by Yoo and Gretzel (2008) to understand the motivation to write online travel reviews. Their study shows that the travellers' eWOM behaviour is activated by three motives: (1) helping a travel service provider, (2) concerns for other consumers, and (3) needs for enjoyment / positive self-enhancement. Interestingly, venting a negative feeling is found to be irrelevant to online travel reviews writing.

While some scholars explore the motivation of general WOM communication behaviour, others focus on specific platforms to understand the motivation for eWOM communication. For example, Wang and Fesenmaier (2003; 2004) investigate the motivations of members to participate in the online travel community. They find that the same behaviour performed by different

individuals could be driven by different forms of motivation. On the contrary, the same motivation could result in different behaviour when activated by different individuals. Empirical studies employing the same motivation to examine the relationship to eWOM communication generates different findings. Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) conclude that economic incentives are significantly related to the willingness of individuals to write comments online. However, later studies disagree with such findings in that economic incentives do not significantly influence travellers' intention to publish eWOM comments (Bronner and Hoog, 2011; Yoo and Gretzel, 2008).

Wang and Fesenmaier (2003; 2004) confirm that the easy use of electronic media influences the involvement of individuals and their contribution to online communities. The results further suggest that different platforms also influence the willingness to contribute to eWOM communication. For example, Bloggers utilise the blog as a platform to document their life, which is defined as 'life-documenting motivation', producing a positive influence on the intention to write their blog (Huang *et al.*, 2007). The 'life documenting motivation' is not mentioned by other studies regarding motivation for eWOM communication through other online platforms. Many studies focus on different platforms to understand the motivation in knowledge sharing through electronic discussion boards (Lee *et al.*, 2006), online panel participation (Daugherty *et al.*, 2005), political blogging (Ekdale *et al.*, 2010), and travel review writing (Bronner and Hoog, 2011).

Apart from discussing general and specific types of electronic media, various theories are employed to understand the motivation for eWOM communication. For example, Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) used the utility theory to explain eWOM communication. Sepp *et al.* (2011) employ the gratification theory for analysing the motivation of private bloggers. Wolny and Mueller (2013) combine the motivation theory and brand involvement to explore consumers' motives to engage in eWOM communication of fashion brands. The Motivation-Opportunity-Ability (MOA) theory is applied to understand the social media involvement of travellers (Leung and Bai, 2013). Studies regarding the motivation to contribute to eWOM communication confirm the importance in understanding why people want to produce eWOM communication.

Motivation is a goal-oriented construct and is used to understand eWOM communication behaviour. However, because of the different platforms (online community vs. blog) or different subjects (goods vs. service) involved, there is no reliable model in understanding eWOM behaviour. While existing studies utilising the motivation theory to understand consumer behaviour, 'attitude' is another construct to impact on consumers' intentions to engage with eWOM communication. Attitudes are antecedents of human behaviour within different contexts. This study intends to identify the reasons for traveller's attitudes toward eWOM communication and their intention to use eWOM communication media. The next section will discuss consumers' attitude towards eWOM communication from the behavioural theory and functional theory perspective, respectively.

#### 4.3 Attitude towards eWOM Communication

Attitude is a psychological concept which dominates major social psychology studies, including its nature, measurement, antecedents, and consequences (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Regan and Fazio, 1977). Previous studies have proposed their definition of attitude but have failed to produce a consistent statement. Several definitions more frequently cited by other researchers are postulated below.

*"Attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor and disfavor" (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993, p.1).*

*"Attitude can be described as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object" (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p.6).*

*"Attitude is the predisposition of the individual to evaluate some symbol or object or aspect of his world in a favorable or unfavorable manner" (Katz, 1960, p.168).*

*"An attitude is a relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or situation predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner" (Rokeach, 1968, p.112).*



Based upon different definitions of 'attitude', several characteristics are extracted to compose the description. Firstly, an attitude is learned and relatively enduring. Some predispositions are momentary whereas attitudes are accumulated and formed from previous experiences over a period of time (Rokeach, 1968). Attitudes are consistent and enduring but can be changeable. Attitudes can be learned and be influenced by stimulus from the environment (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Individuals form their attitude by learning from different information providers such as parents, teachers and media etc.

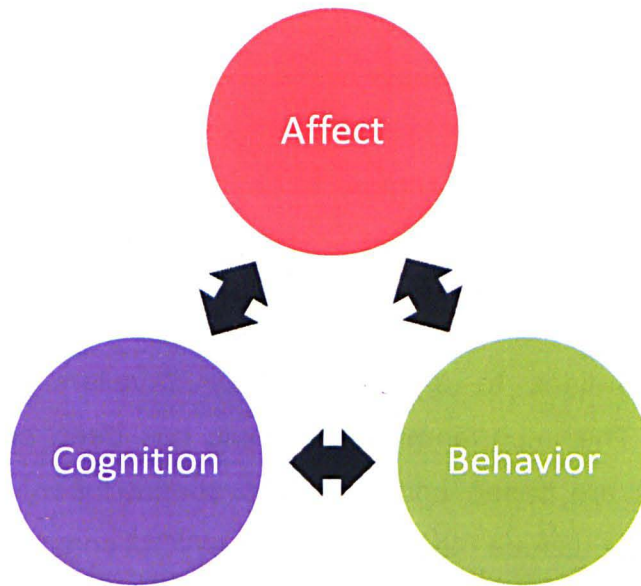
Secondly, an attitude is an evaluative construct. To encounter a new object, the individual can judge and categorise a specific object. The evaluation process involves affective or emotional responses which result in preference, hate, like or dislike tendencies towards the object (Eagly and Chaiken, 1998).

Thirdly, an attitude is an organization of beliefs. Beliefs represent the understanding of one's knowledge or cognition, which usually comes from direct observations. One's attitude towards an object is based on his / her salient beliefs about that object (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). An attitude is referred to as a corresponding affection from one's belief. Thus, belief refers to the cognitive aspects whereas attitude attributes to the affective or motivational aspect (Fishbein and Raven, 1962). An alternative view suggests that as the attitude includes a concept of belief, it can have an affective and cognitive aspect at the same time (Rokeach, 1968).

Fourthly, an attitude is a set of interrelated predispositions that respond to situations or objects (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Attitude is not behaviour as such, but associates itself with a predisposition towards an object. Attitude incorporates more than one belief presenting a favourable or unfavourable aspect towards the object. Belief implies several predispositions and can lead to forming an attitude towards an object. Consequently, a preferential behavioural intention or favourable behaviour is conducted because of the positive or negative attitude and initial evaluation from their beliefs.

The classic model of attitude structure identification has three components, those being affect, behaviour and cognition, as shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 The Tripartite Model of Attitude



Source: Breckler (1984, p. 1196)

The three component attitude model is proposed but not explicitly discussed until the late 1940s. Smith (1947) introduces the tripartite model to discuss peoples' attitudes towards Russians. The cognitive component refers to "the knowledge and perceptions that are acquired by a combination of direct experience with the attitude object and related information from various sources" (Schiffman *et al.*, 2010, p.249), whereas the affective components are stated as "an emotional response, a gut reaction, or sympathetic nervous activity" (Breckler, 1984, p.1191). Judgement is made upon an object, presenting their belief or cognitive evaluation, but this is not sufficient in forming an attitude towards an object. An affective or emotional response should be considered of forming an attitude (Katz and Stotland, 1959). An attitude also includes a behavioural component, which is defined as "an action tendency toward the object of the attitude in addition to the expression of affect about it" (Katz and Stotland, 1959, p.429). Hence, the behavioural intention occurs because s/he embraces a favourable or unfavourable perception towards the object (Breckler, 1984). The favourable perception results in a tendency to perform such behaviour, whereas the unfavourable perception leads to not engaging in the behaviour.

The influence from an attitude on a behavioural intention has been studied for more than 70 years (e.g. Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Campbell, 1950; LaPiere,

1934). Intentions usually regarded as cognitive components of attitude are “assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence a behaviour: they are indications of how hard people are willing to try, or how much effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behaviour” (Ajzen, 1991, p.181). The stronger the intention to engage in behaviour, the more likely will be its performance. Therefore, an attitude shapes the intention of the individual and further influences subsequent behaviour.

This study determines to understand why travellers engage in eWOM communication. The importance of this topic has been confirmed but most previous studies are based upon the motivational theory. Very few studies have employed the attitude theory to discuss eWOM communication. Following the concept of attitude-intention-behaviour, this study aims to understand the antecedents of eWOM communication from the attitudinal perspective.

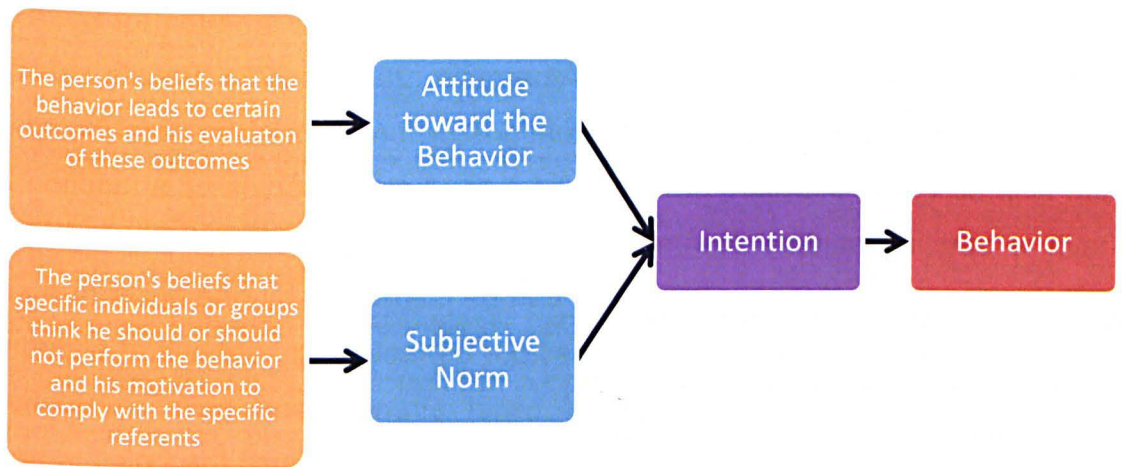
#### 4.3.1 Behavioural Approach to Consumer Attitude

Two theories are discussed in this section to understand the attitude and behavioural intentions of individuals, being the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). These two models have received considerable attention, being widely employed to discuss consumer behaviour (Armitage and Conner, 2001; Sheppard *et al.*, 1988) but not applied in the eWOM communication field.

##### 4.3.1.1 Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), is one of the most popular attitude models applied to predict the behavioural intention or actual behaviour of an individual. It is named as “reasoned action” because TRA “is based on the assumption that humans are rational animals that systematically utilize or process the information available to them” (Fishbein, 1979, p. 66). Figure 4.3 shows TRA model of attitude.

Figure 4.3 Theory of Reasoned Action



Source: Fishbein (1979, p.69)

As shown in Figure 4.3, two major factors are applied to determine specific behavioural intentions or actual behaviours: attitudinal factor and normative factor. The attitude is determined by someone's beliefs associated with an object and an evaluation of that belief (Fishbein, 1979). Alternatively, subjective norm is someone's beliefs regarding the perceived expectation from his / her reference group and the motivation to comply with those beliefs and reference groups (Fishbein, 1979). Beliefs, which are the informational base that ultimately determines attitudes, intentions, and behaviours (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), are the fundamental building blocks of TRA. Thus, the attitude towards specific objects is determined by his / her beliefs regarding the subjects.

TRA aims to explain volitional behaviour of beliefs, attitudes and intentions of the individual (Hale *et al.*, 2002). Within TRA, attitudes refer to affective or valenced responses toward behaviour rather than the generalised attitude object (Hale *et al.*, 2002). Thus, the intention to perform a specific behaviour toward the subject or actual behaviour regarding the subject is associated with his / her attitude. The relationships between beliefs, attitudes, behavioural intention and actual behaviour are proposed and developed from the conceptual framework of TRA. The more favourable the attitude and stronger the subjective norm is, the higher the intention will be produced or behaviour will be performed.

Beliefs are defined as "estimates of the likelihood that the knowledge one has acquired about a referent is correct or, alternatively, that an event or state of affairs has or will occur" (Wyer and Albarracin, 2005, p.273). Beliefs can be associated with specific objects or situations or formed as a general belief; it can also be about the past, present, or future. A belief serves as a function to have a specific attitude towards or to perform a particular behaviour. An attitude towards performing behaviour can be influenced by one belief or a set of beliefs making performing that behaviour correct. Facts show that attitudes are a multiplicative consequence of belief strength and belief evaluation (Bagozzi, 1981). The belief strength is the certainty in which the belief is held in its own right, whereas belief evaluation is the extent or consequence of having a specific belief. These two components of interactive influences form an attitudinal belief and evaluation of having specific attitudes. Once the attitudinal belief is formed, it leads to the intention to perform or not to perform, a specific behaviour. Thereafter, a specific behaviour will be conducted.

The other belief to influence the intention of individuals is the subjective norm. A subjective norm, also known as a social norm, is defined as "the person's perception that most people who are important to him think he should or should not perform the behaviour in question" (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p.302). In other words, subjective norm is perceived as an expectation or a pressure from important friends, relatives or colleagues, to force the person to perform a specific behaviour. Subjective norm is combined multiplicatively by normative belief and the motivation to comply.

Within TRA research, subjective norm received less attention in comparison to attitudinal belief (Borsari and Carey, 2003; Povey *et al.*, 2000). One major reason is that normative beliefs are encapsulated within TRA. Two types of subjective norm can be identified: injunctive norm and descriptive norm (Manning, 2009; Povey *et al.*, 2000). Injunctive norm implies that the referents are implicitly or explicitly forced to behave in a particular way. Alternatively, descriptive norm refer to situations whereby the behaviour is the result of mimicking another's conduct (Borsari & Carey, 2003; Park & Smith, 2007). TRA only includes injunctive norm and measures its influence on the behavioural intention of individuals. The ignorance of descriptive norm

weakens the influence of normative beliefs and lowers the impact on behavioural intention (Manning, 2009; Povey *et al.*, 2000; Ravis and Sheeran, 2003).

Another reason for the weak influential power of the normative influence is the path to influence one's behaviour (Lee and Lee, 2011). Within TRA, subjective norm is independent to attitude and produces isolated influences on behavioural intention. Nevertheless, subjective norm may produce influences on the person's attitude through the process of internalization, compliance and identification as proposed by Kelman (1958). Internalization refers to the incorporation of someone's peer groups', or a valued person's belief into his/her own belief structure and behaviour. The nature of this compliance suggests that the individual will adopt group values in order to form an agreement with group members. Identification requires that members maintain an active relationship with other liked and respected community members. Building on these principles of compliance and identification, individuals develop a positive attitude towards a specific object, producing the intention to perform certain behaviour toward the object.

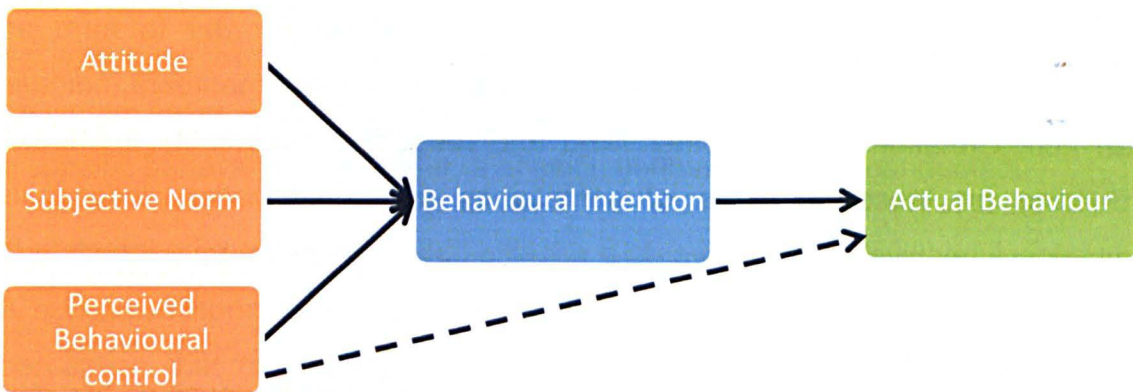
Previous studies employ TRA to discuss a variety of contexts, such as altruistic behaviour (Zuckerman and Reis, 1978), technology usage (Taylor and Todd, 1995b), unethical behaviour (Chang, 1998), online buying behaviour (Gentry and Calantone, 2002) and mobile adoption (Kim *et al.*, 2009). Empirically, data supports the influences from both attitude and normative norm on personal behavioural intention. Criticisms of TRA are also discussed within the literature (e.g. Sheppard *et al.*, 1988). Firstly, the interaction between attitude and subjective norm exists and influences the relationship within the model (Hale *et al.*, 2002). The positive perception of subjective norm leads to forming a positive attitude toward acting the behaviour. In other words, in addition to the direct influence from the subjective norm to behavioural intention, there is an indirect relationship from subjective norm to behavioural intention via attitudes. Secondly, TRA particularly explains or predicts volitional behaviour via measuring the attitude and subjective norm of individuals. Even the original model developers acknowledge this defect. They further identify four variables: moral obligations, self-identity, affect and prior behaviour, as possible factors

to influence the behavioural intention and actual behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, 1980). Ajzen (1985) further develop the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) which includes perceived behaviour control to account for prediction of human behaviour within specific contexts.

#### 4.3.1.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is an extension of TRA which fills the gap regarding the focus on volitional behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Figure 4.4 shows the model, Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Figure 4.4 Theory of Planned Behaviour



Source: Ajzen (1991, p. 182)

In addition to the two forms of belief: attitudinal belief and subjective norms, (Ajzen, 1985) proposes a third belief, control belief, to explain human behaviour when facing incomplete volitional control, as shown in Figure 4.4. TRA shows that the higher the intention to perform behaviour, the better likelihood that actual behaviour will be performed. However, this conclusion is only valid under volitional control (Ajzen, 1985). In a specific context, such as time, availability of resource, money and cooperation of others, the behaviour achievement cannot be executed properly only when having the higher behavioural intention. When the person can control these factors, the inference from behavioural intention to behaviour performance will be successful. Thus, perceived behaviour control is an additional belief to be included within TRA and formed as TPB model.

Perceived behavioural control is defined as the “people’s perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour of interest” (Ajzen, 1991, p.183). This is important in that the availability of resources and opportunities are crucial to achieving the particular behaviour even with a high behavioural intention. Two constructs mentioned by previous researchers are similar to perceived behavioural control: perceived focus of control and perceived probability of succeeding at a given task (Ajzen, 1991). The most compatible concept is the perceived self-efficacy discussed by Bandura (1982). Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with “judgements of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (Bandura, 1982, p.122), which enables the confidence to complete the given task or behaviour. Therefore, TPB comprises this belief as perceived behavioural control in discussing the behavioural intention or actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). When the task is viewed as being easier to perform, for example, the resource of performing the behaviour is available or the opportunity of performing is better, their perception of behavioural control is higher. Accordingly, the higher the intention to achieve the behaviour or actual behaviour, then the better the performance is. Therefore, there is a positive relationship between perceived behavioural control, behavioural intention and actual behaviour. Being similar to attitude and subjective norm, the perceived behavioural control can be decomposed into two components: control belief and perceived power (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen, 1991). The perceived behavioural control is multiplied by these two components and further accomplishes the target behaviour.

While many studies use TPB to discuss individuals’ behaviour (e.g. Ajzen and Driver, 1991; Darvell *et al.*, 2011; Heath and Gifford, 2002; Hsu *et al.*, 2006; Lu *et al.*, 2009), three limitations of TPB are suggested by previous researchers (Hale *et al.*, 2002). Firstly, the causal relationship may not be supported between perceived behavioural control and intentions. The proposed relationship implies that the individual embraces a positive intention because they can control their behaviour. However, in special situations, even though people can fully control their behaviour, they still have a negative intention to perform the behaviour. Secondly, as TRA, four variables are possible factors to influence behavioural intention and actual behaviour which are moral obligations, self-identity, affect and prior behaviour. Thirdly, the role of ‘planned’



within TPB is omitted. TPB addresses the evaluation or perception of control or availability over a specific context instead of planning to perform or execute the behaviour.

The Behavioural Approach of Attitude attracts considerable attention in predicting consumers' behaviour within various contexts. However, the formation of attitude is not addressed. In order to cover this issue, the functional theory of attitude provides further elaboration to discuss the motivational underpinning behind the attitude towards eWOM.

#### 4.3.2 Functional Approach to Consumer Attitude

The Functional Theory of Attitude is "the attempt to understand the reasons people hold the attitudes they do" (Katz, 1960, p. 170). The functions as motivational underpinnings explain why people hold a particular attitude toward objects, events, or behaviour. In other words, the individual perform a specific behaviour because of the function of their attitude towards that behaviour. Even with the same attitude, people may support different functions which drive them towards specific objects or to perform particular actions. Functional theory provides a fundamental understanding of the formation of a specific attitude and further explains the determination of changing attitude. This theory is widely recognised by attitude studies and is employed by consumer researchers (e.g. Clary *et al.*, 1998; Daugherty *et al.*, 2005).

Prior to Kutz's research (1960) of the functional theory of attitude, Smith (1947) investigates 250 men in New England, United States, to discuss their attitude towards Russia. At the time of the research, it is the end of World War II when Americans face the threat of Communism by Russia. Smith (1947) intends to identify public opinions, an explicit format of attitude, and in particular, why they hold such attitudes and create public opinions. Five different functions underlying one's attitude are classified as: (1) value function, (2) consistency function, (3) gratification function, (4) meaning function, and (5) conformity function. Personality also plays an important role when forming the attitude towards Russia. The value function presents a person's central values, while the consistency function shows consistency within one's attitude and the characteristics of reaction (e.g. personality traits). The gratification function

means that attitude indirectly satisfies their basic needs whilst the meaning function allows people to create a stable or meaningful world to live in. Finally, the conformity function enables people to express their attitude when being accepted by social groups. Smith (1947) does not go through the details of each function nor develops the measurements of each function (Lutz, 1978).

While Smith (1947) focuses on the personality influence of the attitude towards a topical issue, Katz (1960) emphasises attitude change during the public opinion formation process. The threefold importance of functional theory is outlined within this research. Firstly, it recognises the functions of attitude which can be generalised to human behaviour. Secondly, oversimplification can be avoided because several different functions underpin a person's attitude. To elaborate, people who have the same attitude can be driven by a different basis of motivation. Thirdly, Katz's model (1960) merges the motivational basis of attitude which corresponds to other psychological research fashions such as the Gestalt theory. Different functions of attitude drives the individual towards specific objects or to perform particular actions. When individuals hold a stronger attitude towards a specific object, they have a higher behavioural intention to perform a particular action (Daugherty *et al.*, 2005). In Katz's model (1960), four different functions are classified within the Functional Theory of Attitude: adjustment function, ego-defensive function, value-expressive function and knowledge function.

The adjustment function, known as the utilitarian function or instrumental function, refers the individual to maximize rewards and minimize punishment from the external environment (Katz, 1960). This function is specifically based upon self-interests associated with personal satisfaction, which may differ to a personal situation. A past or present experience plays an important role in forming the attitude in respect to this function. By providing the rewards or punishment continuously, the individual holds this attitude, consistently underlying the utilitarian function. Accordingly, the most efficient way to change the attitude through this function is to change the existing reward or punishment.

Attitude serves as an ego-defensive function in defending one's self-image (Katz, 1960). The ego-defensive function differs to the adjustment function in

an essential way, to generate satisfaction from the external world. It explains how people protect themselves against internal conflict or external danger (Katz, 1960). In respect to the utilitarian function, it clearly shows the rewards that are desired or the penalties to be avoided. However, due to the human defence mechanism not all people accept rewards as they defend themselves or do not understand why they are defensive. Katz (1960) suggests that the condition in which to change the individuals' attitude through the ego-defensive function is to develop self-insight, or to remove external threats. In this way the individuals' attitude can be changed through this function.

The value-expressive function is virtually opposite to the ego-defensive function. The ego-defensive function prevents individuals from revealing their inner concept, whilst the value expressive function enables them to present their own ideas and who they are (Katz, 1960). This function motivates the individual to reveal their self-concept and further helps them to move closer to their desirable self-identity. The individual can enhance their self-identity through expressing themselves and obtaining gratification through the process. Attitude with a value-expressive function can be altered because people change their beliefs or self-image fundamentally. They can also control the environmental support to enable them to change their current values.

The knowledge function of attitude reflects the role of attitudes in organising and understanding information and events, and in general provides clarity and consistency to one's perspective of the world (Katz, 1960). Individuals are motivated to gain knowledge beyond their original understanding or senses. However, in most situations, people are only interested in the knowledge most relevant to their own life rather than universal knowledge. The change of attitude through the knowledge function can create ambiguity through new information or can promote changes to the old environment. Also, through accessing more meaningful information about a subject it can stimulate the desire to have a more positive attitude through the knowledge function.

Much functional theory research focuses on the theoretical discussion. A few empirical studies apply the functional theory of attitude to discuss within a different context, such as the motivation of volunteer behaviour (Clary *et al.*, 1998; Francis, 2011), attitude towards democracy (Gastil, 1992), online panel

participation (Daugherty *et al.*, 2005), and user-content contribution (Daugherty *et al.*, 2008). From those empirical studies, different functions of attitude are shown to have a significant influence on the individual's formation of attitude. For example, Clary *et al.* (1998) extend Katz's classification of volunteers to propose a Volunteer Functions Inventory. This contained values, understanding, enhancement, career, and social and protective function. Statistical analysis supports the relationship between functional motivation and commitment to be a volunteer. Additionally, Daugherty *et al.* (2005) explore the motivation behind online panel participation by employing the functional theory of attitude. They listed five functions, the utilitarian, knowledge, ego-defensive, value-expressive and social function, to discuss individual's attitude towards online panel participation and a sense of community belonging. The results also support the influences produced from a different function based upon the personal attitude toward online panel participation.

The functional theory of attitude provides a systematic theoretical underpinning to identify individual's motivation in formation of attitude and subsequent behaviour. With the classification of different functions, it provides a clear picture to explain why people behave in a particular way. Unlike previous research using the motivational analysis, which can be very different in terms of behaviour, the functional theory of attitude is proposed in this study to provide an alternative way in explaining the behaviour of consumers.

#### 4.4 Technology Acceptance Model

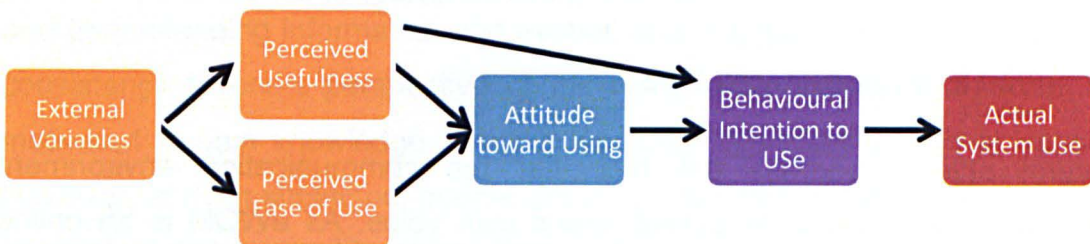
Several studies address the fact that the communication environment influences the intention to publish one's own voice. As eWOM is an online behaviour, the Technology Acceptance Model is well-established to discuss online human behaviour.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed by Davis (1989), is the most influential model in predicting user adoption and usage behaviour within the information system field (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). Being similar to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), TAM is also adopted from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Davis *et al.*, 1989). TRA and TPB discuss the factors that influence individual's attitude towards behaviour in a general context,

whereas TAM puts the focus on the reasons for usage in IT related areas such as computer usage within the work place and college learning programmes. TAM is cited by thousands of journals (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2007) being replicated through various computer-based technologies and in different cultural backgrounds.

In the late 1980s, information technology provided huge potential and opportunities for organisations by improving the working process and increasing performance. These benefits can be successfully obtained dependent upon the users' willingness and usage behaviour of information systems. Much attention is therefore given to understand the acceptance of information system use and to further explain or predict the actual behaviour of users. However, previous studies fail to develop valid constructs and measures in determining the acceptance or adoption by users (Davis, 1989). Davis (1989) fills this knowledge gap and proposes two beliefs that form individuals' attitudes towards using the computer and that influence actual behaviour. By reviewing previous research, the valid measurements can also be developed and examined in relation to attitude and behaviour. The model is shown in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5 Technology Acceptance Model



Source: Davis *et al.* (1989, p. 985)

Davis (1989) posits TAM to explain user acceptance of computer usage within the workplace. Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEU) are two main beliefs being statistically relevant to consumer preference in use of a specific facility, e.g. computer, (Hauser and Shugan, 1980) and further facilitates their attitude and intention of usage (Davis, 1989).

Perceived usefulness is defined as “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance” (Davis, 1989, p.320). Perceived usefulness is positively associated with individuals’ intention to use or adoption of, technology. This is because people do not show their interests or contribute their efforts on the system, which cannot help enhance their working performance (Robey, 1979). More specifically, in order to produce better performance, individuals are more willing to use a more productive or effective system. The system, which is perceived as having high usefulness, creates a positive attitude towards using it and induces the users’ positive intention to use it. Consequently, the actual usage of the system is increased.

The influence between PU and usage intention is based on the cost-benefit paradigm. During the decision-making process, people consider the effort required and the benefits gained. Owing to limited resources and energy, people tend to allocate their efforts on the worthy activity (Radner and Rothschild, 1975). Thus, people are more likely to contribute their efforts when the outcome is beneficial. Applying this to the acceptance of technology context, when usefulness is significantly perceived, the attitude is positively formed towards using that technology (Davis, 1989). Therefore, perceived usefulness has a positive influence on the attitude, behavioural intention and actual behaviour.

The second factor affecting individuals’ adoption or usage of technology is perceived ease of use. Perceived ease of use refers to “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort” (Davis, 1989, p.320). The more efforts are required in accomplishing a task, the fewer people wish to contribute to or become involved in. When all other conditions are equal, the individual shows a preference to employ an easier way to accomplish the task instead of the more difficult way. Therefore, perceived ease of use is a determinant in identifying the adoption of a particular system or programme. Moreover, perceived ease of use serves as an antecedent of perceived usefulness at the same time. When other conditions are equal, individuals find technology more useful when it is easier to use (Venkatesh, 2000). The direct influence from perceived ease of use on behavioural

intention is much stronger when individuals are inexperienced. With time and accumulated experience, perceived ease of use embraces the indirect influence on behavioural intention via perceived usefulness (Davis *et al.*, 1989; Venkatesh, 1999).

Davis (1989) highlights the theoretical background of ease of use by employing self-efficacy theory. Perceived self-efficacy is defined as "judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982, p.122), whereas perceived ease of use has a similar concept being "tied to an individual's assessment of the effort involved in the process of using the system" (Venkatesh, 2000, p.344). To apply this into the technology-based research, computer self-efficacy represents "an individual's perceptions of his or her ability to use computers in the accomplishment of a task" (Compeau and Higgins, 1995, p.191). The perception of self-efficacy determines how much effort to contribute and what action to take (Bandura, 1982). In terms of computer acceptance, it facilitates the adoption of using technology-wise applications (Yi and Hwang, 2003). When a higher self-efficacy of computer use is perceived, the system can be seen as being easy to operate and therefore a higher intention to use it.

TAM is regarded as powerful and influential in predicting technology adoption behaviour. However, it is also received criticisms regarding its parsimony (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2007). The original TAM only contains two identified types of belief in explaining the intentions of technology adoption behaviour. Other factors which possibly influence individual's intention to use technology are ignored within TAM. Therefore, the original model is proposed for examining in workplace making TAM have less validity outside of the workplace or other technological environments (Bruner II and Kumar, 2005; Moon and Kim, 2001). One most popular belief theory in influencing users' adoption of technology and post behaviour is perceived enjoyment, also known as perceived playfulness or perceived fun (Davis *et al.*, 1992).

To merge the motivation theory, perceived enjoyment is absorbed into TAM and regarded as an example of intrinsic motivation to drive one's behavioural intention to use that technology (Davis *et al.*, 1992; Igbaria *et al.*, 1994). Perceived enjoyment refers to "the activity of using the computer is perceived

to be enjoyable in its own right, apart from any performance consequences that may be anticipated" (Davis *et al.*, 1992, p.1113). People with happy dispositions are willing to perform specific behaviour, having cognitive spontaneity without any external reinforcement. Being opposite to perceived usefulness which is regarded as an extrinsic motivation, perceived enjoyment is viewed as an intrinsic motivation that drives individuals towards performing specific behaviour.

Several studies confirm the importance of perceived enjoyment and its influence within TAM (Bruner II and Kumar, 2005; Hwang, 2005; Venkatesh, 1999; Webster and Martocchio, 1992). Within the workplace, perceived usefulness is more important than perceived enjoyment because individuals consider their performance as the first priority (Igbaria *et al.*, 1994). Bruner II and Kumar (2005) highlight the importance of perceived enjoyment when employing TAM to explore consumer behaviour. Empirical studies support the relationship between perceived enjoyment and personal attitude / behavioural intention (Hsu and Lin, 2008; Kauer *et al.*, 2013; Lee *et al.*, 2007; Yu *et al.*, 2005). The internet provides a platform to various activities including shopping, banking, information searching, networking, education, entertainment, communication and working, etc. This multi-functional platform cannot be fully explained by only two compressed beliefs, especially in terms of the leisure function. Hence, perceived enjoyment becomes more important and better reflects the belief and attitude towards adopting internet-based technology (Lee *et al.*, 2005; Shin, 2009; Teo *et al.*, 1999).

#### 4.5 Summary

This research aims to explore the antecedents of eWOM communication. Chapter 3 firstly reviews relevant studies that discuss the motivation for eWOM communication. Thereafter, a research gap is highlighted whereby limited attention has been received in the understanding of attitudinal factors affecting traveller's eWOM communication behaviour. Attitude is those beliefs of an individual and serves as a disposition towards a specific behaviour. Attitude theories are therefore reviewed to understand the relationship between attitude and behaviour. In sum, the Theory of Reasoned Action, Theory of Planned Behaviour, Functional Theory of Attitude and Technology Acceptance Model



are reviewed, including the origins, determinants and empirical findings by previous studies. These theories will be employed to develop a conceptual framework in the understanding of travellers' eWOM communication.

# Chapter 5

## Conceptual Framework and Research Hypotheses

### 5.1 Introduction

The development and importance of eWOM communication and the consequences of eWOM communication behaviour have been discussed within Chapter 3. Chapter 4 further reviewed consumer-related theories relevant to eWOM communication. The purpose of this chapter is to propose the conceptual framework and to introduce the research hypotheses. The definition of constructs and dimensions are also reviewed and amended.

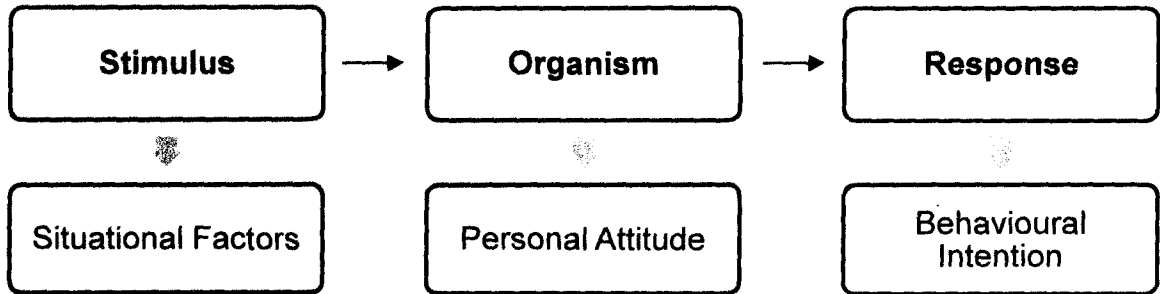
### 5.2 Preliminary Conceptual Framework

eWOM communication posted and used by travellers is viewed as one of many consumer behaviours. The Input-Output (I-O) model is a conventional model used to understand the response of consumers (e.g. behavioural responses or verbal responses) when experiencing stimuli (Jacoby, 2002). In addition, social science scholars have been aware of the importance of internalisation of many factors and its mechanism mediating input – output relationship. A sophisticated model, the Stimulus – Organism – Response (S-O-R) paradigm is introduced to explain consumer behaviour (Belk, 1975). The behaviour of individuals can be reactive to given stimuli, through organisms such as attitude, values, knowledge, etc. (Jacoby, 2002). The organism internalises and connects those stimuli and then affects the response.

Existing research does not attempt to understand eWOM communication from the attitudinal perspective. The importance of the mechanism of the overall attitude of the relationship between antecedents and eWOM communication behaviour is also addressed. This research has adopted the S-O-R paradigm to identify different antecedents (as stimuli) influencing the attitude of individuals (as an organism) and sequential behavioural intention (as a

response). Belk (1975) employs the S-O-R paradigm to discuss situational variables that influence consumer behaviours, as depicted in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Revised S-O-R Paradigm



Source: Adapted from Belk (1975, p. 158)

Belk (1975) identifies five situational factors as stimuli that influence consumer behaviour: Physical Surroundings, Task Definition, Social Surroundings, Temporal Perspective, and Antecedent States. The present study adopts situational variables classification by Belk (1975) to understand antecedents of eWOM communication (as stimuli), influencing the attitude of individuals (as an organism) and sequential behavioural intention (as a response). Each stimulus is respectively discussed below. The application to this study is also elaborated on.

Physical surroundings include location, decoration, and other visible configurations of the merchandise, behaviour, or any possible object (Belk, 1975). It is the easiest and most obvious feature of the situational factors. To clarify, the physical surroundings of accommodating the behaviour refer to the environment or platform used for eWOM communication. Various electronic media, including different platforms or websites for individuals to exchange their opinions, are considered. The advent of electronic media facilitates travellers to share their experiences more easily. In the past, travellers could only present photos or share their experiences face-to-face after their trip. Through electronic media, travellers can present their photos, experiences and comments immediately, even during their trip. Additionally, they may receive feedback, or be able to search for further information. Electronic media provides an alternative choice for travellers to communicate with families, friends or even strangers.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is employed in order to understand how individuals adopted electronic media. TAM is well-developed by Davis in 1989 and further employed for several studies on the consumer behaviour of technology adoption. This model focuses on perception of individuals using or adopting technology innovation, such as computer usage in the workplace (Davis *et al.*, 1989), college learning programmes (Taylor and Todd, 1995a), online shopping (Vijayasathy, 2004), mobile commerce (Wu and Wang, 2005), and instant messaging communication (Lu *et al.*, 2009). Three dimensions are identified and used to evaluate the adoption of technology by individuals. These dimensions are perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment. *Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology* is named as the first antecedent within this study. This influences the behaviour of travellers. The theoretical underpinning of TAM is employed to discuss its influence on the attitude and behavioural intention of individuals.

Task definition features the intent or purpose of performing a specific behaviour. For example, people can decide to purchase a shampoo by considering the functionality (e.g. anti-dandruff), or hair-type (e.g. blonde hair) of the products available. The choice of communication methods by individuals through eWOM may depend on having a different purpose, e.g. gaining benefits, releasing emotional responses, etc. (Dichter, 1966; Sundaram *et al.*, 1998). The internet brings a new environment to travellers in which to share their travel experiences. Prior to travel, the use of information through electronic media can be accessed to organise their trip and places to visit. During the journey, prompt eWOM communication allows the traveller to share photos, experiences, and opinions with others for a leisure trip, or it can help communicate with colleagues instantly if travelling on business. Additionally, after travelling, electronic media can provide a platform to record memories permanently. Through this communication travellers could also offer their recommendations or warnings to other prospective travellers.

The functional theory of attitude is employed to address why individuals hold a specific attitude. Functional theorists believe that behaviour is performed for a specific purpose (Sarnoff and Katz, 1954; Smith *et al.*, 1956). The purpose explains why the person holds a positive or negative attitude towards that

behaviour. In other words, the purpose, serving as a motivation, arouses the attitude of individuals and influences their behaviour. This research employs Katz's model (Katz, 1960) to discuss different functions within personal attitudes towards eWOM communication. The reason for this is that Katz's model is one of the most well-known classifications of motivation. Several studies (e.g. Clary *et al.*, 1998; Daugherty *et al.*, 2008; Daugherty *et al.*, 2005) that address the functional classification of motivation are an extension of Katz's model which are applied within a different context. In addition, this model discusses the motivational formation of personal attitude in depth, which fits the purpose of this study. Four different functions introduced by Katz (1960) are included in this conceptual framework. These functions are utilitarian, knowledge, value-expressive, and ego-defensive function. This research employs the functional theory of attitude to discuss the *Motivation for eWOM Communication* by travellers, its influences on their attitude and behavioural intention.

Social surroundings indicate the influences of others who are involved in the behavioural situation. Individuals may be influenced by the presence of other people, their active participation, or even their interaction with other people. This concept, similar to the subjective norm, is one of the main beliefs in Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behaviour proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). Subjective norms, also known as social norms, are defined as "the person's perception that most people who are important to him thinks he should or should not perform the behaviour in question" (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p.302). In the tourism industry, electronic media provides a huge volume of information to potential travellers when planning their trip. Individuals may feel an obligation to provide useful information or experiences of their trip to future travellers. In addition, travellers may be expected to post impressive photos or exciting experiences during their trip to share with friends within their social networks. Those obligations or expectations from peer groups are treated as a normative norm which influences the attitude of individuals towards and behavioural intention of eWOM communication.

Subjective norm has been widely discussed in TRA and TPB, and further empirically examined by a number of other studies. While Fishbein and Ajzen

(1975) propose that subjective norm produces direct influences on the behaviour of individuals, Kelman (1958) argues that social influence has a significant impact on personal attitude. Recent studies (e.g. Manning, 2009; Park and Smith, 2007), not only confirm that subjective norm significantly influences the attitude, behavioural intentions and actual behaviour of individuals, but also identify different types of subjective norm, such as: injunctive norm and descriptive norm. This study includes *Subjective Norm* as the third antecedent of eWOM communication.

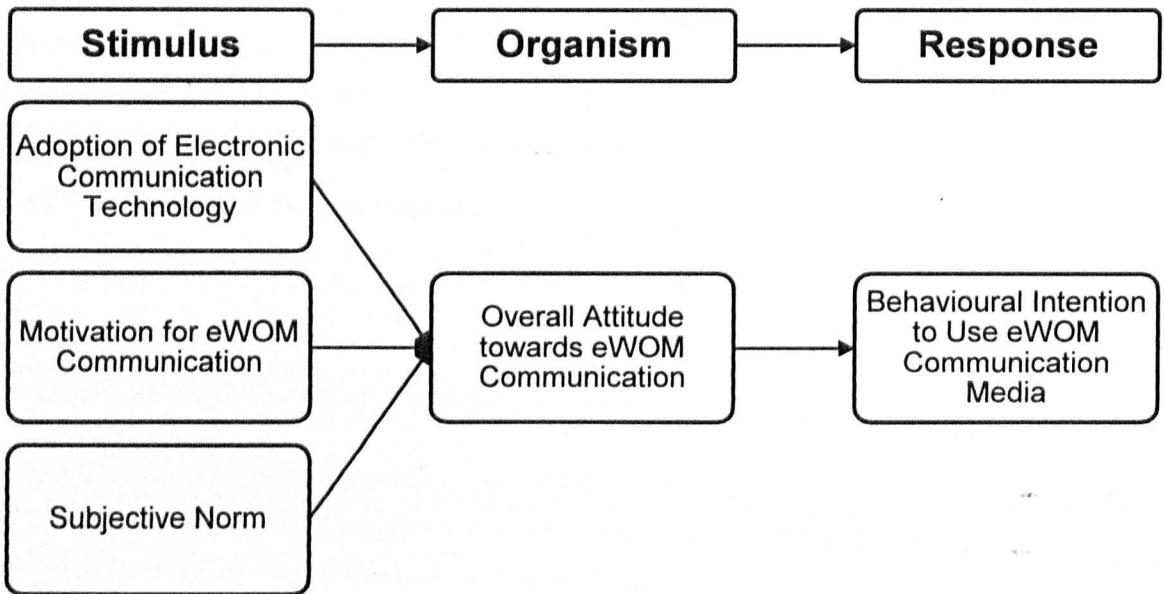
Temporal perspective, the fourth situational stimulus, is not considered by this research because it is unrelated to eWOM communication. Temporal perspective serves as an influential factor when consumer behaviour contains a temporal consideration (Belk, 1975). The temporal consideration can range from a minute to a year and can refer to the past or the future. For example, by assuming the consumer food shops regularly every week, it is easier to predict their next shopping behaviour because of the short span between shopping times. This stimulus is omitted by the current study because eWOM communication can happen at any point in time, so a time frame is not the main consideration within this behaviour. In addition, this research does not aim to predict when travellers engage in eWOM communication. These are the reasons why this stimulus is not discussed within the current study.

Antecedent states are defined as momentary moods (angry or happy), or conditions (fatigue or illness), that influence consumer behaviour (Belk, 1975). Individuals can execute a specific behaviour in order to alter their current mood or conditions. These moods or conditions are momentary instead of chronic, whereby individuals expect to change. eWOM communication is more like a story-telling that describes a previous experience, taking place immediately after the experience or after a period of time. When communicating through eWOM, individuals may or may not have momentary moods or conditions. However, this research focuses on the antecedents that drive people to eWOM communication, instead of the physical or mental environment of eWOM communication. Therefore, this stimulus is not included within the current study.

Three stimuli are identified and supporting theories are adopted from research of literature. The conceptual framework of this study is shown in Figure 5.2.

This demonstrates the relationship between focal constructs under the S-O-R paradigm structure.

Figure 5.2 Conceptual Framework under the S-O-R Paradigm Structure



Once the proposed conceptual framework is based upon the S-O-R paradigm, the definition of each construct will require amendments to enable application within the context of eWOM communication. Three antecedents are adopted from existing theories drawing upon works of prominent scholars. The following section describes the review and amendment to each construct and dimension.

### 5.3 Defining Constructs and Dimensions

This study aims to understand the antecedents of eWOM communication from the attitudinal perspective. Three antecedents are identified: Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology, Motivation for eWOM Communication and Subjective Norm serving as stimuli to influence the overall attitude towards eWOM communication and the behavioural intentions to use eWOM media. Adopting the S-O-R paradigm, five constructs are proposed and the conceptual framework developed. Three antecedents serve as stimuli influencing the attitude. The attitude acts as an organism and thereafter the behavioural intention, which is employed as the final response.

### 5.3.1 Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology

Adoption of electronic communication technology is identified as the first antecedent of eWOM communication. The intention of this construct is to assess the individual's evaluation of the use of new technology to communicate. The Technology Adoption Model (TAM) is employed by this study to understand how individuals cope with electronic communication technology. Davis (1989) introduces two dimensions within TAM, Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEU). In a follow up paper, PU is referred to as extrinsic motivation whereas the third dimension, Perceived Enjoyment (PE), is added to serve as the intrinsic motivation (Davis *et al.*, 1992) to understand individual's intention to use technologies.

TAM is developed to predict the attitude and behaviour in relation to the adoption of new technologies within the workplace (Davis *et al.*, 1989; Davis *et al.*, 1992). Within the consumer context, perceived enjoyment receives higher attention and produces stronger influences on consumer's attitudes and behaviours (Bruner II and Kumar, 2005). This study explores travellers' behaviour, therefore, to utilise TAM with three dimensions, PU, PEU, and PE, as the theoretical underpinning of the first antecedent being an exogenous construct, to enable the understanding of traveller's adoption of electronic communication technology.

### 5.3.2 Motivation for eWOM Communication

Motivation for eWOM communication refers to the reasons for engaging in eWOM communication. The importance of motivation for eWOM communication has been highlighted by previous researchers through drawing upon different theoretical perspectives (e.g. Bronner and Hoog, 2011; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Kang and Schuett, 2013; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004). This thesis employs the functional theory of attitude to understand motivational reasons that form the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. The behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media is thereafter influenced.

The work of Katz (1960) suggests four different functions in forming the attitude of individuals which further influences their behavioural intention.



Several studies employ Katz's model and explore in the different contexts (e.g. Clary *et al.*, 1998; Daugherty *et al.*, 2005). This study takes the original model proposed by Katz (1960) as the theory in which to understand the individual's motivations for eWOM communication. Accordingly, four functions being the utilitarian function (UF), knowledge function (KF), value-expressive function (VEF) and ego-defensive function (EDF) are chosen as dimensions to understand motivation for eWOM communication within this study. This construct is presented as an exogenous construct within the hypothetical framework.

### 5.3.3 Subjective Norm

Subjective norm refers to the influences or pressures from individual's social network. Such norm impact on one's behaviour explicitly or implicitly. By adopting the Theory of Reasoned Action or Theory of Planned Behaviour, the subjective norm refers to pressure received from peer groups (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

Later studies (e.g. Manning, 2009) suggest that subjective norm should include two types: injunctive norm (IN) and descriptive norm (DN). IN is defined as perceived pressure from peer groups of performing behaviour, whereas DN is a mimicking behaviour of his / her peer group. There are two types of norm that do not violate the definition proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975; 1991) within the Theory of Reasoned Action or Theory of Planned Behaviour. Therefore, these two norm types enhance the explanatory ability of subjective norm (Rivis and Sheeran, 2003). This study therefore adapts two dimensions within subjective norm being the exogenous construct within the conceptual framework.

### 5.3.4 Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication

"An attitude is a relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or situation predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner" (Rokeach, 1968, p. 112). It is an evaluation of a psychological objective presented as positive or negative attitude towards a specific object which leads personal behavioural intention or actual behaviour (Ajzen, 2001). Within marketing discipline for example, the consumer has a positive attitude towards one brand

that s/he will have a greater intention to buy than others. Previous studies (e.g. Bronner and Hoog, 2011; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Kim *et al.*, 2013; Leung and Bai, 2013; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2003; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004; Yoo and Gretzel, 2008) discuss reasons to perform eWOM communication but not from the attitudinal perspective. This study fulfils this gap by employing the overall attitude towards eWOM communication as being a critical focus in understanding traveller's eWOM communication behaviour. Following the principle of SEM, this construct is regarded as an endogenous construct, as well as the mediating construct between the three antecedents and behavioural intention.

### 5.3.5 Behavioural Intention to Use eWOM Communication Media

The behavioural intention is defined as "people's decisions to perform particular behaviours and represent a summary of people's motivation to act" (Armitage and Conner, 2004, p.128). It is usually regarded as a cognitive component of consumer attitude, assumed to capture the motivational factors that influence behaviour. Thus, it is an indication of the effort someone plans to exert in performing that behaviour and the most immediate indicator to predict one's behaviour (Sheeran, 2002; Triandis, 1979). This research employs this construct to understand the traveller's intention in the use of eWOM communication media. This construct serves as an endogenous construct within the conceptual framework.

## 5.4 Research Hypotheses

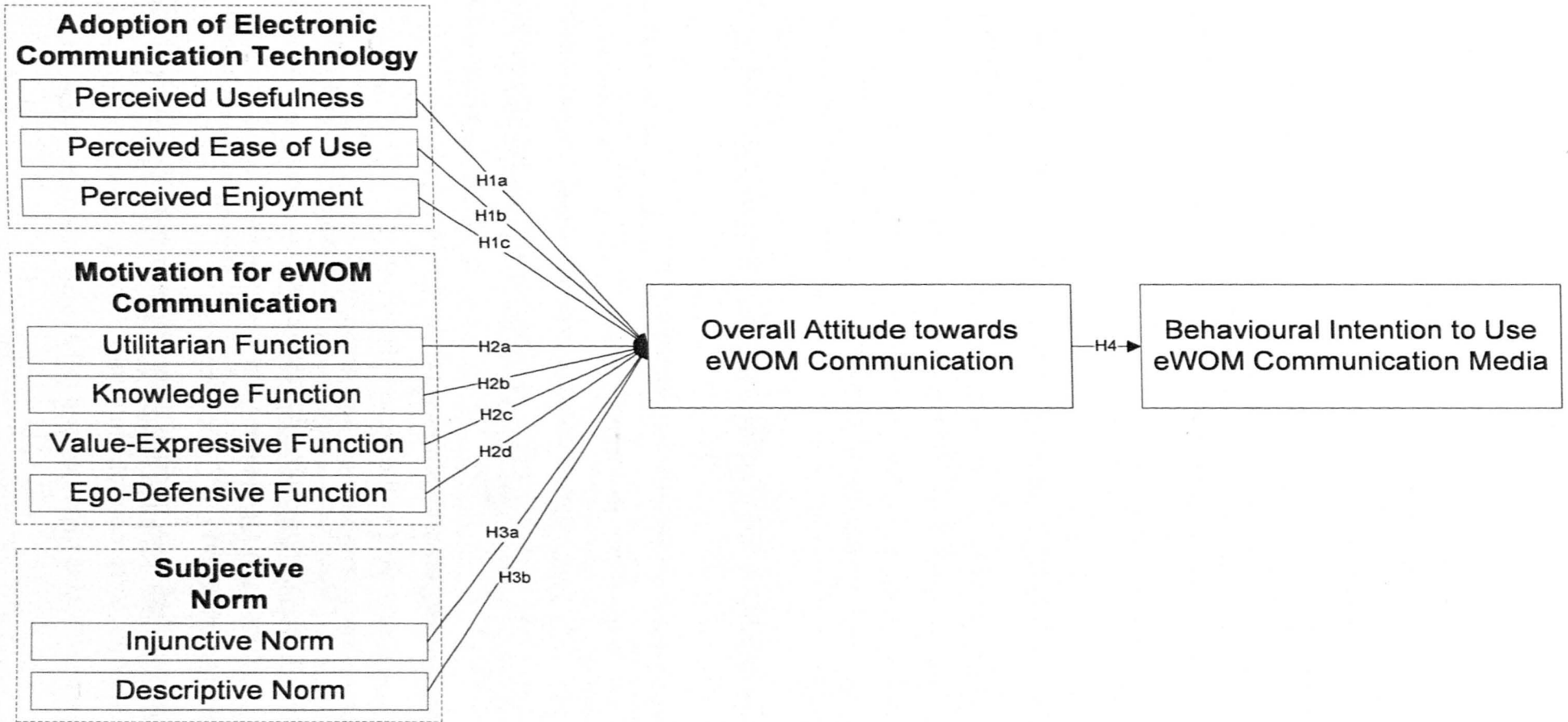
Three antecedents, Adoption of Electronic communication Technology, Motivation for eWOM Communication and Subjective Norm are identified, their roles within the conceptual framework being addressed. The underpinning theories are fully discussed within the literature chapter. The proposed relationships between constructs are recapped below and the hypotheses are presented thereafter.

### 5.4.1 Direct Effects from the Antecedents

Following the principles of SEM, each exogenous construct may have a direct / indirect effect on other endogenous constructs. There should not be any

causal relationships other than correlated relationships between all exogenous constructs. Three exogenous constructs, along with nine dimensions are proposed as having a direct influence on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication, with in-direct influences on the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Figure 5.3 presents the proposed hypotheses with each being then discussed respectively below.

Figure 5.3 Conceptual Framework – Full-Mediation Model



#### 5.4.1.1 Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology

Motivation theory research by Amabile (1993, p. 188) quotes that "individuals are extrinsically motivated when they engage in the work in order to obtain some goal that is apart from the work itself". People are willing to contribute their efforts in doing something to help achieve better performance. Within technology adoption research, individuals show their interest in using a piece of technology which they realise can enhance their working performance (Robey, 1979). They will have a more positive attitude towards such technology, therefore being more inclined to use it. In this study, individual's overall attitude towards eWOM communication will increase if s/he believes such electronic communication technology can improve their communication more efficiently or effectively. The PU of adoption of electronic communication technology is thus concluded to have a positive association with individual's attitude towards eWOM communication.

The more effort requires accomplishing a task, the fewer individuals would prefer to contribute or become involved. When all other conditions are equal, the individual shows a preference to employ an easier way to accomplish the task instead of a difficult one (Venkatesh, 2000). Davis (1989) highlight the theoretical background of ease of use by employing self-efficacy theory. Perceived self-efficacy is defined as "judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982, p.122), whereas perceived ease of use has a similar concept being "tied to an individual's assessment of the effort involved in the process of using the system" (Venkatesh, 2000, p.344). When applying to the technology-based research, computer self-efficacy represents "an individual's perception of his or her ability to use computers in the accomplishment of a task" (Compeau and Higgins, 1995, p.191). The perception of the self-efficacy determines how much effort to contribute, what action to take (Bandura, 1982); and, in terms of computer acceptance, it facilitates the individuals' adoption of using technology-wise applications (Yi and Hwang, 2003). When the individual perceives higher self-efficacy through computer use, they perceive the system is easier to operate or to control, thus they have a positive attitude toward using it. Therefore, PEU is hypothesised to have an effect on overall attitude.

Perceived enjoyment is later considered by merging the motivation theory into TAM. It is regarded as an example of intrinsic motivation to drive the individual's intention or behavioural intention to use the technology (Davis *et al.*, 1992; Igbaria *et al.*, 1994). People with joyful dispositions are willing to perform specific behaviour, having cognitive spontaneity without any external reinforcement. Opposed to perceived usefulness, which is regarded as an extrinsic motivation, perceived enjoyment is viewed as an intrinsic motivation which drives individuals towards performing a specific behaviour. Several studies confirm the importance of perceived enjoyment and its influence within TAM (Hwang, 2005; Liao and Tsou, 2009; Venkatesh, 1999; Webster and Martocchio, 1992). In the workplace, perceived usefulness is more important than perceived enjoyment because individuals consider their performance as the first priority (Igbaria *et al.*, 1994). However, within cyberspace, the influence of perceived enjoyment becomes more important. The internet provides a platform to various activities including shopping, information searching, networking and communication, etc. This multi-functional platform cannot be correctly explained by only two compressed beliefs, especially in terms of the leisure function. Perceived enjoyment can better reflect the users' belief and attitude towards adopting internet-based technology (Lee *et al.*, 2005; Shin, 2009; Teo *et al.*, 1999). When people enjoy the use of technology, they will have a more positive evaluation of it. Therefore, they are more willing to be involved in the use of technology for the pleasure of it. Thus, positive relationships between perceived enjoyment and the overall attitude towards eWOM communication and the behavioural intention of eWOM communication are proposed.

Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment are confirmed to have a positive influence on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication technology. In other words, individuals will have a positive attitude towards the use of eWOM communication when they have a better understanding of electronic communication technology, either by their higher perception of usefulness, ease of use, or enjoyment of electronic communication technology. The three hypotheses are therefore posited below:

*H1a: Perceived usefulness of electronic communication technology will have a positive impact on overall attitude towards eWOM communication*

*H1b: Perceived ease of use of electronic communication technology will have a positive impact on overall attitude towards eWOM communication*

*H1c: Perceived enjoyment of electronic communication technology will have a positive impact on overall attitude towards eWOM communication*

#### 5.4.1.2 Motivation for eWOM Communication

The functional theory of attitude is employed to discuss motivation for eWOM communication and its impact on the overall attitudes towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention toward eWOM communication media. Four functions are identified and conceptualised as a purpose of attitude holding (Herek, 1986; Katz, 1960). Individuals hold a specific attitude because they wish to achieve their personal interests. Taking the value-expressive function of attitude, people hold this attitude because they would like to present or elaborate their own value. Therefore, when the purpose or function is stronger, the attitude towards the subject becomes higher.

The volunteer behaviour research employs four functions as classified by Katz (1960), plus two extended functions. These are the social function and enhancement function, whereby the individual's intention to serve as a volunteer is discussed (Clary *et al.*, 1998; Snyder *et al.*, 2000). The results confirm that the individual with stronger functional concerns has a higher intention to participate in volunteer activity. All six functions have significant influences as motivation to facilitate the commitment of volunteer activity (Clary *et al.*, 1998). Moreover, if participants receive benefits from the volunteer activity congruent to their personal functions, they will be more satisfied being a volunteer and will do so continuously. The six functions and relevant items in the measurement of the motivation to be a volunteer is further employed within several contexts, such as student volunteers (Francis, 2011), health caring volunteers (Akintola, 2011), and volunteers tourism (Coren and Gray, 2012).

From the online panel participation research, Daugherty *et al.* (2005) include five functions, the four by Katz (1960) plus one other, the social function. This is to enable the understanding of the intention to participate in online panel discussions. Through the use of multiple regressions, five functional sources significantly influence the attitude towards participation of the online panel. Specifically, the knowledge and value-expressive functions produce stronger influences to formulate the attitude towards online panel participation. Not all five functional sources produce a positive influence on the attitude towards online panel participation. The knowledge, value-expressive, and ego-defensive functions show the positive influence, whereas the utilitarian and social functions serve as negative predictors. People having stronger concerns regarding the utilitarian function or social function, result in a weaker attitude towards online panel participation. In other words, giving financial rewards or social benefits may not enhance their attitude and further persuade them to join the online panel discussions. This conclusion is later challenged by follow up study. Daugherty *et al.* (2008), again employ five functions to examine the users' intention to create their opinion online. The findings confirm that the ego-defensive function has a positive influence on the attitude towards user generated-content. However, negative relationships are found between the value-expressive functional motives and the attitude towards user generated-content. No significant influence is identified from the utilitarian function.

Several studies confirm the relationship between functions of the objective serving as motivation, and attitude towards the objective, though the direction may be different. This research follows the original work by Katz (1960) and proposes all positive relationships between four functions and the overall attitude. Therefore, this research proposes hypothesis 2 as:

- H2a: Utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication*
- H2b: Knowledge function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication*



*H2c: Value-expressive function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication*

*H2d: Ego-defensive function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication*

#### 5.4.1.3 Subjective Norm

Subjective norm, also known as social norm, is defined as “the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour” (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p. 302). The theoretical relationship between subjective norm and behavioural intention is explained by the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). This is empirically supported within a different context such as buyer behaviour (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975), college student behaviour (Borsari and Carey, 2003), health communication (Campo *et al.*, 2004), drinking behaviour (Gomberg *et al.*, 2001) and organ donation (Park and Smith, 2007). Rather than discussing the direct influence between subjective norm and behavioural intention, this study explores the indirect influences from subjective norm on behavioural intention. Two separate relationships are proposed, from subjective norm to personal attitude and from personal attitude to behavioural intention.

Three processes of social influence, compliance, identification, and internalisation is developed by Kelman (1958). These are adopted to discuss the influence of social norms and incorporating this influence into the individuals' attitude (Ryan, 1982). Compliance suggests that “an individual accepts influence because he hopes to achieve a favorable reaction from another person or group”, whereas identification infers that “an individual accepts influence because he wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship to another person or a group” (Kelman, 1958, p.53). Eventually, an individual will internalise the influence from peer groups and act the behaviour intrinsically motivated. Three steps of social influences support how the influence from peer groups becomes an attitude within an individual.

Within online community participation, individuals are motivated to participate because they would like to gain recognition from peer groups, expand social networks and reinforce a sense of attachment, belonging and membership to, an online travel community (e.g. Wang and Fesenmaier, 2003; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004). These influences from other community members are internalised and build up the individual's attitude. Within a different empirical research context, such as watching online advertising (Lee and Lee, 2011), purchasing new food products (Choo *et al.*, 2004) and sharing knowledge (Bock *et al.*, 2005), subjective norm also shows the influence on the attitude towards behavioural actions.

Several studies employ TRA or TPB to examine the behaviour of individuals. However, subjective norms have received less attention in comparison to attitude belief (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Sheeran and Orbell, 1999). One possible reason is that subjective norms have a less important, but still significant, influential power on behavioural intention (Sheeran and Orbell, 1999; Trafimow *et al.*, 2002). Ajzen (1991) also indicates that personal factors such as attitude and perceived behaviour control may dominate the prediction of behavioural intention. Another reason is the under-development of subjective norm (Fishbein, 1976) in the early development of TRA. Within the TRA and the TPB, subjective norm is limited to injunctive norm only (Park and Smith, 2007). Injunctive norm is defined as the individual receiving pressure from peer groups to perform a specific behaviour, whereas descriptive norm suggests that individuals execute behaviour in order to gain recognition or acceptance from peer groups (Borsari and Carey, 2003; Park and Smith, 2007). Partial measuring of the subjective norm may underestimate its statistical power on prediction of behavioural intention. In fact, descriptive norm can provide an additional 5% in explaining the variance of behavioural intention (Rivis and Sheeran, 2003). This study includes both injunctive norms and descriptive norms to explore a further understanding of the influence from subjective norms on behavioural intention.

While subject norm receives less emphasis in comparison to attitudinal belief, some scholars argue the independence between subjective norm and the overall attitude (e.g. Miniard and Cohen, 1979; Ryan, 1982). In the area of

technology use, researchers also argue the importance of social norms, in addition to the original TAM based on individual behavioural intention (Lewis *et al.*, 2003; Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). Related research within travel and tourism industry, Casaló *et al.* (2010) determine the reason for consumers engaging in firm–host virtual community and sharing their opinions by employing TPB and TAM. The results show that subjective norm does have an impact on consumers' behavioural intention to participate in the community, but, surprisingly, it has a negative impact. Their research also states the influence from subjective norm being hypothesised to have a direct effect on behavioural intention, but neglect the mediating effect of the overall attitude. This research includes subjective norm comprising of two dimensions being the third antecedent of eWOM communication and proposes their influences on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. Hypothesis 3a and 3b are listed below:

*H3a: Injunctive norm will have a positive impact on overall attitude towards eWOM communication*

*H3b: Descriptive norm will have a positive impact on overall attitude towards eWOM communication*

#### 5.4.2 Direct Effect of Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication

The relationship between an attitude and a behavioural intention or an attitude and an actual behaviour has been widely discussed for more than 70 years (e.g. Campbell, 1950; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; LaPiere, 1934). 'Attitude' is a set of interrelated predispositions to respond (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). It guides individuals' manners and behaviours. Moreover, an attitude incorporates one or more belief presenting a favourable or unfavourable way toward the object (Bagozzi, 1981). Consequently, a preferential behavioural intention or favourable behaviour is conducted because the positive or negative attitude and initial evaluation comes from the belief. Individuals with a stronger positive attitude have a higher intention of performing a specific behaviour. Therefore, the influence from attitude on behavioural intention is positively confirmed.

H4: Overall attitude towards eWOM communication will have a positive influence on behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media

#### 5.4.3 Mediating Effect of Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication

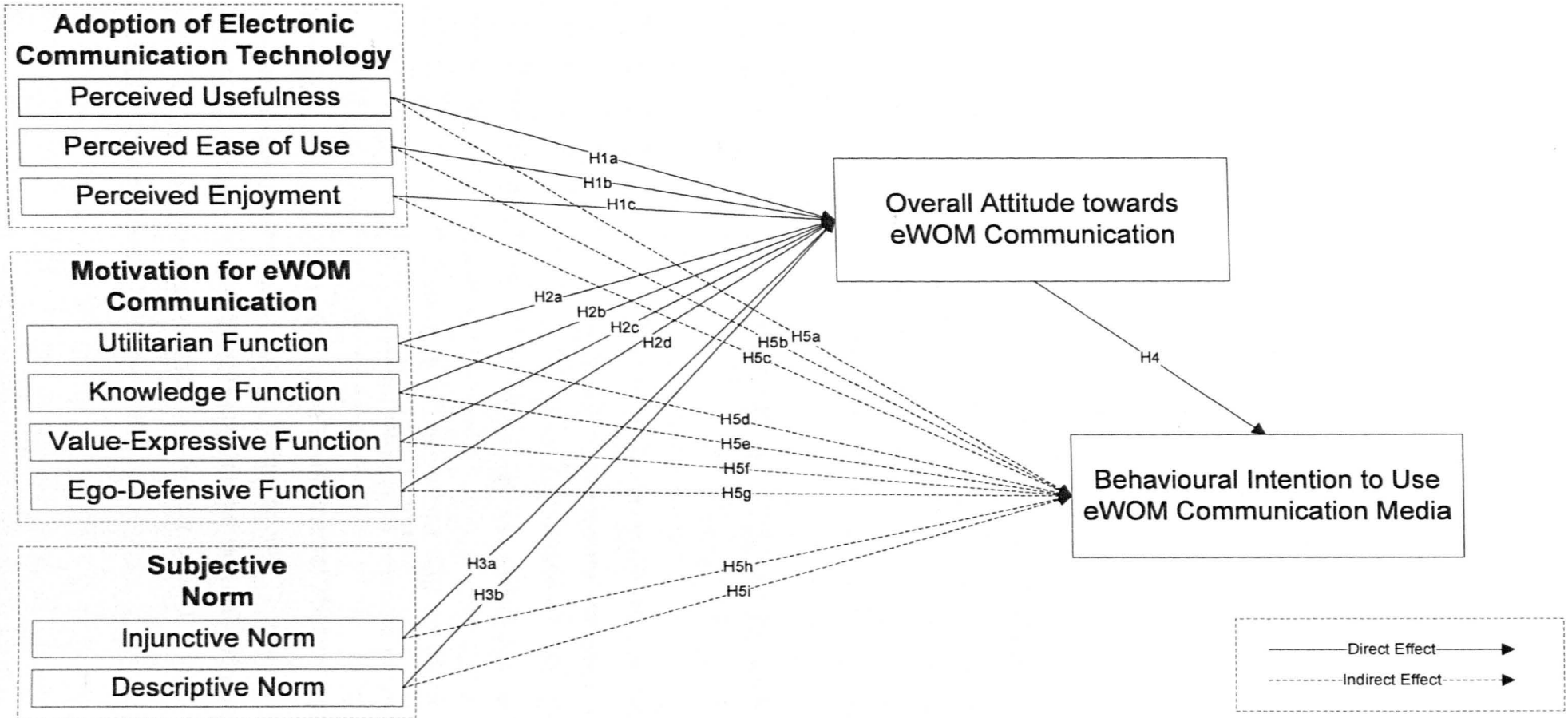
Attitude proposed as a mediator between the antecedents and behavioural intention is somewhat debatable. For example, Davis *et al.* (1989) firstly propose the direct influence from perceived usefulness on the behaviour of individuals. However, according to the learning and affective-cognitive consistency mechanisms, Davis *et al.* (1989) argue that individual's evaluation is positively affected when the performance is more of an achievement. In other words, the attitude towards using a specific technology is positively associated with perceived usefulness. Both direct and indirect influences between the three dimensions (perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment) and behaviours are discussed. Such indirect relationships are mediated by the attitude towards technology adoption. Later studies examine the adoption of technology by applying the TAM and confirm that the three determinants have both direct and indirect influences on behavioural intention. The indirect relationship is mediated by personal overall attitude (Davis *et al.*, 1992; Venkatesh and Bala, 2008; Venkatesh and Davis, 2000).

The same arguments occur when studies employ the functional theory of attitude in understanding individual's behaviour. Daugherty and colleagues (2008; 2005) confirm that the functions of attitude can be regarded as motivation to formulate individual's attitude towards online opinion contribution. Instead, by taking the relationship between the functions and attitude only, volunteer behaviour studies argue the direct influence from six functions serving as motivation to behavioural intention (Clary and Snyder, 1999; Francis, 2011). Empirical studies confirm that the overall attitude is a mediator between each function and behavioural intention (Clary *et al.*, 1998; Daugherty *et al.*, 2008; Daugherty *et al.*, 2005; Snyder *et al.*, 2000). This study includes the original four functions proposed by Katz to examine their influence on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention of eWOM communication. The mediated effect of attitude between functions and behavioural intention can therefore be proposed.

Subjective norm is usually regarded as a predictor producing a direct influence on personal behavioural intention within TRA (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and TPB (Ajzen, 1991). Within TRA and TPB, subjective norm is defined as a parallel indicator as the attitude that determines the behavioural intention or actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Such theoretical relationships employed in this study suggest that the intention of travellers to use eWOM communication media is directly influenced by subjective norm. On the contrary, through compliance, identification, and internalisation processes, subjective norm produces a direct influence on the overall attitude, and thereafter on the behavioural intention. Based upon various propositions, Schepers and Wetzels (2007) conduct a meta-analysis study to assert that both direct and indirect relationships existed between subjective norm and the behavioural intention.

Given that arguments exist within the research literature, the partial-mediation model for this research is presented in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4 Conceptual Framework – Partial-Mediation Model



As shown in Figure 5.4, three antecedents are proposed to have a direct relationship on both the overall attitude towards eWOM communication (H1 – H3) which influences the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media (H4). Information drawn from supporting literature is also proposed as having a direct influence from the three antecedents of behavioural intention to use eWOM communication (H5). Therefore, the overall attitude towards eWOM communication is proposed to serve as a mediating variable through the adoption of electronic communication technology, the motivation for eWOM communication and the subjective norm on the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media respectively. Therefore, influences from the main constructs to behavioural intention are mediated. Also the relationships from dimensions on the behavioural intention are hypothesised. The hypotheses are posited that:

- H5a Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's perceived usefulness of electronic communication technology on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media.*
- H5b Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's perceived ease of use of electronic communication technology on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media.*
- H5c Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's perceived enjoyment of electronic communication technology on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media.*
- H5d Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media.*
- H5e Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's knowledge function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media.*

- H5f Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's value-expressive function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media.*
- H5g Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's ego-defensive function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media.*
- H5h Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's injunctive norm on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media.*
- H5i Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's descriptive norm on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media.*

## 5.5 Summary

This chapter discusses the development of the conceptual framework of this study and the influential direction between each variable. By adoption of situational factors influencing consumer behaviour (Belk, 1975), three antecedents, namely Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology, Motivation for eWOM Communication, and Subjective Norm, are proposed. This chapter assembles variables and theories into a conceptual framework and addresses the possible relationships between all variables. The conceptual framework is a novel integrative model in which to understand travellers' overall attitude towards eWOM communication and their intention to use eWOM Communication Media. 19 Hypotheses are developed based upon the literature research. As all adopted variables, constructs, and hypotheses have never been tested before within the online environment, the framework and hypotheses will be preliminary examined by online focus groups to ensure suitability. A web-based questionnaire will further collect quantitative data to test the conceptual framework empirically.



# Chapter 6

## Methodology

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the research design process and methodological issues to enable progress of the project. Based upon literature reviews, the aims and objectives of this study are outlined with a proposed conceptual framework. The philosophical stance of this study and its influences are thereafter discussed leading to the research design process. The research design overview is fully illustrated to include the type of study, time horizon, unit of analysis and research medium. Data collection, sampling design, instrument development and analysis techniques are thereafter explained in detail.

### 6.2 Research Aim and Objectives

Since the 1960's, one of the most influential and powerful marketing and information source, known as WOM, continues to receive significant attention from academics and practitioners alike (Arndt, 1967b; Buttle, 1998; Charlett and Garland, 1995). Businesses often use positive WOM as a low cost promotional tool because it invokes buying intentions and helps form long term customer loyalty (Bone, 1995). In contrast, a negative WOM can damage the brand and corporate image, therefore increasing consumer switching behaviour (Charlett and Garland, 1995; Wangenheim, 2005). Negative effects resulting from WOM may occur before businesses become aware of it. Retaining all the WOM influences, eWOM reaches a broader audience than WOM itself, a further enhancement being that eWOM web appearance is more consistent and long term. Therefore, the influences of eWOM invoke strong research interests in academia and industry alike. (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003).

Studies have investigated either conceptualization of eWOM communication (e.g. Brown *et al.*, 2007; Litvin *et al.*, 2008), or its influences on customers (e.g. Lee and Youn, 2009; Riegner, 2007). Some researchers have focused on the motivation of eWOM communication (e.g. Bronner and Hoog, 2011; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Leung and Bai, 2013; Wang and Fesenmaier, 2004; Wolny and Mueller, 2013). Apart from motivational eWOM studies, additional research could be extended through the adoption of a diverse theoretical perspective, therefore understanding the attitude towards, and behavioural intention of eWOM communication behaviour. Motivation is a task-oriented behaviour. Attitude, on the other hand, is an enduring belief towards an object or situation that leads to a disposition towards a specific behaviour after the belief (Rokeach, 1968). Attitudinal research is surprisingly omitted from eWOM communication research. Moreover, eWOM is particularly important within the tourism industry. This is because travel purchases are perceived as high-risk and high-involvement purchases (Tsaour *et al.*, 1997). Conventionally, travellers rely upon the opinions of families, peers and friends to facilitate the decision making process (Beldona *et al.*, 2005). With the popularity of internet and electronic media, up to 85% of travellers use online information as a reference when planning their trip (Travel Industry Wire, 2011). Given the importance and influence of eWOM within the tourism industry, the intention of this study aims to investigate antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication behaviour from an attitudinal perspective.

In order to achieve the aims of this study, specific objectives are identified as follows:

1. To review literature based upon eWOM communication behaviour and its antecedents, including the adoption of electronic media technology, motivation for eWOM communication, subjective norm and the literature on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication.
2. To propose a conceptual framework to explain the antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication.
3. To empirically validate the conceptual framework.

4. To draw theoretical contributions and managerial implications for academics and practitioners in regard to travellers' attitudes towards eWOM communication within the tourism industry.

### 6.3 Research Philosophy

Philosophical issues are crucial in conducting successful research. It represents the way in which the researcher views the world and influences the strategies employed to study the topic (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). It helps clarify research approaches, identify capable research design and prompts the researcher to explore new research methods (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008). Thus, it is important for a researcher to be aware and to identify philosophical commitments that underpin the research. Epistemology and ontology are two ways to address the research philosophy (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). This methodology serves the theoretical principles to give guidance on how research is conducted (Jennings, 2009).

Epistemological issues are concerned with the question of what is regarded as acceptable knowledge within a discipline, whereas ontology is the study of the nature of social reality (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The position of epistemology is commonly divided into positivism and interpretivism, associated with the objective and subjective point of ontology respectively (Collis and Hussey, 2009; Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Weber, 2004). Table 6.1 illustrates a summary of the assumptions and implications of positivism and interpretivism.

Table 6.1 Assumptions and Implications of Positivism and Interpretivism

|                            | Positivism  | Interpretivism  |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Ontological Assumption     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reality is objective and singular</li> <li>• The researcher and reality are separate</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reality is subjective and multiple</li> <li>• The Researcher interacts with that being researched</li> </ul>   |
| Epistemological Assumption | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective reality exists beyond the human mind</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of the world is intentionally constituted through live human experiences</li> </ul>  |
| Axiological Assumption     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research is value-free and unbiased</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research is value-laden and bias is present</li> </ul>   |
| Rhetorical Assumption      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal writing style</li> <li>• Passive voice</li> <li>• Quantitative words and set definitions</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal writing style</li> <li>• Personal voice</li> <li>• Qualitative terms and limited definitions</li> </ul>   |
| Methodological Assumption  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process is deductive</li> <li>• Study of cause and effect with a static design</li> <li>• Research is context free</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process is inductive</li> <li>• Study of mutual simultaneous shaping of factors with an emerging design</li> <li>• Research is context bound</li> </ul>  |
| Methods                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative</li> <li>• Statistics</li> <li>• Content analysis</li> <li>• Hypotheses testing</li> <li>• Large numbers sampling size which are selected randomly</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative</li> <li>• Hermeneutics</li> <li>• Phenomenology</li> <li>• Gathering rich data from which ideas are induced</li> <li>• Small numbers sampling size which are chosen for specific reasons</li> </ul> |
| Validity                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certainty: data truly measures reality</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defensible knowledge claims</li> </ul>   |
| Reliability                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replicability: research results can be reproduced</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretive awareness: researchers recognise and address implications of their subjectivity</li> </ul>  |

Source: Collis and Hussey (2009); Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2008); Weber (2004)

Positivism is closer to the natural science perspective, using an objective way to carry out research. A positivist should be independent of the research topic, without inserting personal values and should use hypotheses to test the existing theory (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). However, some critics argue that the social phenomenon is complicated and cannot be theorised using a framework which applies to all cases (e.g. Collis and Hussey, 2009). Also, researchers who are involved in society are not able to completely isolate themselves from their research

observation. On the contrary, an interpretivist stands in the position whereby reality is subjective and multiple. They engage, observe, and interpret what they research. The research process is inductive and uses qualitative methods (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Researchers are participants in the research process. The findings are created jointly by both researchers and participants through interactive interviews, observations and interpretation by the researcher (Ponterotto, 2005). Interpretivistic researchers may incorporate their personal view into the research results.

Positivism and interpretivism conventionally stand on a mono-method to conduct studies. In the past, mono-method was usually chosen in conducting a study, whereas mixed-method or multi-method is more developed and gaining in popularity recently (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Johnson *et al.*, 2007; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010). Research method refers to the techniques or procedures in generating data and analysing data of various research strategies (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). It includes the sampling selection, scales, questions or guidance design, analysis techniques and data interpretation. Though the mixed-method technique is increasingly employed within social sciences, the definition of mixed methods is debateable. Some scholars define mixed-method on using two or more 'methods', while others enlarge to the 'methodologies' scope including mixed-method, mixed-methodology, or even mixed-type research (Biesta, 2010; Creswell, 2010; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Biesta (2010) lists seven levels within mixed-method research discussions, these being data, methods, design, ontology, epistemology, the purpose of research and practical roles of research. A study can be described as a mixed-method research once the researcher employs more than one research method, no matter what the level (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Johnson *et al.* (2007) provide a general definition after evaluating 19 definitions and holding an online discussion with researchers from different fields. "Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (Johnson *et al.*, 2007, p. 132).

The philosophical stance of mixed-method is another debated issue when conducting mixed-method research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In Table 6.1, two different philosophical positions are listed and discussed. However, philosophical stance is a continuum whereby several different paradigms are proposed and discussed, such as post-positivism, realism, constructivism, etc. Feilzer (2010) argues that a solo philosophical stance may blind researchers in a particular method technique and methodological viewpoints. A mixed-method research intends to break this restriction, employing more than one method. As a result, it might not be suitable to claim a single philosophical stance for a mixed-method research. Pragmatism is usually argued as a philosophical framework for mixed methods research (Biesta, 2010). The pragmatic approach suggests researchers be open-minded and that research should not be constrained by choosing dichotomy between different philosophical stances (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). A mixed-method research, employing more than one method, should not be restricted within a single philosophical assumption whereby pragmatism is usually claimed as a suitable stance.

The aim of this study is to explore antecedents of eWOM communication and to propose an integrative conceptual framework by employing different theories. Although previous studies provide theoretical support for possible antecedents of eWOM communication, it is unclear whether those antecedents exist within the travellers' online communication context. Study I therefore employs a qualitative method to confirm those antecedents and to inform the conceptual framework. Moreover, qualitative data provide a more in-depth understanding regarding any possible new antecedent which may not be revealed through literature reviews. The scales adapted from existing theory are also revisited through qualitative data. Thereafter, Study II employs a structured questionnaire to generate quantitative data from target participants. Such quantitative data are used to test the relationship between all antecedents and the attitude towards and behavioural intention of, eWOM communication. By combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, this study therefore embraces the mixed-method approach. While the qualitative method is employed to facilitate the quantitative method within this research, the anticipated results of this study are dominated by quantitative data

collection and analysis. As a result, the study is argued to be that of positivistic research, and at the same time, the mixed-method employed is for data collection and analysis.

#### 6.4 Research Design

Research design is defined as a general plan of how research is conducted in answer to research questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Research design covers a wide-range of topics including purpose of research, time-frame, research procedures, sampling strategy, data collection design and data analysis methods (Cooper and Schindler, 2011; Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). On the other hand, many researchers specifically address the techniques of data collection and analysis methods when referring to research design (e.g. Bryman and Bell, 2011; Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). Regardless of covering various topics, the function of research design is “to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible” (De Vaus, 2001, p. 9). The research design in this thesis includes eight sections: types of study, time horizon, units of analysis, research medium, methods of data collection, sampling, developments of research instrument, and data analysis techniques. Figure 6.1 lists different sections of the research design and ways to develop the research, section by section. Each section addresses choice and justification of the current study respectively.

Figure 6.1 Research Design

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Type of Study          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploration</li> <li>• Description</li> <li>• Hypothesis-Testing</li> </ul>   |
| time Horizon           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-Sectional</li> <li>• Longitudinal</li> </ul>  |
| Units of Analysis      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals</li> <li>• Dyads</li> <li>• Groups / Organisations</li> </ul>   |
| Research Medium        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offline</li> <li>• Online</li> </ul>  |
| Data Collection        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative: Interview, Focus Group, Observation, etc.</li> <li>• Quantitative: Questionnaire, Secondary Data, etc</li> </ul> |
| Sampling               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probability / Non-Probability Sampling</li> <li>• Sample Size</li> </ul>  |
| Instrument Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scaling</li> <li>• Structured / Semi-Structured Guidance</li> </ul>   |
| Data Analysis          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative: Content Analysis, Grounded Theory, etc.</li> <li>• Quantitative: Regression, ANOVA, SEM, etc</li> </ul>          |

Source: adapted from Cooper and Schindler (2011); Saunders *et al.* (2012); Sekaran and Bougie (2013); Zikmund *et al.* (2010)

#### 6.4.1 Types of Study

Types of study are also known as nature of research design or types of research. Although different terminologies are introduced in research methods textbooks, three general classifications can be found; exploratory study, descriptive study and hypothesis-testing study (Cooper and Schindler, 2011; Pallant, 2010; Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). Table 6.2 lists characteristics of the study types.



Table 6.2 Definition of Type of Study

| Types of Study           | Definition (All quotations)  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Exploratory Study        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aiming to clarify ambiguous situations or discover ideas that may be potential business opportunities (Zikmund <i>et al.</i>, p. 54)</li> <li>• Also named as reporting study<br/>Providing a summation of data, often recasting data to achieve a deeper understanding or to generate statistics for comparison (Cooper and Schindler, p. 141).</li> <li>• Undertaken when not much is known about the situation at hand, or no information is available on how similar problems or research issues have been solved in the past (Sekaran and Bougie, p. 96)</li> <li>• Discovering what is happening and gain insights about a topic of interest (Saunders <i>et al.</i>, p. 171)</li> </ul>        |
| Descriptive Study        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describing characteristics of objects, people, groups, organizations or environments; tries to 'paint a picture' of a given situation (Zikmund <i>et al.</i>, p. 55)</li> <li>• Concerning with finding out who, what, where, when, or how much (Cooper and Schindler, p. 141)</li> <li>• Collecting data that describes the characteristics of persons, events or situations. Can be either quantitative or qualitative in nature (Sekaran and Bougie, p. 97)</li> <li>• Gaining an accurate profile of events, persons or situations (Saunders <i>et al.</i>, p. 171)</li> </ul>  |
| Hypothesis-Testing Study | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Named as causal research<br/>Investigating causal inferences to be made; seeks to identify cause-and-effect relationships (Zikmund <i>et al.</i>, p. 57)</li> <li>• Also named as causal-predictive<br/>The attempt to predict the effect of one variable by manipulating another variable while holding all other variables constant (Cooper and Schindler, p. 141).</li> <li>• Testing whether or not one variable causes another to change. Interested in delineating one or more factors that are causing the problem (Sekaran and Bougie, p. 98).</li> <li>• Also named as explanatory study<br/>Establishing causal relationships between variables (Saunders <i>et al.</i>, p. 172)</li> </ul> |

Source: Cooper and Schindler (2011); Saunders *et al.* (2012); Sekaran and Bougie (2013); Zikmund *et al.* (2010)

The objective of the current research is to understand antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication behaviour. eWOM is a relatively new phenomenon, receiving more attention since the advent of the internet and the popularity of electronic media. The antecedents of eWOM communication are firstly outlined from relevant literature reviews, thereafter verified by reality. Study I is

exploratory in the development and understanding of the antecedents of eWOM communication. The results from Study I will inform the conceptual framework and facilitate the scale development for Study II. Study II outlines the hypothesis-testing nature, in that the relationship between antecedents and the attitude towards intention in the use of eWOM communication media are investigated.

Sekaran and Bougie (2013) highlight two types of investigation methods: correlational and causal. The intention of correlational study is to define whether two or more variables are related to the research interests. The prediction of correlated variables can be made based upon the results of a correlational study (Shaughnessy *et al.*, 2012). The correlational study is conducted in a natural environment with the researchers having minimal interference into the research itself (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). The survey method is a common tool in which to generate data to enable the testing of a correlational relationship.

On the other hand, a causal study is conducted to identify a definitive cause-and-effect between the variables or between the variables and research interests. Shaughnessy *et al.* (2012) identify three important conditions in making a causal inference: covariation of events, a time-order relationship and the elimination of plausible alternative causes. When conducting a causal study, the research normally manipulates the independent variables to understand the effects of such manipulation on the dependent variables. Experimental design is commonly used when conducting a causal study (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). By designing different scenarios with a manipulation of independent variables, the results provide an understanding of how the changes of independent variables (causes) results in the changes to dependent variables (effects). Experimental design is also applied to ensure there are no plausible alternative causes and the time-order relationship between independent and dependent variables.

The current research proposes an integrative conceptual framework including more than one antecedent of eWOM communication. Based upon literature research outcomes, each antecedent can be regarded as having a correlation to the overall attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention

in the use eWOM communication media. The order of antecedent occurrence, overall attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media can be proposed based on the literature research results. None-the-less, this study has no intention to understand whether the changes to antecedents may or may not influence the changes to the overall attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Therefore, this study is classified as a correlational study.

#### 6.4.2 Time Horizon

Time horizon is regarded as an important consideration in determining research design (Cooper and Schindler, 2011; Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). Two classifications of time horizon are determined: cross-sectional and longitudinal study. Cross-sectional study posits that data be gathered at one point in time to represent a snapshot picture of a particular phenomenon (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). Such data collection can last a few minutes, days or months. On the contrary, longitudinal study is more of a 'diary perspective', to understand the research topic over an extended period (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). The main advantage of longitudinal study is to find changes or developments within research objects over time - at least two points in time.

This study aims to understand antecedents of eWOM communication behaviour, at a specific point in time. There is no intention to track either how those antecedents develop or if travellers' attitudes change over a period of time. Therefore, this study is identified as a cross-sectional study.

#### 6.4.3 Units of Analysis

Units of analysis "refers to the level of aggregation of data collected during the subsequent data analysis stage" (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013, p. 104). The importance in deciding the units of analysis is particularly relevant to research objectives, along with further influences on data collection methods, sample size and analysis methods. Units of analysis can be individuals, dyads, groups, organizations, industries, nations and cultures (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). In reference to the current study, the main research question addresses the

antecedents of eWOM communication by travellers. Data is generated from the perspective of an individual as to why s/he would like to engage in online communication. Therefore, the unit of analysis within this research is based upon individuals.

#### 6.4.4 Research Medium

The advent of internet and electronic media, increasingly used by people in everyday life, has generated a lot of research interest from both academics and practitioners alike. It also provides a new environment and more possibilities for conducting research (Hewson *et al.*, 2003; Vehovar and Manfreda, 2008). This research aims to discuss online communication by travellers, and also intends to conduct fieldwork through utilising the advantages of internet usage.

The main advantage of conducting online research is beneficial in relation to time and also of financial consideration (Hewson and Laurent, 2008). The internet can provide immediate response and facilitate the research process without funding support (Hewson *et al.*, 2003). Secondly, data are more easily generated through both primary and secondary data collection. Participants are more easily approached for primary data collection, even though they are based in dispersed locations or perhaps have sensitive issues (Hine, 2008). Regarding secondary data research, a huge amount of available internet data is indeed attractive and creates more possibilities for researchers. Thirdly, anonymity is of a unique feature being available to online research medium. Such advantage protects the privacy of participants which may enhance their willingness to participate in surveys (Hewson and Laurent, 2008).

Nonetheless, drawbacks should be considered before conducting online research. Firstly, because of the characteristics of the internet, ethical issues should be carefully taken into account (Eynon *et al.*, 2008). From the process of most online data collection, participants and researchers do not have physical contact (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The consent should be agreed before the research is conducted. The current study requires no participant Consent Form. Instead, participants are reminded that they have a right to withdraw their participation should they feel uncomfortable about any aspect of

the questions. Otherwise, the consent is automatically applied when s/he completes the whole participation process. Secondly, the potential sampling bias, which is inherent to the internet-user population, impacts on the reliability and validity of internet-generated data (Schmidt, 1997). This part will be discussed specifically within the research method section. Thirdly, controllability is another issue in relation to online data collection (Hewson and Laurent, 2008). When conducting online qualitative data collection, it is more difficult to notice the facial expressions or body language of participants because there is no physical interaction. Online quantitative data collection has less control by the researcher as to whether participants would like to complete the questionnaire or not. Suggested solutions regarding these issues will be discussed in more detail in the data collection section on respective methods.

#### 6.4.5 Data Collection

Mixed-method is applied to the current research. As stated in the philosophical stance section, Study I aims to collect qualitative data to inform the conceptual framework and the scales of each construct. Online focus groups are chosen as a method to collect qualitative data. Quantitative data, generated in Study II, validates the conceptual framework empirically. This data is generated through a web-based survey questionnaire. This section discusses the general concept of online focus groups, followed by the process of conducting the online focus group within this study. Thereafter, the general theory of the survey questionnaire is addressed, followed by the specific study process applied.

##### 6.4.5.1 Study I: Focus Group

Several qualitative methods can be employed in collection of data to inform conceptual framework and measurements. A focus group is defined as “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the research” (Morgan, 1996, p.130). This is not just a discussion within a group of people. A focus group should have a specific purpose, procedure and composition (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). The purpose of conducting a focus group is to generate information from a group of people with similar characteristics or experiences.

Focus groups are widely used in research nowadays (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). Traced back to the late 1930's, social scientists revealed their consideration in terms of the closed-end questionnaire result which may limit the choice of respondents and contain predetermination (Krueger and Casey, 2009). Therefore, the use of open-ended questions allows respondents to answer without boundaries or clues. A focus group forms a data collection method through the use of open-ended questions via someone who facilitates the discussion on a specific topic or purpose. A focus group is usually employed to screen concept or refine concepts (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010).

Compared to group interviews or other group discussions, focus groups should be conducted in a formal setting through a guided interviewing process, using formatted, structured questions (Morgan, 1996). As it is a group discussion, the simulations and interaction between respondents is very important in comparison to individual interviews. Group discussions can gather different perspectives at the same time; interaction can encourage participants to simulate and recall their memories and reflect back to their original thinking (Krueger and Casey, 2009; Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). On the contrary, an individual interview is comparatively difficult to arouse simulation as there are only two people involved in the activity - an interviewee and interviewer. Moreover, an important consideration when collecting data through focus groups is about time and monetary costs (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). Through group discussions, researchers can gather different opinions from several individuals at the same time. Comparatively, an in-depth interview may take more time and money to reach potential participants one after another.

The internet not only changes our daily lives but also provides a new platform to the researcher in conducting data collection (Vehovar and Manfreda, 2008). An online focus group is conducted through the online communication platform. Online focus groups can be viewed in two different ways: 'synchronous' and 'asynchronous' (Hanna, 2012; Rezabek, 2000; Sweet, 2001). A synchronous online focus group is a real-time discussion. It is conducted through an online platform such as a chat room or instant messaging (Stewart and Williams, 2005; Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). All participants, including a moderator, join the discussion simultaneously. The synchronous online discussion can take a

written form (e.g. chatting room) or vocal discussion (e.g. video conferencing) (Rezabek, 2000). A group interview, carried out in a vocal discussion is not included in this research context. The reason for this is because the vocal internet discussion is similar to a traditional discussion via the telephone or face-to-face. The vocal discussion does not contain features that belong to the online focus group only, for example, immediate transcript. The benefits and drawbacks of online focus groups are discussed below based on online focus group via written communication.

Asynchronous focus groups allow all participants to respond to the topic at different times (Sweet, 2001). The topic is listed on an electronic bulletin for a period of time allowing participants to express their thoughts (Stewart and Williams, 2005). Alternatively, e-mail is another tool for asynchronous discussion. Some opinions may take place at the same time, but others may reply one after the other (Stewart and Williams, 2005). An asynchronous focus group provides more time for participants to express more detailed responses. The moderator within the group is responsible for monitoring the whole process and ensuring that the responses are relevant (Gaiser, 2008). The moderator should also reply to any enquires raised by the participants through the whole process.

Several benefits should be considered in conducting an online focus group. Firstly, an online focus group is relatively inexpensive. All participants can join the discussion wherever they may be, which saves time and money in relation to travel (Gaiser, 2008). Secondly, without a geographical boundary, it can reach a broad scope of sampling (Stewart and Williams, 2005). Thirdly, it is easier to recruit more potential participants who are located in widely dispersed areas (Stewart and Williams, 2005). Additionally, less equipment is required during the discussion such as a meeting room, video recording and refreshments. Fourthly, sitting in front of a personal computer provides a familiar and comfortable environment for participants which encourages them to express more opinions (Sweet, 2001). As all participants are located in different countries but connected through the internet, some may join in during the middle of the discussion or leave the discussion earlier without disturbing others. Fifthly, the researcher can employ an assistant to monitor the

discussion unobtrusively, without distracting other participants. In addition, the transcript is available and ready to print immediately at the end of discussion (Fox *et al.*, 2007). As all participants express their opinions through typing, the record is automatically saved and can be analysed in a short space of time. Finally, anonymity is of obvious benefit (Montoya-Weiss *et al.*, 1998) to an online focus group as participants do not see each other physically. Individuals will perceive more freedom to express themselves (Rezabek, 2000). In this situation, participants have no concerns in exposing their real identity and may be more open to express their true feelings. This feature also breaks one limitation of a face-to-face focus group. In a traditional focus group, some participants may already know each other. They may lead the whole discussion or distract other participants from their full expression (Krueger and Casey, 2009). Through the online focus group, participants only see each other as a virtual name. It is more difficult to identify someone whether you know the other participants or not. All participants can voice their opinion equally.

There are however, disadvantages to be considered. Firstly, an online focus group saves travel cost, time and equipment costs, but it implies that each participant has to have their own computer and internet access. From this point of view, those people who do not have a computer or cannot access the internet are excluded from the research sampling pool (Gaiser, 2008; Rezabek, 2000). Also, participating in an online focus group requires computer ability, e.g. typing and familiarity of the programme. Respondents may not be willing to join an online discussion because of a technology fear (Rezabek, 2000). On the other hand, a good typing skill is required as a moderator. Through the online group discussion, the moderator may face 6-8 participants who may ask questions at the same time. Therefore, the moderator should have good typing skills to reply to all enquiries in a short time period. Secondly, the no-show rate of an online focus group is normally higher than that of a traditional focus group (Schneider *et al.*, 2002). Because there is no in-person contact, participants feel less guilt and pressure, even if s/he does not appear in the discussion, (Gaiser, 2008). Some people will join in at the beginning but disappear in the middle of the discussion without notification. This problem can be caused by internet accessibility or the participant intentionally withdrawing



from the discussion. No-show or disappearing problems influence the performance of online focus groups. Thirdly, online security is another issue for an online focus group (Gaiser, 2008). All data can be retrieved by a stranger who does not join the group discussion. In an online environment, an absolute 'private' conversation can hardly happen. Controllability can be another issue affecting an online focus group (Gaiser, 2008). In a physical situation, it is easier for a moderator to control or stop any expression by participants. In an online environment, guidance from a moderator may be ignored or skipped. If one opinion raises interest from other participants, the discussion can be dominated by that participant and the direction of the discussion may differ from the original topic.

The reason for choosing a focus group rather than other methods mainly depends on the purpose of Study I. The conceptual framework is developed and measurements are adapted from literature reviews. As there is a lack of research that investigates antecedents of eWOM in the tourism industry, the purpose of Study I is to inform the conceptual framework and measurements. Therefore, opinions from travellers who have online communication experience are most suitable in providing valid information. In-depth interviews or focus groups are two possible ways to generate first-hand information from potential participants. Focus groups can generate larger amounts of data in a shorter period of time in comparison to in-depth interviews, providing an efficient way to collect data. The second purpose of Study I is to identify whether there is any possible antecedents being ignored from the literature review. Interaction between focus group participants can stimulate similar or different opinions in seeking out agreements or disagreements. Such interaction can not only help to confirm the proposed conceptual framework, but also identify if other antecedents emerge. Conducting an online focus group not only enjoys the benefits of the internet, but also echoes the essence of this research topic: *online consumer behaviour*.

#### 6.4.5.2 Process of Conducting Online Focus Group

The online focus group discussed in this study refers to the synchronous focus group. The whole discussion process requires typing by all participants and a moderator as a way to communicate with each other. Skype was chosen as

the intermediate platform for the online focus groups, given cost and familiarity considerations (Hanna, 2012; Myhill *et al.*, 2009). Skype is a free form of communication software. It is familiar to many people who perceive less tension or fear when joining an online focus group. Skype also provides a closed discussion environment. Individuals join the group discussion through invitation. The record can be deleted after the discussion. These settings reduce the concerns of internet security. Participants are assigned a username and password which is only used for this particular online focus group. They are required not to share personal details in the discussion in order to protect their privacy and anonymity.

An e-mail invitation is sent out to recruit potential participants. The first e-mail invitation is released to all contacts in the e-mail address book of the researcher and from there will further snowball. Any individuals interested in this topic are asked to reply back to confirm their time of attendance. Participation times for the three focus groups were proposed on weekdays but at different times: 12:30 on Friday, 19.00 on Monday and 16:00 on Thursday. The time arrangements allow individuals who live in different places to participate without consideration of time differences (Gaiser, 2008).

Bearing in mind the benefits of online focus groups, the strategy of handling the disadvantages should be prepared. The first concern is that participants should have the facilities such as computer and internet access to participate in an online focus group (Rezabek, 2000). In this study, all participants are required to have relevant experience of eWOM communication, in that they should have equipment to communicate online. Those people who do not have equipment, such as computer and internet, are less likely to express their experience online and are not qualified to become a participant. Therefore, people willing to participate in the online focus group are expected to have a computer and internet access. The second drawback of the online focus group is the no-show rate of participants (Schneider *et al.*, 2002). Each participant is required to provide some form of private connection information purely for reminder purposes. The researcher can send a gentle reminder should participants not present themselves or drop off during the discussion. Given that some participants may be late or leave the discussion early, participants

are required to attend at least 90% of discussion time to ensure the validity of data quality. As for internet security consideration, Skype, chosen as a medium to conduct the online focus groups, should minimise this concern (Hanna, 2012). As previously explained, all participants are invited to join the discussion through an allocated username and password. The username and password are changed after the discussion is completed. The conversation is deleted immediately after recording the information. Finally, an assistant is employed to monitor the whole process of discussion. All participants are informed before officially starting the online discussion. The main duty of an assistant is to remind the moderator if any enquiry from participants is ignored, if all questions are asked, or if any expression is improper. The assistant is not allowed to express any opinion during the online discussion.

#### 6.4.5.3 Study II: Structured Questionnaire

In Study II the quantitative method is employed in the collection of primary data and examines the conceptual framework empirically. An integrative conceptual model and proposed hypotheses are thereafter developed based upon literature research, further developed using the results of Study I. Specific questions and measures are asked to answer research questions. A questionnaire is suitable in generating quantitative data from a large amount of participants. Such data can provide sufficient information to verify the significance of relationships within the model. Compared to qualitative methods, quantitative data can be analysed and generalised to other similar populations. Therefore, the questionnaire is the chosen method within Study II.

“A questionnaire is a pre-formulated written set of questions to which respondents record their answers, usually within rather closely defined alternatives” (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010, p. 197). It is ubiquitous in both academic and industry research, and regarded as a cost-saving and efficient method to generate data in a short period of time (Cooper and Schindler, 2011). Respondents should answer all questions by themselves, also named as a self-completion questionnaire or self-administrative questionnaire (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The researcher should not be able to give any further instruction or explanation after the questionnaire has been distributed.

Several advantages can be identified via a questionnaire as a method of conducting research. Firstly, the questionnaire can be distributed to many potential respondents at the same time. It therefore allows the researcher to receive a large number of responses in a short period of time (Simmons, 2008). Secondly, it is easier to keep participants anonymous. Some people have concerns regarding identity exposure when participating in research (Cooper and Schindler, 2011). By using the self-administrative questionnaire as a method, participants have no physical contact with the researcher. This avoids any exposure to the real identity of the participant. Thirdly, participants can control their own answering process (Cooper and Schindler, 2011). They can have more time to think about questions if they need to, or they can decide the time and the place that they would like to answer the questionnaire. Participants therefore feel less anxiety when taking part in the questionnaire.

The same as all methods, some disadvantages of the questionnaire should be taken into account. Firstly, the length of the questionnaire should be limited (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). The longer the questionnaire, the fewer participants are willing to complete. Secondly, the wording in a questionnaire should not be complex or ambiguous (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). As participants receive no further instruction or explanation during the answering process, they are more likely to quit the questionnaire if they cannot understand the questions clearly by themselves. Thirdly, the respondent rate is not controllable (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Simmons, 2008). Both the above-mentioned points, the length and wording of the questionnaire, may lower respondent rates of the self-completion questionnaire. Participants sometimes opt-out during the process without any specific reason. Fourthly, even though the questionnaire allows access to a large number of participants at the same time, access to the right targets and accuracy of responses are more important than the number of responses.

A self-administrative questionnaire is conventionally distributed by post or fax, or delivered in person. This distributive method requires an accurate list or contact list of participants (Cooper and Schindler, 2011). On one hand, a questionnaire can be sent with a cover letter. Such cover letters include accurate personal information which may increase perceived responses by

participants. Thus, participants may be more willing to fill in the questionnaire. In addition, the pre-selected procedure can help limit focus on more representative samples. On the other hand, access may become an issue for a researcher to get in touch with potential participants. This is one of the drawbacks of questionnaire techniques. The internet breaks the geographical boundaries to provide an alternative platform in reaching participants more broadly.

Nowadays, researchers utilise the internet as a tool for data generation (Hewson and Laurent, 2008). Researchers can not only search more efficiently and effectively for information on the web, but can also distribute questionnaires online (Simmons, 2008; Vehovar and Manfreda, 2008). The questionnaire can be presented in an electronic format, such as a word or PDF document (Tuten *et al.*, 2002). The electronic document can be sent as an attachment to potential participants. Participants can decide to complete the questionnaire in the electronic format and return it, or print out and post the completed questionnaire back to a researcher. Alternatively, some websites such as Survey Monkey or Google document, provide a platform to develop a web-based questionnaire (Tuten *et al.*, 2002). These websites enables researchers to develop and present their questionnaire. A direct questionnaire link is assigned and is easy to send to participants. With the rise of electronic media popularity, several websites provide multiple ways of data collection. For example, researchers can embed information on a Facebook wall or Twitter to attract more participants.

The web-based questionnaire embraces all advantages of conventional questionnaires. Firstly, an online questionnaire is relatively inexpensive. A direct e-mail with an attachment or a link can be sent to all participants saving photocopy and postage costs (Bandilla, 2002). In addition, several websites providing web-based questionnaire development or software for questionnaire layout design charge very little, or even come free (Hewson and Laurent, 2008). Secondly, the internet provides almost limitless geographical and time boundaries (Fricker, 2008; Rhodes *et al.*, 2003). Once a participant has the facility to surf online and the link to access the questionnaire, s/he can participate in the potential sampling of online questionnaires. Thirdly,

anonymity is enhanced through the online questionnaire rather than the conventional one. A conventional questionnaire requires a list of potential participants, giving researchers the opportunity to identify a specific respondent. The internet and website serve as a mechanism to minimise such a consideration. Because of respondent anonymity, the online questionnaire gains more chance in reaching the 'hidden population' based upon a sensitive research topic, such as a criminal or medical issue (Rhodes *et al.*, 2003). One dedicated benefit of a web-based questionnaire is data entry (Tuten *et al.*, 2002). Most web-based questionnaire sites provide a convert function to export collected data into statistical software such as Excel or SPSS. This function saves much time and provides data entry accuracy for researchers.

Disadvantages should be a concern in the use of online questionnaires. Firstly, security of online data is an important issue for researchers to consider (Best and Krueger, 2008). The online database of web-based questionnaires is easier to access by other people or third parties. In addition, the electronic questionnaires attached via e-mail are easily forwarded and the confidentiality of data is broken. Secondly, the response rate is even lower than the conventional questionnaire (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Tuten *et al.*, 2002). Several different factors affect the willingness of participants to respond. Reasons for this could be the time of data collection, the questionnaire layout, sampling frame, etc. The response rate is relatively lower compared to the mail survey when confirming data collection time, use of the same questionnaire and adjustment to errors in the sampling framework (Kwak and Radler, 2002). They also find that the follow-up reminder questionnaire has less impact on a web survey. Moreover, a meta-analysis of 39 studies between 1998-2006 comparing web and mail surveys concludes the average response rate of 34% applied to the web survey and 45% to the paper survey, respectively (Shih and Fan, 2008). Thirdly, sampling representativeness or sampling bias creates some argument through the use of online questionnaires (Fricker, 2008; Kwak and Radler, 2002). Although internet questionnaires can reach more participants, those who have no computer equipment or internet access become automatically excluded from the pool of research numbers. Additionally, researchers have less control over participants who may repeatedly complete the questionnaire (Fricker, 2008). Provision of an

incentive can be an effective way to encourage individuals to participate in the questionnaire. That may however, attract participants for the wrong reasons, given they would only be interested in the incentive.

This study aims to validate the conceptual framework and test the hypotheses between constructs. A structured questionnaire is a suitable technique to employ when the researcher knows exactly what is required and how to measure the variables of interest (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). In addition, a questionnaire is more suitable for descriptive or explanatory research (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). The purpose of Study II is to identify whether the proposed antecedents influence traveller's attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. All antecedents and their relationships are proposed based on the literature research, with measures adapted from previous studies. The web-based questionnaire is therefore appropriate to employ as a technique for data collection. One of the main reasons for this is that the standardised format provided by the website is easier for the participants to access. Another reason is that a web-based questionnaire requires less effort from participants. Once participants complete the questionnaire, the answers are automatically saved onto the database. Linked to the popularity of electronic media, it is easy to disseminate the online survey invitation to the social networks of researchers.

#### 6.4.5.4 Process of Conducting Web-Based Questionnaire

The measures in the web-based questionnaire was developed upon literature research outcomes and amended by the results of the online focus groups. Before officially launching the questionnaire, pilot tests were carried out to make sure the operation and appearance of the web-based questionnaire were correct. The online survey link was posted on several electronic media and travel sites such as Facebook, blogs. E-mail invitations were also sent to the researcher's network.

The handling strategies for questionnaire disadvantages were considered and addressed below. The security issue is always of importance for all online research. This study applied Survey Monkey as the platform in developing the web-based questionnaire. Survey Monkey is a well-known web-based

interface for online questionnaire development. It provides an enhanced security (SSL) system to protect data. In addition, Survey Monkey is more popular and reliable for participants who have less concerns regarding data storage. Additionally, Survey Monkey enables different way for collecting data. For example, the link of the questionnaire can be sent as e-mail to potential participants, embed on any website or blog, or share on the Facebook wall with friends. Multiple methods to access different potential participants can help to generate more responses of online survey. Full research information and instructions to complete the questionnaire were provided on the first page. This action was intended to attract the most representative samplings.

#### 6.4.6 Sampling

Ideally, a researcher should contact everyone who may influence the research topic in generating the most information to satisfy the research objective. This procedure is termed as a 'census'. However, practically, to reach a broad population and survey every unit seems an impossible achievement (Baker, 2002; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). This is the reason why all researchers should complete the 'sampling'. This can help estimate or infer the real characteristics of the entire population. A sample is "a subset, or some part, of a large population" whereas population refers "any complete group of entities that share some common set of characteristics" (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010, p. 387). Sampling is to select those representable target participants whose opinion can contribute to the research questions and objectives (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). Sampling selection is important because it can affect, represent and generalise the data results. In other words, sampling design directly leads to the success or failure of the research.

Sampling techniques are broadly divided into two types: probability and non-probability sampling (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). Within the probability sampling, the population should be known (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). Any individual can be randomly chosen within the population and his / her contribution is equal to any other unit within the population. An appropriate sampling technique (e.g. simple, systematic, stratified and cluster sampling techniques) can be decided according to the research objectives and aims (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). On the contrary, when the population is unknown or



an element within the population cannot be chosen randomly, a non-probability sampling is applied. Another set of techniques (e.g. quota, purposive, volunteer, haphazard) could be considered for data collection. The most appropriate sampling should be selected through various considerations, such as the representativeness, research type, costs and the controllability of samples (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Table 6.3 shows definition, advantages and concerns of each sampling technique.

Table 6.3 Sampling Techniques

| Definition   | Advantages   | Concerns  |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Probability Sampling</b>  |  |   |
| <b>Simple random</b>   |  |   |
| All elements in the population have equal chance to be selected  | High representativeness and generalisability; easy to analyse and compute error                  | The population should be known; uneconomical to achieve                 |
| <b>Systematic</b>  |  |   |
| Every $n^{\text{th}}$ element in the population is chosen  | Simple to draw sample; moderate cost   | The sample frame is required; possible systematic biases                |
| <b>Stratified</b>  |  |   |
| Random sample from identifiable groups (strata), subgroups, etc.                                       | Most efficient among all probability designs   | High cost; the "strata" should be meaningful                            |
| <b>Cluster</b>   |  |   |
| Random samples of successive clusters of subjects (e.g., by institution) until small groups are chosen | Low cost, particularly in the geographic clusters; only need individuals in the selected cluster | Less reliability and efficient among the probability sampling technique |
| <b>Non-Probability Sampling</b>  |  |   |
| <b>Quota</b>   |  |   |
| Select individuals as they come to fill a quota by characteristics proportional to populations         | Do not require the list of population; very useful for minority participation                    | Lower generalisability; Potential bias of defining classification       |
| <b>Snowball</b>  |  |   |
| More participants are referred by the initial participants who may be introduced by other participants | Useful for investigating in a sensitive topic or unique population                               | High bias because of the independence of sampling                       |
| <b>Judgment</b>  |  |   |
| Subjects are selected by an expertise  | Samples fulfil some specific requirements  | Lower / questionable generalisability;                                  |
| <b>Volunteer</b>   |  |   |
| Asking for volunteers, or approaching the easily accessible subjects                                   | Very low cost; easier way to get sufficient data   | Lower generalisability  |

Source: adapted from Black (1999); Sekaran and Bougie (2013); Zikmund *et al.* (2010)

Study I and Study II employ a different data collection method. Different sampling techniques are required to satisfy the purpose of each study. Choices and justifications of the sampling techniques are discussed respectively shortly. Sample size is also an important concern across every technique because “a reliable and valid sample should enable to generalize the findings from the sample to the population under investigation” (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010, p. 287). The proposed sample size of each study is also determined in the following section.

#### 6.4.6.1 Sampling Technique for Online Focus Group

The purpose of the online focus group is to generate different opinions regarding the antecedents of eWOM, and further validate the conceptual framework. Thus, the participants should have eWOM publication experience whereby they recall their memories and why they published eWOM online. As the sample should have eWOM communication experience, judgement sampling was chosen as the sampling method at this stage. Judgement sampling, one type of purposive sampling, “is a nonprobability sampling technique in which an experienced individual selects the sample based on his or her judgement about appropriate characteristics required of the sample member” (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010, p. 396). By using judgemental sampling, the researcher can select samples to meet specific criteria in order to generate the most powerful information. The criteria are based upon the knowledge of the researcher regarding the topic, the literature review and the individuals who can contribute most to the study (Marshall, 1996). As a non-probability sampling method, judgement can receive a lot of criticism regarding the representative consideration. However, it is commonly used in research because the purposeful samples enable provision of the most relevant information (Marshall, 1996). The samples should have online communication experience in that they can contribute their knowledge and share their experiences through the online focus group. Therefore, judgement sampling is applied as a sampling method at this stage.

Typically, the size of a focus group can vary from four to twelve people (Krueger and Casey, 2009). A small focus group, composed of four or five people is easier to manage and control. It allows each participant the

opportunity to share their thoughts and it is easier to find a place to accommodate the discussion. Yet, the diversity of information from a small group is a consideration when group size is small. A large focus group, on the other hand, enables generation of various perspectives via a diversity of participants. However, when the number of participants is more than ten, the focus group may be fragmented as there are too many people wanting to talk. They may either be stopped by others or cannot find an opportunity to talk. Thus, in most research projects, the recommended focus group size is five to eight participants with a moderator (Krueger and Casey, 2009). The same as a traditional focus group, an online focus group is composed of six to eight participants and a moderator.

Krueger and Casey (2009) determine that three or four groups are an adequate number. Morgan (1998) agrees that, in most projects, three to five focus groups can produce enough diverse information. Researchers can check the saturation of information from focus groups carried out. Three focus groups were conducted to generate qualitative data for Study I. It is more manageable to find consistency of information across three focus group discussions. Should any diversity be found within any two focus group discussions, the third group can provide further information to confirm the differences or consistency. Once there is a considerable difference of opinions or experiences from three focus groups, more groups may be conducted to generate further information for clarification of facts.

In Study I, three focus groups were arranged, with each group recruiting six to eight participants. A small group may have less interaction and representation, but it was easier to accommodate and facilitate all participants, enabling them to express their own opinions. Initially, 24 participants were confirmed as participants, being allocated into three different groups respectively.

E-mail invitations were sent out to recruit potential participants. The first e-mail invitation was released to all contacts in the e-mail address book of the researcher and it further snowballed out. Any individual interested in this topic was asked to reply back to confirm their time of attendance. Full information was provided and explained via the e-mail. Through e-mail communication, the participants confirmed that they had an experience of eWOM publication.

Thereafter, they confirmed their availability of participation at different time slots offered. Online focus groups were formed on a first-come-first-served basis. Once the 24 places were allocated, a note was sent to late comers as an appreciation of their interest.

#### 6.4.6.2 Sampling Technique for Web-based Questionnaire

Web-based questionnaires were decided as the method for quantitative data collection. Census is the best way to generate data from the population, in that full information is sufficient in providing accurate answers to the research questions. This is not feasible for this research as the population engaging in online communication regarding their travel experiences are unknown. The sample frame was therefore non-probability sampling was selected.

An online link of the web-based questionnaire was sent to the social network contacts of the researcher and posted to online travel forums to reach more potential respondents. In addition, all participants receiving an e-mail invitation or having completed the questionnaire were encouraged to forward the online survey link to their own social networks. This procedure is defined as volunteer sampling (Saunders *et al.*, 2012) with two different sub-types: snowball sampling and self-selection sampling. Volunteer sampling strategy is whereby participants volunteer to take part in the research. They are not chosen or required to participate. Snowball sampling strategy is commonly used when there are challenges to reach or access desirable samples (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Within this research, the population or desirable samples are difficult to identify. Participants who received an invitation or participated in the questionnaire were gently asked to circulate the online survey. The purpose of this sampling process was to reach more potential participants. Another technique, self-selection sampling, was also employed. Individuals viewing the post on the forum and becoming interested in participation were made more than welcome to take part in the questionnaire. This mirrors the behaviour most people would have when deciding to engage in eWOM communication.

An important issue relating to sampling technique is the sample size. Both sampling design and sample size may influence generalisation of the results (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). Quantitative sampling data requires five factors

to specify sample size including variance, heterogeneity, the population, magnitude of acceptable error and confidence level (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). Sekaran and Bougie (2013) also indicated confidence interval, confidence level, variability of the population, cost and time constraint and size of the population itself in influencing the appropriate numbers of sample sizes.

Roscoe (1975) simply proposes that an appropriate sample size for the majority of research is between 30 and 500. If samples can be further divided into sub-samples, a minimum sample size for each group should be more than 30. Several statistical techniques are applied with an assumption of normal distribution of data patterns. According to central limit theorem, "as the sample size increases, the distribution of the mean of a random sample taken from practically any population approaches a normal distribution" (Zikmund *et al.*, 2010, p. 426). This is the reason for the Roscoe (1975) proposition that the minimum required sample size should be 30 or above. Kimmel and Kitchen (2013), however, asserts that the appropriate sample size of valid sampling is 25. Although there are different arguments about the minimum sample size, this research takes the more general concept of central limit theorem. The minimum sample size for this study should be at least 30. In addition, for multivariate research, some researchers argues that the minimum required sample size should be 200 (MacCallum *et al.*, 1996; Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). Another viewpoint declares that "the sample size should be several times (perfectly 10 or more times) as large as the number of variables" (Roscoe, 1975, p. 184). Kline (2011) also suggests that the necessary sample size be estimated by the number of parameters when using structural equation modelling.

Different rules are proposed by different researchers under different analysis techniques (e.g. MacCallum *et al.*, 1996; Roscoe, 1975). This study proposes a conceptual framework consisting of 19 hypotheses. Multi-variances analysis is employed to examine the hypotheses empirically. Study II follows the guidance rules in estimation of sample size which are set at a minimum of 200, and preferred at 500 (Kline, 2011; MacCallum *et al.*, 1996).

#### 6.4.7 Research Instruments

Research instrument for the focus groups refer to the discussion guide which helps to facilitate the group discussions (Krueger and Casey, 2009). This discussion guide composes a list of opened-end questions or statements requesting responses in relation to the perception of eWOM communication across the three antecedents. The questions and measures used in the questionnaire were adapted upon previous studies, and further amended upon the online focus group outcomes. This section provides the development process and justification of the discussion guide of online focus group and measures used in the questionnaire.

##### 6.4.7.1 Discussion Guide of Online Focus Group

The discussion guide of the online focus group was developed based upon the study aims and conceptual framework (Krueger and Casey, 2009). In this study, the discussion guide comprises of four parts. Initially, a general question was proposed regarding eWOM behaviour, respectively addressing the four different antecedents. Questions were developed upon the previous research on motivation in relation to eWOM communication (e.g. Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Sundaram *et al.*, 1998). The discussion guide of online focus group was mailed to all confirmed participants outlining how the online focus group would be operated (Krueger and Casey, 2009).

The first part of the discussion guide is to allow all participants to become familiar with eWOM communication. Questions regarding their general usage behaviour were introduced. Secondly, questions in relation to electronic media for online communication were put forward. The set of questions were based around the preference of using a particular type of platform and their reasons associated with the said platform. The aims of these questions were to understand the reasons for selecting electronic media and for the adoption of electronic media as an environment as their eWOM communication. Thirdly, questions were put forward to explore personal motivation and inner attitude towards eWOM communication of participants. This part involved two constructs within the conceptual framework: motivation for eWOM communication and the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. The

last discussion was in regard to peer pressure. Three questions led participants to understand whether their peer group were applying eWOM communication and if such behaviour did or did not influence their own behaviour. Table 6.4 shows the full discussion guide in relation to the online focus groups.



Table 6.4 The Discussion Guide of Online Focus Group

**Part I. General question about usage habit**

1. Which social media do you use on a regular basis? e.g. e-mail, Skype, Facebook, Youtube, blogs, online forum websites, twitter, etc.
2. How much time do you usually spend on eWOM publishing?
3. Please write some sentences to describe what is "eWOM expression"?

**Part II. About eWOM platform**

4. Which are the most frequent online communication platforms that you use to publish eWOM, please list three platforms?
5. Why do you use these particular online communication platforms?
6. Is there any particular online communication platform you don't like to use? Why?  
Or any particular device you had used before but have stopped using. Why?
7. Compared to traditional communication (e.g. face-to-face talk), which means of communication do you prefer? Why? Please compare and tell the differences

**Part III. About the overall Attitude towards eWOM**

8. How do you feel "publishing online opinions" in your daily life?
9. In your opinion, what are the most benefits and drawbacks from the eWOM expression?
10. Initial publication vs. Interactive replies  
Base on your proactive publication, what makes you initiate your behaviour?  
Base on your interactive expression, what makes you reply to opinions of others?
11. In which particular circumstance would you definitely like to share with others online?
12. Please identify the reason for publishing your opinion online
13. Please use some words to describe your feelings when expressing eWOM
14. How do you evaluate eWOM? Is it useful? valuable? helpful? Please give some examples to explain

**Part IV. About Peer Pressure**

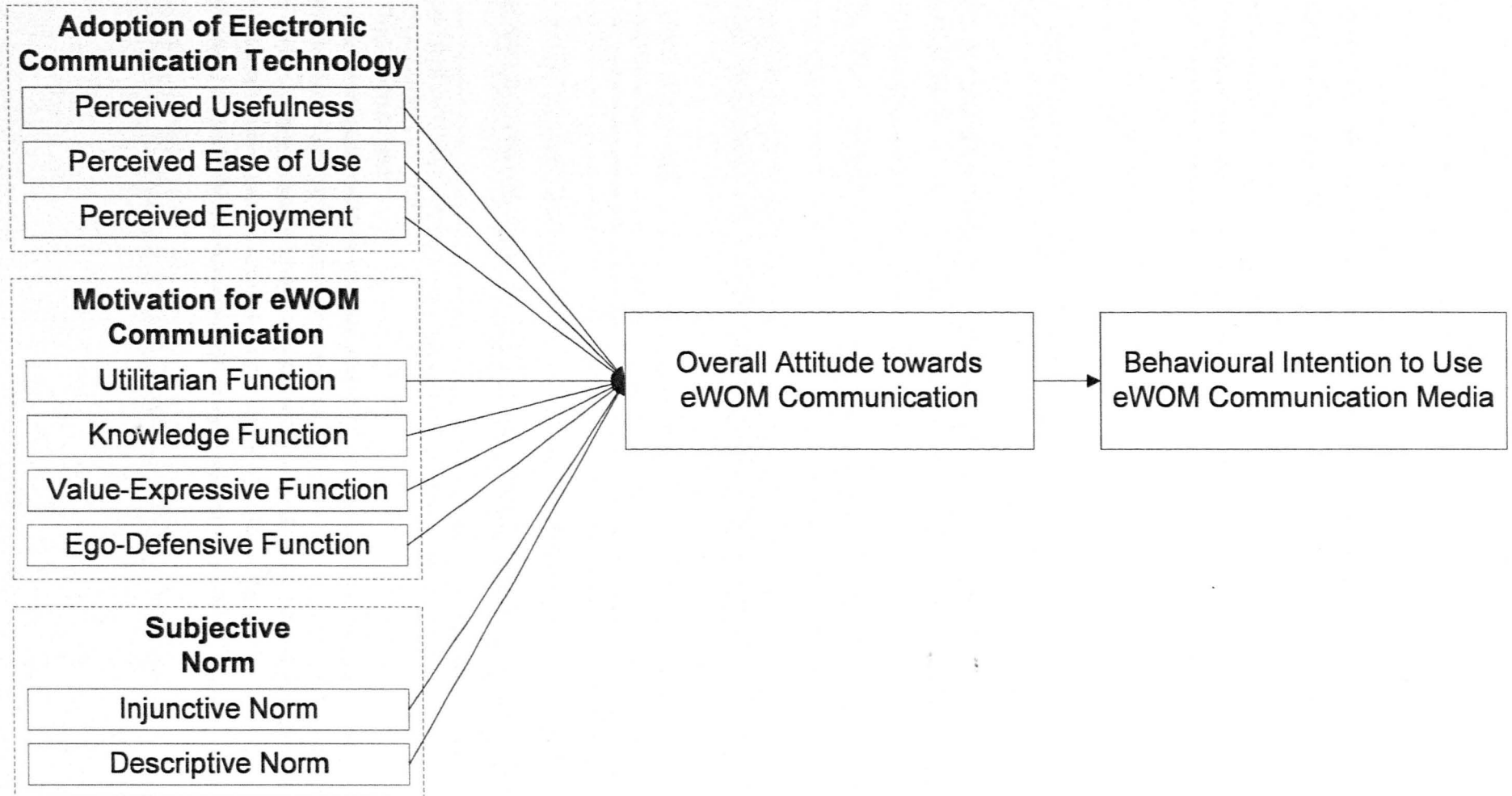
15. Among the most popular social media you are using at the moment, what was the initial trigger of your usage?
16. Among the most popular social media you are using at the moment, did anyone suggest you use it? Or even force you to use it?
17. Will you ask your friends/relatives/colleagues to join social media with you?

#### 6.4.7.2 Questions and Measures in Web-Based Questionnaire

The study questionnaire begins with a screening question to filter whether the participant has online communication experience or not. Individuals with any eWOM communication experience will be asked their usage experience, adoption of electronic media, motivation for eWOM communication, influences from their peer group, overall attitude and their future behaviour of eWOM communication. By the end of the questionnaire, demographic questions have been asked.

The proposed conceptual framework is made up of five constructs of which contain different dimensions. These are shown in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2 Conceptual Framework



All constructs are formed from the literature review results, the scales being developed and examined within a different context. Table 6.5 shows the underpinning theories and adaption of scales to each construct. All scales are required amendments to fit into online communication.

Table 6.5 Underpinning Theories and Sources of Measures of Constructs

| Construct   | Underpinning Theory                      | Source of Scale Adaption   |
|---|--|--|
| • Adaption of Electronic Communication Technology       | Davis (1989); Davis <i>et al.</i> (1992) | Davis (1989); Davis <i>et al.</i> (1992)   |
| • Motivation for eWOM Communication                     | Katz (1960)                              | Clary <i>et al.</i> (1998); Daugherty <i>et al.</i> (2008); Daugherty <i>et al.</i> (2005) |
| • Subjective Norm                                       | Ajzen (1991); Fishbein and Ajzen (1975)  | Manning (2009)   |
| • Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication           | Ajzen (1991); Fishbein and Ajzen (1975)  | Ajzen (1991)   |
| • Behavioural Intention to Use eWOM Communication Media | Ajzen (1991); Fishbein and Ajzen (1975)  | Ajzen (1991)   |

The justifications in choice of scales were either originality or relevance. The Adoption of Electronic Media Communication is adopted from TAM which was proposed by Davis in 1989. Three dimensions are developed by Davis and examined by himself (Davis, 1989; Davis *et al.*, 1992) and other researchers within different contexts (Lai and Li, 2005; Lu *et al.*, 2009; Porter and Donthu, 2006; Shih, 2004). The Motivations for eWOM Communication are based on Katz' functional theory of attitude (Katz, 1960). However, the article does not provide any scale to process quantitative measurement. More recent studies (e.g. Daugherty *et al.*, 2008; Daugherty *et al.*, 2005) not only employ Katz's model, but also develop a set of scales to measure online panel participation. Subjective Norm is widely discussed in TRA and TPB (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). However, in both the TRA and TPB model, only injunctive norm is addressed which affects the influence of subjective norm on the attitude or behaviour of individuals. Manning (2011) argues that a descriptive

norm should play an important role when discussing the influence of subjective norm. This research therefore adapted the scales from Manning (2011) and Park and Smith (2007) instead of TRA or TPB. On the contrary, TRA and TPB are the most popular models within the area of attitude-behaviour research. The overall attitude and behavioural intention measures are thus adapted from TRA and TPB. Statements of each construct are shown in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6 Statements of Six Focal Constructs

**Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology**

(1) Strongly Disagree – (7) Strongly Agree

**Perceived Usefulness**

- Using electronic media improves my communication ability
- Using electronic media enables me to communicate more quickly
- Using electronic media enhances my effectiveness in communication
- Using electronic media would make it easier to communicate with others
- I would find electronic media useful in my communication

**Perceived Ease of Use**

- Learning to use electronic media to communicate would be easy for me
- My communication through electronic media would be clear and understandable
- I would find electronic media to be flexible to use in terms of communication
- It would be easy for me to become skilful at using electronic media to communicate
- I would find electronic media easy to use

**Perceived Enjoyment**

- I find using electronic media to communicate is enjoyable
- The actual process of using electronic media to communicate is pleasant
- I have fun using electronic media to communicate

**Motivation for eWOM Communication**

(1) Strongly Disagree – (7) Strongly Agree

**Utilitarian Function**

- eWOM communication is as my profession
- eWOM communication enables me to earn extra income
- eWOM communication enables me to have non-financial benefits (e.g. free meal)
- eWOM communication enables me to get financial compensation

**Knowledge Function**

- eWOM communication allows me to learn new things
- eWOM communication enables me to gain a new perspective on things
- eWOM communication allows me to obtain new knowledge
- eWOM communication allows me to deepen my perspectives on my knowledge

**Ego-Defensive Function**

- eWOM communication helps me to be released from bad feelings
- eWOM communication helps me work through my own personal problems
- eWOM communication is a good escape from my own troubles
- eWOM communication makes me feel important
- eWOM communication increases my self-esteem
- eWOM communication makes me feel needed
- eWOM communication makes me feel better about myself

**Value-Expressive Function**

- eWOM communication allows me to express my moral values
- eWOM communication represents my most cherished values
- eWOM communication is my moral obligation
- eWOM communication reflects my moral values

Table 5.6 Statements of Six Focal Constructs (Continued)

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**Subjective Norm**

(1) Strongly Disagree – (7) Strongly Agree

**Injunctive Norm**

- eWOM communication is recommended by my peer group
- eWOM communication is suggested by my peer group
- eWOM communication is my obligation because of peer pressure

**Descriptive Norm**

- eWOM communication is a fashion in my peer group
- eWOM communication is trendy among my friends
- eWOM communication is a common behaviour in my peer group

**Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication**

A pair of adjectives from (-3) – (+3)

My attitude towards eWOM communication is.....

- Negative / Positive
- Pleasant / Unpleasant
- Enjoyable / Not Enjoyable
- Bad / Good

**Behavioural Intention to Use eWOM Communication Media**

(1) Very Unlikely – (7) Very Likely

- It is likely that I will publish eWOM about my travel experience in the next 12 months
  - I would recommend others to publish their eWOM about their travel experience
- 

All questions including screening questions, behaviour questions and statements for constructs are further refined dependent upon the online focus group results. After amending the questionnaire, the implementation of a pilot study to test reliability and validity was applied to ensure the questionnaire quality and accuracy of collected data. The amendment process will be illustrated in the Chapter Six covering the analysis of online focus groups, along with analysis of the pilot study.

#### 6.4.8 Data Analysis

Once data is generated, it should be coded, interpreted, and analysed according to scientific procedures to find the answer to research questions (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). Content analysis was chosen to analyse data from the online focus group, while structural equation modelling was employed in testing the conceptual framework and proposed hypotheses. The justification of each analysis method and advantage / disadvantage of each is discussed in the following section respectively.

#### 6.4.8.1 Analysis Methods for Qualitative Data

Study I was conducted through the online focus groups from which qualitative data was generated. The purpose of Study I is to inform the conceptual framework, re-define the constructs, and provide amended suggestions for instruments to be used within the structured questionnaire. The analysis was divided into two sections being demographic analysis and content analysis.

##### 6.4.8.1.1 Demographic Analysis

Demographic analysis is basic but important in the analysis of most research. It provides a general picture of the portfolio of participants. Descriptive analyses of gender, age, educational background, place of residence and nationality are produced for each participant.

##### 6.4.8.1.2 Content Analysis

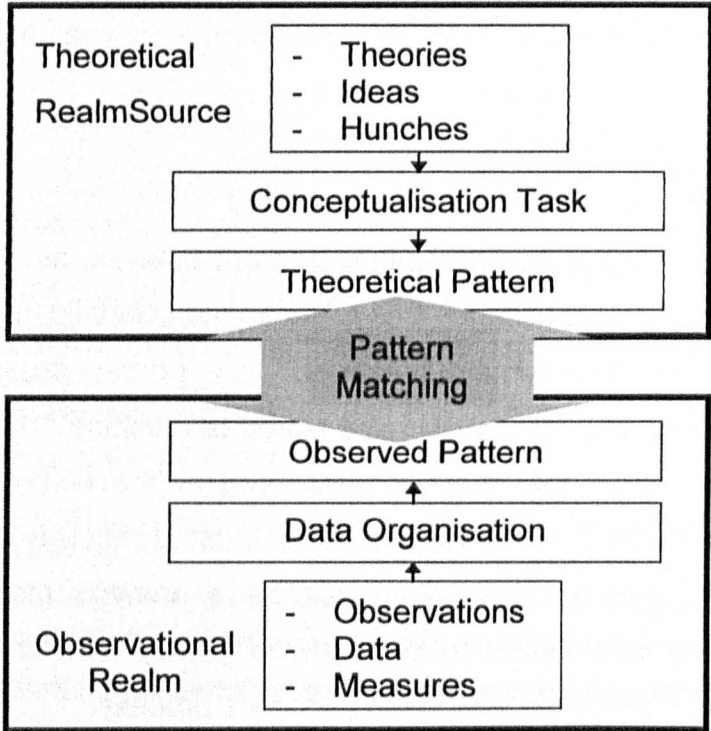
Content analysis was chosen to analyse the data from online focus groups. It is extensively used within social research to discuss consumer behaviour (Kassarjian, 1977). Content analysis is a method to evaluate the symbolic content systematically based on a series of procedures (Kolbe and Burnett, 1991) and can be used to analyse newspapers, websites, advertisements, interview recordings and videos, etc. (Reichelt *et al.*, 2013; Zikmund *et al.*, 2010). Neuendorf (2002, p. 10) defines content analysis as “a summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method (including attention to objectivity-intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, generalizability, validity, replicability, and hypothesis testing)”. It is not limited to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented. The most distinctive feature making content analysis different from other qualitative analysis methods is that it relies on the scientific procedure (Neuendorf, 2002). The analysis guideline should be developed before starting the analysis process.

The purpose of online focus groups is to identify whether the proposed conceptual framework and underpinning theories can be applied to the eWOM communication context. Content analysis is an analysis technique to



understand and classify similar views raised by participants. Therefore, it was chosen to record the textual information in units of sentences and phrases from online focus group discussions. Additionally, pattern matching was employed as a specific technique to check that the data pattern could fit into the integrative conceptual framework. "All social research is based on the relationship between the ideal and the real, theory and observation, the conceptual and the operational" (Trochim, 1985, p.575). Theories imply a pattern in which the researcher expects to find and confirm the reality. The pattern matching is a technique in which to understand if theory and reality can coincide. A conceptual model or theoretical proposition should be established using existing theories. On the other hand, observation, data or measures should be collected from reality. When the theoretical pattern is confirmed by the observed pattern, validity of the conceptual framework is increased. The pattern matching model proposed is by Trochim (1989), as shown in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3 Pattern Matching Diagram



Source: Trochim (1989, p. 356)

Antecedents and underpinning theories extracted from the literature review represent the upper part in Figure 6.3, whereby data generated from online

focus groups exhibit the lower part. Though measures of each construct are developed and empirically examined within a different context, this is the very first time that three antecedents have been employed within the online communication environment. The results will demonstrate whether such antecedents are confirmed or requiring further amendments. Another purpose of the online focus group is to revisit all measures of each construct. The data should provide the information required for measurements, confirmations or amendments.

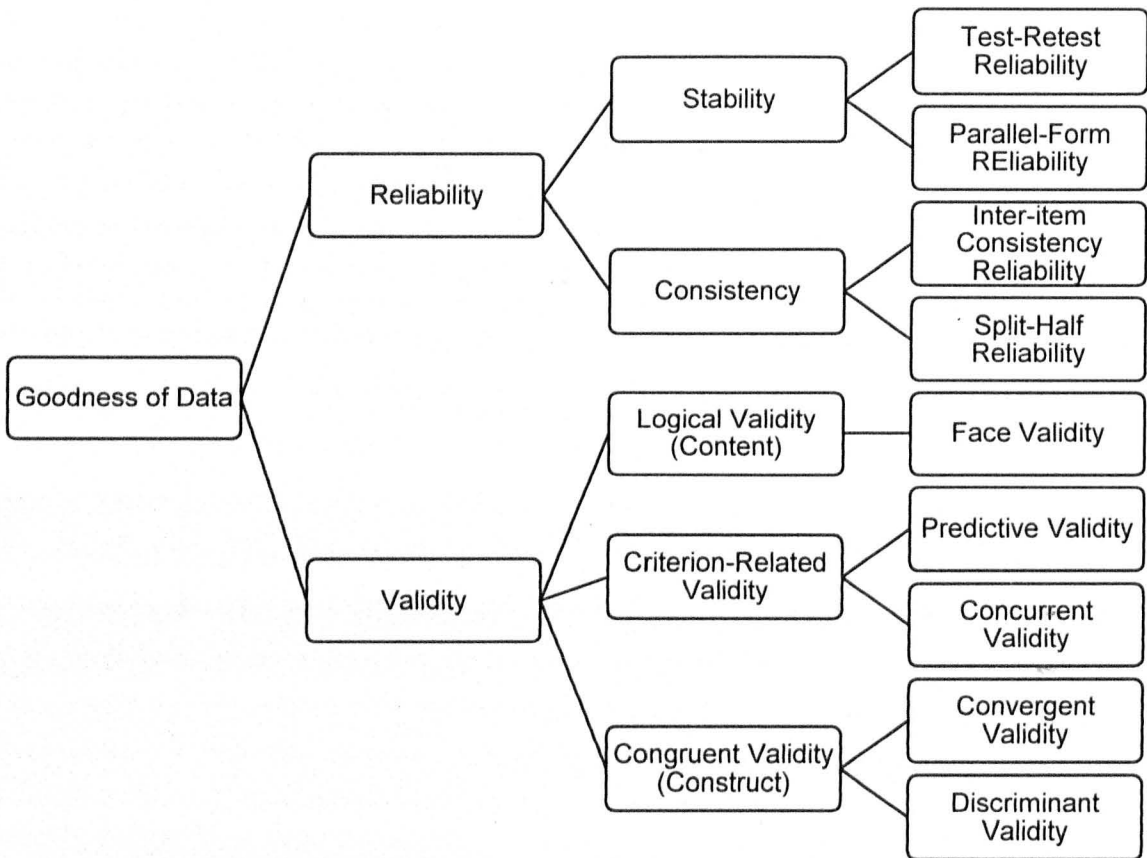
#### 6.4.8.2 Analysis Methods for Quantitative Data

Study II aims to test hypotheses via identifying the influences of antecedents on the attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Quantitative data was obtained through a web-based questionnaire in Study II. Some procedures such as reliability and validity, are withheld to ensure the quality of questions before launching the questionnaire officially. After data collection, the data cleaning process, including missing data, outlier detection, and assumption checking, were processed to prepare the data for further analysis. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed as the main analysis technique.

##### 6.4.8.2.1 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are two forms to test the goodness of measures and ensure the accuracy of questions within a questionnaire. Figure 6.4 lists various forms of reliability and validity.

Figure 6.4 Reliability and Validity



Source: Sekaran and Bougie (2013, p. 226)

Reliability is “the consistency of a measure of a concept” (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 158). A reliable questionnaire should get a consistent result even though it is repeatedly employed in a different context, replicated by different researchers, or written at a different time point. Stability and consistency are two forms in which to examine the reliability. Stability infers “an instrument remains the same over the time” (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013, p. 229) . Test-retest reliability and parallel-form reliability are two ways in which to measure the stability of instruments. In addition, the internal consistency of measures is “indicative of the homogeneity of items in the measure that taps the construct” (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013, p. 229). Inter-item consistency reliability and split-half reliability are two tests of consistency of measures. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  is the most popular and adequate test in which to measure the inter-item consistency reliability (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013).

Reliability is not sufficient to ensure quality of the measures, whereas validity can provide further information. Validity infers that “the issue of whether or not an indicator (or a set of indicators) that is devised to gauge a concept really measures that concept” (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 159). In other words, the validity refers to whether the questions describe correctly what the researcher would like to ask. Face validity intends to ensure whether the instruments measure what they intend to measure. Criterion-related validity is “established when the measure differentiates individual’s on a criterion it is expected to predict” (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013, p. 226) whereas construct validity “testifies to how well the results obtained from the use of the measure fit the theories around which the test is designed” (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013, p. 227).

Both reliability and validity are examined prior to circulating the questionnaire. This is to ensure the accuracy of collected data. Therefore, the pilot study was conducted to examine reliability by calculating Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ . Each one of Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  is recommended to be higher than 0.7 which is a satisfactory standard of reliable scale (Pallant, 2010). In addition, because of amendments made on the adopted scales, face validity can be utilised to check that all statements retain the research topic focus. The questionnaire draft was viewed by individuals having different backgrounds, including academic and non-academics, native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English, to ensure the face validity of the instruments.

#### 6.4.8.2.2 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was given to the ‘usage behaviour’ section of the questionnaire and the demographic analysis. Participants were asked to identify their usual eWOM communication behaviour, their platform for communication and frequency of expression of eWOM within the usage behaviour section. Mean score provides the average of the question, while standard deviation presents the spread of distribution or the variability in the data. These were analysed to offer a general picture of the usage behaviour of participants. To analyse the frequency of different platform usage, a ranking was given to confirm which platform was most popular. Demographic analysis

provided the frequency statistics which shows the combination of different gender, age and educational background, etc.

#### 6.4.8.2.3 Data Screening

Data screening is an important procedure to all studies before processing the data analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2009; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). It can identify and correct potential problems within the dataset which may distort the analysis results and its generalisability. Four issues: uncompleted / unqualified data, missing values, outliers and normality, are discussed respectively prior to data analysis.

The first step in data screening was to delete the unqualified and/or uncompleted responses. Unqualified responses were given by those participants without any experience of eWOM communication. The screening question was therefore arranged to ensure all participants had relevant eWOM communication experiences. Uncompleted responses could create bias or distort the analysis results required from the sampling. Some participants may quit their participation during the process or some questions may be skipped because they feel uncomfortable in answering them.

Missing data is a common problem within research (Acock, 2005; Allison, 2003; Hair *et al.*, 2009; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). It can lead to two major problems within data analysis results: reducing statistical power and biasing parameter estimates (Roth, 1994). Increasingly, researchers and studies put more attention on different methods to estimate missing values in order to produce better analysis results (Acock, 2005). In addition, misuse of the remedy process for missing data may lead to distorted estimations for missing values and reduction or exaggeration of statistical power (Acock, 2005; Allison, 2009). Therefore, selecting the most appropriate technique to estimate missing values is very important. Two issues form a discussion regarding the missing values: the amount of missing values and the technique for the remedy of missing values.

The first consideration in analysing missing values is the number of missing values. Several different techniques can be chosen to remedy the missing values: deletion, substitution, non-stochastic imputation, and stochastic

imputation (Allison, 2009; Huisman, 2000; Schlomer *et al.*, 2010). Substitution is to assign a value based on the estimation of missing values (Allison, 2009). The advantages of this are in retaining most available data, compared to deletion methods. It is also simpler than imputation techniques of which require more statistical techniques and software. Three basic methods can be classified within the substitution techniques: mean substitution, regression substitution, and hot-deck substitution (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Mean substitution is the most well-known and popular technique used for this method. It can retain the original mean, but reduce the scale correlations (Little, 1988). Regression and hot-deck substitution are very similar in their approach (Downey and King, 1998). The scale of this study contains 11 constructs, which are examined by a set of statements respectively. The statements within a single construct are related to each other to ensure the best examination of the said construct. Therefore, by applying hot-deck substitution a reasonable estimation for missing values can be proven. This is because the value from a similar case can represent a missing value (Downey and King, 1998). This research also applied correlation to replace the missing values.

Outliers are defined as “observations with a unique combination of characteristics identifiable as distinctly different from other observations” (Hair *et al.*, 2009, p.64). The occurrence of outliers can be either beneficial or problematic to data analysis because it may attenuate the results of statistical analysis (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Therefore, the detection or remedy of outliers should take place before any data analysis to ensure the accuracy of results. An univariate outlier refers to cases having an extreme score on one variable, whereas multivariate outliers are a combination of values of two or more variables (Frane, 1976; Hair *et al.*, 2009). Both univariate and multivariate outliers are detected and managed within this research.

A typical detection of any univariate outlier is inspected by the standard score (Z score), which have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Any case with absolute Z score excess, 3.29 indicates an outlier (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). All outliers were listwise deleted and brought forward to detect the multivariate outliers. Multivariate outliers were detected by Mahalanobis Distance ( $D^2$ ) which is “the distance of a case from the

centroid of the remaining cases where the centroid is the point created at the intersection of the means of all the variables” (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007, p. 74). A higher  $D^2$  implies that the case is far from the general distribution of other observations and is a potential multivariate outlier (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Hair *et al.* (2009) suggest the use of  $D^2$  divided by the number of variables involved ( $df$ ) to identify potential multivariate outliers. In a large sample size, the threshold value of  $D^2 / df$  is up to four. Any cases with  $D^2 / df$  in excess of four are treated as multivariate outliers.

Normality is the fundamental assumption of variety of multivariate analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2009). In similarity to outliers, normality can be classified as univariate normality and multivariate normality. The difference is whether the normality is related to a single variable or a combination of all variables (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Violating normality assumption may inflate  $\chi^2$  and underestimate some indices, such as CFI and TLI, parameters, and standard errors (West *et al.*, 1995).

Univariate normality is more easily examined by skewness and kurtosis of a single variable whereas multivariate normality testing is more difficult to apply (Kline, 2011). This study requires that SEM has a relatively large sampling to ensure the statistical power of analysis results. Within a large sampling, multivariate normality is limited in its examination when using SEM (Kline, 2011). In addition, a large sample size creates less concern regarding abnormal data because a large sample size tends to diminish the detrimental effects of abnormality (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Hair *et al.* (2009) and Kline (2011) suggest that univariate normality assessment is sufficient when the sample size is large enough. Skewness and kurtosis were used to detect univariate normality within this research. Both skewness and kurtosis record at zero when the data is of strictly normal distribution. Descriptive analysis of SPSS can provide the skewness index (SI) and kurtosis index (KI) of each variable. According to Kline (2011), items with SI value of more than 3.0 should be regarded as extreme skewness, whereas KI value exceeding 20 indicates a serious kurtosis.

#### 6.4.8.2.4 Structural Equation Modelling

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is recommended for analysing multivariate variables (Hair *et al.*, 2009). It is not a new statistical technique. Instead, SEM is a hybrid of confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2009; Weston and Gore, 2006). It not only validates the theory, but also examines the inter-relationship between variables empirically (Hair *et al.*, 2009). It has received more attention recently because SEM enables the “test a wide range of hypotheses concerning the relationships among any combination of manifest and latent variables” (McQuitty, 2004, p. 175). McQuitty (2004) further claims that SEM is able to handle several problems including the effect of sample size on model fit, the form of correlation modelled, the use of covariance vs. correlation matrices, the optimal number of items per factor and the handling of missing data.

SEM is “a comprehensive statistical approach to testing hypotheses regarding relations among observed and latent variables” (Hoyle, 1995, p. 1). SEM is designed to evaluate the linear relationship between the observed variable, also known as a measured variable or manifest variable and unobserved constructs, also known as latent variables. Latent construct cannot be measured or observed directly, while measured variables serve as indicators to be representative of them (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Both measured variables and latent constructs can serve either exogenous (independent) or endogenous (dependent); and relationships between latent constructs represent proposed hypotheses in a research model. Therefore, SEM is regarded as a hybrid of factor analysis, which provides a parsimonious analysis among latent and observed variables and path analysis, which tests hypotheses between constructs (Weston and Gore, 2006).

Some limitations exist when using univariate and bivariate statistical techniques to analyse variables simultaneously (Crowley and Fan, 1997). Multivariate statistical techniques are therefore used to solve complex research problems (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011). Weston and Gore (2006) compare SEM with three popular quantitative analysis methods, correlation, multiple regression, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Some similarities are identified: applying to the linear model, assumptions, and causality testing. This study



proposes the hypotheses whereby relationships are examined statistically. Multiple regression or SEM can be suitable methods in finding the answer. Churchill and Iacobucci (2002) argue that SEM is similar to multiple regression but can comprise many layers of variables and their interrelationships. Researchers can conduct and compare several multiple regression models until establishing the best one, or they can apply SEM analysis which requires further amendments to identify the best model fit. Weston and Gore (2006). Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011) conclude four SEM advantages over multiple regression, including unexplained variances, testing relationships simultaneously, linking micro- and macro- perspective ability and best fitting model and theory development. On the contrary, limitations of SEM should be bore in mind, such as choice of SEM software, complexity and ambiguity, limitation in exploratory research and incapability of dealing with categorical variables.

Several assumptions should be satisfied before the processing of SEM analysis. These include assumptions for the majority of analysis techniques such as normality of data, a certain number of sample sizes (e.g. more than 200), and independence of error (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Other requirements should also be met including linear relationships, the use of interval or ratio scales to measure all data and discriminant and convergent validity of all variables. In addition, the supporting theories are extremely important when applying SEM analysis. "All aspects of SEM modelling must be directed by theory, which is critical for model development and modification" (Reisinger and Mavondo, 2007, p. 72). Collected data are examined so as to check the proposed relationships are significant and the fitness of the model accurate.

SEM incorporates two major parts for data analysis: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling testing (SEM) (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). The measurement model is used to define measured variables and latent constructs, whereas the CFA is employed to test the measurement model. The measurement model is driven and developed based on theories before data collection. Each latent construct is represented by a set of measured variables (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Three or more measured variables can increase the accuracy of estimation of the latent variable. Those

latent constructs contain only one or two measured variables and should be avoided for CFA analysis (Bollen, 1989). After proposing the measurement model, relationships among measured variables and latent constructs are tested. The correlations between measured variables are also important. Weakly correlated variables may estimate the latent constructs poorly and affect model testing further. Thereafter, reliability and validity of variables and constructs can be assessed.

The structural model further examines the relationships among latent constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2009). SEM not only tests the relationships between latent constructs, but also shows the significance among measured variables and latent constructs, as well as the disturbance error of variables. Relationships amongst latent constructs represent the hypotheses. The hypotheses are proposed by direct, indirect (mediated), and covariance (Weston and Gore, 2006) based on the literature research. Covariance refers to the nondirectional relationship between exogenous latent variables, which will have direct or indirect effects on endogenous variables. Although the direct and indirect effects are shown as directional arrows within the SEM diagram, it does not imply a causal relationship unless analysing experimental data.

Model estimation should be decided upon after specifying the measurement and structural models (Hair *et al.*, 2009). The purpose of estimation is to identify values of the free parameters (Chou and Bentler, 1995). Several estimation methods are available within SEM, such as maximum likelihood (ML), generalised least squares (GLS), unweighted least squares (ULS) and asymptotically distribution free (ADF), etc. The underlying assumptions of each estimation technique are different (Hair *et al.*, 2009). The most appropriate method should be chosen based on the nature of model, data distribution and sample size, etc. (Chou and Bentler, 1995; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). In addition, availability of the computer programme is also important because not all programmes utilise all different estimation methods. ML was chosen as the estimation technique to analyse SEM within this study. ML is widely used across different social science disciplines (Hair *et al.*, 2009) and is the most employed estimation method in literature (Kline, 2011). ML is suitable for medium to large sample sizes and continuous variables with normal

distribution. The results from data screening support the sufficient sampling size and normality of data distribution, in that ML is an adequate estimation of SEM for this study.

Model assessment is another important issue when evaluating the proposed model (theory) and gathered data (reality). Goodness-of-fit (GOF) are the values produced through mathematical comparison of the theoretical covariance matrix and observed data covariance matrix (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Three categories with several indices are identified for assessing the GOF of a model: *Absolute Fit Indices*, *Incremental Fit indices*, and *Parsimony Fit Indices*. Each of them provides different facets of the ability of the model, in that researchers are recommended not to rely on any single index. Table 6.7 shows the brief description and the threshold of each index.

Table 6.7 Goodness-of-Fit Indices

| Index   | Threshold  |
|---|------------|
| <b>Absolute Fit Indices</b>   |            |
| Measures of overall goodness-of-fit for both the structural and measurement models  |            |
| Chi-Square Statistic ( $X^2$ )<br>is a statistical measure of difference used to compare the observed and estimated covariance matrices. This is the most fundamental absolute fit index, but less meaningful of a big sample size or the number of observed variables becomes large. | $p > 0.05$ |
| Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)<br>is an early attempt to produce a fit statistic that was less sensitive to sample size.   | $> 0.90$   |
| Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (REMEA)<br>is most widely used measures that attempts to correct or the tendency of the $X^2$ of GOF test to reject models with a large sample or a large number of observed variables  | $< 0.08$   |
| Standardised Root Mean Square Residue (SRMR)<br>is the standardised value of average of the residuals. Lower SRMR value represents a better fit that this index is also called badness-of-fit index.  | $< 0.08$   |
| <b>Incremental Fit Indices</b>  |            |
| Group of goodness-of-fit indices that assesses how well a specified model fits relative to some alternative baseline model  |            |
| Normed Fit Index (NFI)<br>is one of the original incremental fit indices and is a ration of the difference in the $X^2$ value for the fitted model and a null model divided by the $X^2$ value for the null model   | $> 0.90$   |
| Comparative Fit Index (CFI)<br>is improved version of the normed fit index  | $> 0.90$   |
| <b>Parsimonious Fit Indices</b>   |            |
| Measures of overall goodness-of-fit representing the degree of model fit per estimated coefficient  |            |
| Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)<br>tries to take into account differing degrees of model complexity, by adjusting GFI by a ratio of the degree of freedom used in a model to a total degrees of freedom available.  | $> 0.90$   |
| Parsimonious Goodness-of-Fit Index (PGFI)<br>adjusts the NFI by multiplying it times the parsimony ratio.   | $> 0.50$   |

Source: Hair *et al.* (2009, pp. 666-669)

The reasons for employing SEM as the quantitative data analysis are summarised as following. Firstly, this study proposed an integrative conceptual framework consisting of five main constructs, including 9 dimensions and

several hypotheses. SEM is recommended in the testing of a complicated model and to cope with latent constructs. Secondly, each construct within the conceptual framework consists of a strong theoretical background. Relationships between constructs have been examined within different contexts but as yet, have never been tested within eWOM communication. The conceptual framework and underpinning theories have fully satisfied the role of theory in the development and analysis of SEM. Thirdly, SEM is capable in dealing with direct and indirect relationships as well as to find the inter-relationship between constructs at the same time. As the conceptual framework integrates several different theories, the interaction between each construct is still unknown. In addition, the 'attitude' construct can serve as a mediator or as another dependent variable. SEM is able to identify whether the proposed hypotheses significantly exist (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Several statistical analysis programmes, such as LISREL, AMOS, and EQS, are available for SEM analysis (Shaughnessy *et al.*, 2012). The programme choice is based upon the computer resource availability at the researcher's institution. As a result of this, AMOS was used for SEM data analysis. In addition, the estimation technique, ML, was set as the default method within the AMOS programme.

## 6.5 Summary

This chapter outlines the philosophical and methodological issues of the study and are discussed and elaborated upon accordingly. The study aims are firstly reviewed, thereafter the preliminary conceptual framework is proposed through the adoption of the S-O-R diagram. Three antecedents are identified based on Belk's (1975) work regarding situational variables that influence consumer behaviour. Thirdly, research philosophy is discussed with the outcome being that positivism is to be the philosophical stance of this study. The research design, including several topics, is introduced based on the research aims, framework, and philosophy. Two stages of research design, qualitative and quantitative are discussed, to validate the conceptual framework and to test the relationships between variables. Accordingly, various sampling techniques, data collection, instrument and analysis techniques are addressed. Figure 6.5 summarises the research design applied to this study.

Figure 6.5 Research Design – This Study

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Types of Study         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Study I: Exploratory</li><li>• Study II: Hypothesis-Testing</li></ul>   |
| Time Horizon           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Study I: Cross-Sectional</li><li>• Study II: Cross-Sectional</li></ul>  |
| Units of Analysis      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Study I: Individuals</li><li>• Study II: Individuals</li></ul>  |
| Research Medium        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Study I: Online</li><li>• Study II: Online</li></ul>  |
| Data Collection        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Study I: Online Focus Group</li><li>• Study II: Web-Based Questionnaire</li></ul>   |
| Sampling               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Study I: 3 groups, 8 people per group; Non-Probability Sampling</li><li>• Study II: 500 is preferable; Non-Probability Sampling</li></ul> |
| Instrument Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Study I: Discussion Guide</li><li>• Study II: Scaling</li></ul>   |
| Data Analysis          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Study I: Content Analysis</li><li>• Study II: Structural Equation Modelling</li></ul>   |

## Chapter 7

# Findings from Online Focus Group and Pilot Testing

### 7.1 Introduction

This study aims to contribute to a further understanding of eWOM by consumers within the tourism industry. A conceptual framework and hypotheses were developed through literature research. Given online communication and online consumer behaviour is under constant investigation, online focus groups were conducted and a pilot test was carried out prior to the main survey. The purpose of the online focus groups is to inform the conceptual framework and research hypotheses. Measures within the survey questionnaire are also amended based upon results from the online focus groups. Pilot testing was further conducted to test the reliability and validity of the amended measures. The purpose of the pilot test was to ensure the quality of the questionnaire. This chapter presents the findings from the online focus groups to enable the revision of the conceptual framework and the online questionnaire. Thereafter, findings from the pilot test are reported.

### 7.2 Analysis of Online Focus Group Data

Online focus groups were employed to inform the conceptual framework, research hypotheses and statements used within the online questionnaire. Findings from the online focus groups are divided in two parts: profiles of participants and the findings. Firstly, descriptive analysis is used, whereas content analysis is employed to analyse data. The pattern of eWOM technology behaviour use and evaluation of eWOM communication behaviour are captured.

#### 7.2.1 Profile of Online Focus Group Participants

Approximately one hundred e-mail invitations were sent out to recruit participants. Through back and forth e-mail communication, 24 proposed

participants were confirmed and split into three groups. Seven participants attended the first and second focus group discussions whilst six participants joined in the third focus group discussion. In total, 20 participants formed the online focus groups of which their demographics are shown in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 Profile of Online Focus Group Participants

|                                  | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                    |           |                |
| Female                           | 17        | 85%            |
| Male                             | 3         | 15%            |
| <b>Age Group</b>                 |           |                |
| 16-20                            | 2         | 10%            |
| 21-25                            | 0         | 0%             |
| 26-30                            | 7         | 35%            |
| 31-35                            | 6         | 30%            |
| 36-40                            | 3         | 15%            |
| 41-45                            | 0         | 0%             |
| 46-50                            | 1         | 5%             |
| 51-55                            | 1         | 5%             |
| <b>Educational Qualification</b> |           |                |
| High School                      | 2         | 10%            |
| Bachelor's Degree                | 1         | 5%             |
| Master's Degree                  | 15        | 75%            |
| Doctoral Degree                  | 2         | 10%            |
| <b>Nationality</b>               |           |                |
| American                         | 1         | 5%             |
| British                          | 1         | 5%             |
| Chinese                          | 5         | 25%            |
| Antigua and Barbuda              | 1         | 5%             |
| German                           | 1         | 5%             |
| Hong Kong                        | 4         | 20%            |
| Latvian                          | 1         | 5%             |
| Taiwanese                        | 2         | 10%            |
| Thai                             | 2         | 10%            |
| Russian                          | 1         | 5%             |
| Ugandan                          | 1         | 5%             |
| <b>Place of Residence</b>        |           |                |
| China                            | 2         | 10%            |
| Hong Kong                        | 2         | 10%            |
| Singapore                        | 2         | 10%            |
| Spain                            | 1         | 5%             |
| United Kingdom                   | 13        | 65%            |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>20</b> | <b>100%</b>    |

Regarding the gender of participants, three participants were male and 17 were female. In relation to age groups, more than one third of participants



were aged between 26 and 30 years old while another third were aged between 31 and 35. Ten percent of participants were aged between 36 and 40 years of age. Two younger participants were aged between 16 and 20 whilst another two were aged 46 to 55 years old. Regarding their educational background, 75% participants held a master's degree, two held a doctoral degree whilst the remaining participants had either a bachelor degree or high school certificate.

The nationality of participants was international and the place of residences was various. The demographic figures demonstrate that participants have different backgrounds. Particularly, online focus group allows that participants living in different continents can take part in a synchronised discussion via the convenience of the internet and electronic media.

### 7.2.2 Findings from Online Focus Group Data

The data analysis was divided into three sections. The first section aimed to understand how respondents chose the online platform to conduct their general eWOM and travel-related eWOM communication. This section also identified the reasons for using or not using a specific platform. The second section summarised the motivation for eWOM communication including the following factors: personal attitude, influences from previous experiences and the impact from peer groups. The third section covered the evaluation of eWOM communication and the attitude toward eWOM communication by respondents.

#### 7.2.2.1 Platform for eWOM Communication

With reference to daily life usage of eWOM, several different types of electronic media were mentioned by respondents. For example,

*Skype to save money on phone and to instant message. Facebook to keep in contact with people and to learn new things. Twitter to keep updated. LinkedIn to maintain strong business contacts / links... E-mails for business purposes mainly. – Participant 2, Group 3.*

Table 7.2 Electronic Platforms for Daily Usage of eWOM Communication

| <b>Categories</b>               | <b>Platforms</b>  |
|---------------------------------|---|
| General Asynchronous Platform   | E-Mail, Blog, Online Forum                              |
| Instant Messenger               | Skype, MSN, Yahoo Messenger, Gmail Chat                 |
| Social Networking Platform      | Facebook, Kaixin, Bebo, China Twitter, Twitter, LinedIn |
| Video / Photos Sharing Platform | Youtube, Flickr   |

As shown in Table 7.2, platforms were classified by their various functions. According to the nature and usage purpose, four different groups of platforms were categorised for daily usage: general asynchronous platform, synchronous instant messenger, social networking and video and photo sharing.

Regarding general communication through asynchronous platforms, e-mail was the most common communication platform, not only for personal affairs but also for business communication. Blog served as a personal diary to express reviews and opinions shared by friends and people in whom they are interested. Daily communication via synchronous platforms showed that Skype appeared to be the most popular. Participants logged into Skype all day, but only used it when they needed to communicate. Some participants logged into Skype via their mobile phone, in these cases never being off-line. The social networking group showed that Facebook was the most recognised social networking site, but the usage frequencies varied. Some participants suggested that they spent 2-3 hours per day on Facebook, whilst one participant preferred not to update her Facebook account. Regarding photo and video sharing, Youtube and Flickr were the preferred websites in sharing their videos and photos respectively. Some participants also commented that they published photos and videos on their own blogs and Facebook.

In relation to travel related information eWOM communication, Table 7.3 reveals the platforms preferred.

Table 7.3 Preferred Electronic Platforms for Travel-Related eWOM Communication

| Categories                      | Platforms                               |
|---------------------------------|---|
| General Asynchronous Platform   | E-Mail, Blog                            |
| Instant Messenger               | Skype, MSN, Yahoo Messenger, Gmail Chat |
| Social Networking Platform      | Facebook, Kaixin                        |
| Video / Photos Sharing Platform | Youtube, Flickr                         |
| Website                         | TripAdvisor, Google Rating System       |

In comparison to previous categories, a new category was identified at this stage. Respondents posted their opinions on a travel-specific or product rating website such as Tripadvisor or the Google rating system. Such websites were dedicated to enable consumers to search travel information and post their own reviews regarding their travel experiences or hospitality consumption. One participant said:

*Google, Tripadvisor, e-mail...for recommendations and reviews...about the hotel bookings and accommodations – Participant 1, Group 3.*

Other than those particular travel-related websites, platforms to communicate travel-related experiences were not much different to those of daily usage. These included general asynchronous platforms (e.g. e-mail and blog), instant messenger (e.g. Skype and MSN) and social networking platforms (e.g. Facebook and Kaixin). E-mail and instant messaging were mainly used to enquire about friends or that of travel information. Social networking platforms served as similar functions for information exchange but through a broader source. Some networking platforms and blogs were used to record memories such as photo posting and video sharing.

In reference to the reasons for using a particular platform, several respondents agreed that the use of electronic media was convenient and cheap. Taking Skype as an example, this was very convenient in accessing the instant message and making a call to others with a very low cost. Skype was particularly convenient in talking to family and friends, especially when the communicators were located in different places. Some participants mentioned

they use a particular platform because their friends used it and they wanted to keep connected to them. They enjoyed reading their friend's articles and viewing their photos and comments. Much information was obtained easily from electronic platforms, which was another reason to attract people in spending time doing so. Through the internet they could also expand their networks and get feedback from others.

*Staying connected to the world, socialise, stay updated, as people in my network post very exciting info at times ..... and staying connected with the family. – Participant 6, Group 1.*

In addition to the primary function, people stayed with a specific platform because of the additional functions provided by that platform. For example, one participant mentioned that she loves to play games on Facebook so she spent more time on Facebook rather than other social media sites.

Apart from the most frequently used platforms, participants were also asked whether there was any other platform they had used before but had stopped using. Similar to the reasons for using the platform, they stopped using a specific one because it was not user-friendly, or there were too many advertisements popping up when using it. Some blog platforms also started to charge a membership fee for the use of more functions, e.g. uploading more photos. One respondent mentioned that she stopped using MSN and Skype because her supervisor was on the same network and in her contacts list. It implied the influences from social pressure. People tended to use or not to use a particular platform purely because a specific person stayed with that platform. Another reason to stop using a particular platform was because the platform did not provide a specific function or maybe a function has been replaced. For example, Facebook provided functions similar to those of instant messenger, blog, and photo posting. It integrated different functions and replaced the mono-function of Skype, blog, and Flickr. As a result, people concentrated on one particular platform that is multi-functional.

*I use Facebook most, I think, because my friends use it, but these days also because a lot of websites/organisations I am interested in have their own Facebook pages and updates, so it's easier to follow*

*them, since it's all in one place .....I suppose Facebook replaced those two (windows live messenger and yahoo messenger) – Participant 8, Group 3.*

Table 7.4 summarises the reasons for using a particular platform and to stop using a platform, respectively.

Table 7.4 Reasons for Using a Platform and for Not Using a Platform

| Reasons for Using a Platform   | Reasons to Stop Using a Platform  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convenience</li> <li>• Low Cost</li> <li>• User-friendly Interface</li> <li>• Socialise</li> <li>• Peer Pressure</li> <li>• Additional functions, e.g. games</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non user-friendly Interface</li> <li>• Platform Fees</li> <li>• Alternative Platforms</li> </ul> |

From Table 7.4, the reasons to continue using or to stop using a particular platform are presented in the opposite perspective. For example, 'user-friendly' was emphasised when using a particular platform. People are willing to keep using a platform because such a platform is easy to use. On the other hand, if the platform is not user-friendly, people tend to stop using it and switch to alternatives.

#### 7.2.2.2 Motivation for eWOM Communication

This section discusses why travellers express their opinions online. Table 7.5 presents six groups of general motivations for eWOM communication.

Table 7.5 Motivation for eWOM Communication

|  |
|--|
| <p>To share with friends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To share experiences</li> <li>• To share opinions</li> <li>• To share pictures</li> <li>• To share interesting material</li> </ul>   |
| <p>To communicate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To chat (e.g. Google talk, Skype)</li> <li>• To keep in contact (e.g. Facebook)</li> <li>• To keep updated (e.g. Twitter, Facebook)</li> <li>• To call on people (e.g. Skype)</li> <li>• To socialise</li> <li>• To disseminate messages (e.g. e-mail)</li> <li>• To connect with family</li> <li>• To stay connected to the world</li> </ul> |
| <p>To express feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To express personal opinions</li> <li>• To express personal feelings</li> <li>• To release your pressure by telling people how you feel</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Others functions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To maintain strong business contacts / links (e.g. LinkedIn)</li> <li>• To keep track of important documents (e-mail)</li> </ul>  |

The majority of respondents agreed that they performed eWOM communication because they wanted to share. It can be through sharing of their interesting / good / bad experiences, photos, videos, opinions on products or services and comments, etc. One participant said:

*eWOM, from my point of view, is info sharing online, including pictures, links, photos, opinions, stories, bad and good experiences...it must be related to some products or services; otherwise, it is gossip. – Participant 6, Group 1.*

Another main motivation for eWOM communication was regarding communication. However, different ways in which to communicate decided which platform to use. Respondents using Skype or Google do so if they want to have an instant chat. Facebook or Twitter was chosen when they intend to keep in contact with or updated by friends. Regarding the other category - 'Benefits of the platform', respondents agreed that they communicated through

the internet because it is convenient, with very low cost, therefore money saving.

*On Skype I catch up with friends and family, more or less it as a phone for staying connected, I post things on Facebook to inform of something, share something, comment, help. – Participant 6, Group 1.*

Focusing on travel-related information, the context of communication was changed to the destination, trip, and memorable things which they would like to record. For example:

*After travelling, I usually post photos; or if I have very happy or sad experience, I post some articles; or if I find something really interesting, such as good restaurant, I put photos and descriptions online. – Participant 5, Group 2.*

Also, through eWOM communication, they can record good or bad experiences which transfer into recommendations or advice for others in the future. Table 7.6 shows the different motivation for travel-related eWOM communication.

Table 7.6 Motivation for Travel-Related eWOM Communication

---

|   |
|---|
| To share with friends   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Very interesting, good and bad experiences</li><li>• Laughs</li><li>• Photos or Videos</li><li>• Opinions on products or services</li><li>• Information including pictures, links, photos, opinions, stories, bad and good experiences</li><li>• Comments</li></ul>   |
| To express personal points of view  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To show off</li><li>• To comment / access / evaluate</li><li>• To have freedom to express personal viewpoints</li><li>• To share happiness / enjoy</li><li>• To release emotions / stress / frustrations</li><li>• To complement other information</li><li>• To offer recommendations or advice</li><li>• To complain</li></ul> |
| Interactive response  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To ask questions (private and public post)</li><li>• To exchange opinions with friends or strangers</li><li>• To get feedback</li><li>• To respond to friends or strangers</li><li>• To catch up with families and friends</li><li>• To network (friends and strangers)</li></ul>   |
| To expand knowledge   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To find solutions / references</li><li>• To share my knowledge</li><li>• To get more information / experience sharing</li></ul>   |
| To make a record  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To record all documents (including photos, articles, and videos)</li><li>• To keep memories</li></ul>   |

---

In total, five different categories of motivation for travel-related eWOM communication were identified: to share with friends, to express personal points of view, interactive responses, to expand knowledge and to record experiences. Participants further elaborated on reasons behind their communication. Some wanted to express their personal point of view; while others liked to gain interactive responses. Through cyberspace, individuals can have more freedom to express what they would like to say and get a general or specific response through this form of electronic media.



*eWOM expression is way to express my feelings, experience, opinions...to people you know or you don't know...electronic media actually makes me more comfortable to communicate...and I can have more control. – Participant 8, Group 1.*

Some respondents expressed their feelings by posting articles online when having had a bad experience. This allowed them to release warnings to others through their posts. On the contrary, some respondents only posted good opinions to share with others about their positive feelings and experiences.

*(I post) when there is something good / cool to share or something bad to publicise...good things is to share to joy or to show off. Bad thing is a warning would like to other and a punishment to create bad WOM. – Participant 7, Group 2.*

eWOM has its valence which may affect the intention of individuals to publish opinions online. To understand this factor, one question was put to participants “Do you have a different motivation or consideration when publishing positive eWOM or negative eWOM?” Responses are summarised in Table 7.7

Table 7.7 Motivation for Positive or Negative eWOM Communication

---

|  |
|--|
| To publish positive eWOM   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To share good experiences</li><li>• To create a good impression</li><li>• To show off</li><li>• To share joy, happiness, pleasure</li></ul>  |
| To publish negative eWOM   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• As a warning and advice to others</li><li>• As a punishment</li><li>• To avoid others having the same bad experience</li><li>• To release dissatisfaction and emotional stress</li></ul> |
| Do not publish negative eWOM   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Because it may harm the privacy of others or society</li><li>• Because I would like to forget the bad story</li><li>• Because it helps nothing</li></ul>                                 |

---

Good reviews posted online as recommendations were delivered to friends when encountering a good host or good services. One reason for publishing positive eWOM only was because positive eWOM communication can create a

positive impression on the web. Negative eWOM spread a negative atmosphere and made bad images for others. Therefore, only positive eWOM was posted to share happiness or enjoyment to others.

Some respondents did not want to create negative eWOM because they thought those negative messages may harm others. eWOM was posted on a public domain; therefore you never know who may read these messages in the future. The negative messages could produce a negative effect on the service providers forever as the messages can be listed on the website for many years. Moreover, once encountering dissatisfactory events, it was preferable to forget the whole story as soon as possible, as stated by one participant. They said that there were no words posted to remind them of the bad experience.

On the contrary, some participants regarded negative eWOM as a punishment. Through negative eWOM expression, they gave a warning and advice so as others did not have a similar bad experience. At the same time, they expected the service providers to put more emphasis on dealing with negative eWOM. Otherwise, service providers may have consequences from it.

#### 7.2.2.3 Benefit and Drawback of eWOM Communication

One question was raised toward the online focus groups regarding how they evaluated eWOM communication. From this question, it can be seen how the respondents perceived motivation for other communication. The responses were grouped into four groups: benefits of eWOM and drawbacks of eWOM and benefits from the platform shown in Table 7.8.

Table 7.8 Benefits and Drawbacks of eWOM Communication

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Benefits of eWOM Communication

- eWOM makes communication more convenient and easier
- It takes positive comments as a good sign and negative comments as a real truth
- eWOM serves as a reference and helps to prompt the decision making process
- Massive and easily accessible information online
- eWOM provides general information and the background to the interested target (e.g. destination or hotel)

---

Drawback of eWOM Communication

- Accountability
  - Bias of online information
  - Comments are written by insiders or hoteliers
  - Much false information and false websites
  - Hides true feelings or opinions
- 

The majority of respondents made a positive evaluation regarding eWOM. They thought 'eWOM made life more convenient and easier'. eWOM represented a mass of accessible information which provided the general background of products and services. It helped prompt the decision making process and broadened our knowledge. Two examples illustrate this category:

*I can get real-life true experiences. I will trust people's opinions more than say advertising and easily access where you want it and when you want it. – Participant 6, Group 1.*

*If the comment does tell the truth and give advice, even it is negative, it could be good for society as we need true voice....we can get some ideas and broaden our horizon of thinking by opinions. – Participant 8, Group 2.*

However, one respondent revealed that she felt overwhelmed. There was too much information online and it took time to identify who wrote the opinion, which one was true, and when the opinion was published. These factors were associated with the credibility of eWOM. Through cyber space, people were free to express what they want to say. This freedom also created the problem of accountability and bias. The publisher may not express their true opinion or

the opinions may be published by insiders, such as a journalist or professional writers.

*Always a bit sceptical about online opinions and review, that's why I choose several websites and usually read the comments that gave the best and the worst marks... (to check the reviews and reviewers) by nickname used, avatar used, style of writing, language, grammar, the particular moments highlighted in the review. – Participant 8, Group 3.*

### 7.3 Definition of Antecedents within the Context of eWOM Communication

The previous section captured the pattern from data produced by online focus groups. The results depicted the daily use of different electronic communication technology, the motivation for eWOM communication and the evaluation of eWOM. This section intends to redefine the constructs and dimensions within the conceptual framework according to the online focus group results.

#### 7.3.1 Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology

The adoption of electronic communication technology is identified as the first antecedent to influence eWOM communication. This construct aims to understand the user's perception when using new technology to communicate. The Technology Adoption Model (TAM) is employed to assess the adoption of electronic communication technology. Initially, Davis proposes two dimensions within TAM model, Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEU) (Davis, 1989). He further adds a third dimension, Perceived Enjoyment (PE) as the intrinsic motivation to TAM (Davis *et al.*, 1992). These three dimensions of TAM have been employed by several scholars to discuss the adoption of technology, and this study intends to utilise TAM as the theoretical background for the first antecedents of eWOM communication.

##### 7.3.1.1 Perceived Usefulness

The original definition of PU is "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance" (Davis,

1989, p.320). To apply this within the context of eWOM communication, the 'particular system' refers to electronic media and 'job performance' refers to effective or efficient communication. Participants from online focus groups agreed to the fact that the use of electronic communication technology was very useful in their communication. The main reason was that electronic communication technology was convenient and had a very low cost, especially when talking to people who were located in different areas.

*(The main reason drives me to publish online) because it is convenience and its lower cost.....to let my close friends and families know how I am as I'm away from home.....huge accessible resources and information, easy access..... electronic media actually makes me more comfortable to communicate with them, as there is much less intimacy involved and I have control – Participant 8, Group 1.*

Originally, TAM is employed to discuss technology acceptance in the workplace (Davis *et al.*, 1989; Davis *et al.*, 1992). PU discusses the users' perception as to whether such technology can enhance their working performance. This research defines this variable as 'the perception of use of electronic communication technology and if it would enhance their communication effectively or efficiently'.

#### 7.3.1.2 Perceived Ease of Use

The original definition of PEU is "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort" (Davis, 1989, p.320). Similarly to PU, electronic media is presented as the particular system within this study. Various platforms or channels can be chosen for eWOM communication. Participants confirmed that they appreciated the flexibility of using electronic media for eWOM communication. Some platforms such as ICQ were abandoned because they were not easy to use. Additionally, platforms that integrate multi-functions into a single platform could also replace the mono-function channels. Another consideration to stop using a particular platform is the cost, which was also addressed by participants. Bloggers have always had free space for article and photo postings, but when some websites started to

charge for online space, bloggers switched to another website that provided a free-service.

*I stopped using ICQ since it is not user-friendly. – Participant 7, Group 3.*

*I stopped using blog as it needs to spend a lot of time on it to make it interesting. Otherwise, there will just be a lot of advertising on it. I also find that because anyone can give opinion on it, so it makes the whole blog messy. – Participant 7, Group 1.*

Both positive opinions to use electronic communication technology and negative opinions to stop using it support PEU as the dimension to access the adoption of using electronic communication technology. The definition of this variable is given as the 'users perception of using electronic media would be free of effort.'

#### 7.3.1.3 Perceived Enjoyment

The original definition of PE is "the activity of using the computer is perceived to be enjoyable in its own right, apart from any performance consequences that may be anticipated" (Davis *et al.*, 1992, p.1113). This variable only focuses on the enjoyment of using an electronic platform. Online focus group participants were asked to compare online communication and face-to-face communication. They indicated that talking through a computer was less enjoyable. They preferred to talk in person as they could get a deeper understanding through sight of body language and facial expression from others. Some participants argued that online communication was less preferable if they could have the alternative choice of face-to-face communication.

*I prefer face-to-face talk because I enjoy the human interaction. – Participant 4, Group 1.*

PE from online communication was not denied by participants, but having other choices, they may not rely on online communication only. Though most participants mentioned the fact that online communication was less enjoyable,

their opinions still implied that PE is important when considering the adoption of electronic communication technology. PE is therefore the confirmed choice by online focus groups. The new definition is given as 'the perception of individuals regarding the use of electronic media to communicate as being pleasant and enjoyable in its own right, apart from any performance consequences that may be anticipated'.

### 7.3.2 Motivation for eWOM Communication

Motivation for eWOM communication refers to the reasons or purpose of communicating via eWOM by the individual. This antecedent is proposed to understand the specific reasons for engaging in eWOM communication. Functional Theory of Attitude is employed to address the purpose behind a formation of attitude. Various function names of attitude have been discussed by researchers since the 1940s (e.g. Katz, 1960; Sarnoff and Katz, 1954; Shavitt, 1989; Smith, 1947). Differences and similarities are discussed within the literature review chapter of this study. Although there is no agreed taxonomy of functions, this research adopts the original typology by Katz (1960), having four distinct functions to develop the conceptual framework. The following paragraphs discuss each function respectively to see if they can be confirmed through the primary data from online focus groups.

#### 7.3.2.1 Utilitarian Function

Utilitarian function (UF) is also labelled as adjustment function or instrumental function (Katz, 1960). UF recognises that the individual is motivated to maximise external rewards and minimise punishments from his / her external environment (Katz, 1960). The rewards or punishments are associated with personal self-interest. People hold an attitude within UF to achieve a desirable goal or to avoid undesirable ones.

Rewards and punishments refer to different objects when the theory is employed within a different discipline. For example, the volunteer behaviour research implied that the rewards meant those of career-related benefits (Clary *et al.*, 1998). Thus, UF is re-named as the Career Function in that it motivates the individual to be a volunteer because of the career-related benefits they would like to generate (Snyder *et al.*, 2000). Moreover, within the research

discussion regarding online panel participation, UF acknowledges that people are motivated to participate in online panel discussions because of monetary incentives (Daugherty *et al.*, 2005). Additionally, Daugherty *et al.* (2005) includes a social function to discuss the panellists' attitude towards online panel discussions being associated to concerns about relationships with others. Individuals are motivated to participate in online discussions because of the desirable social benefits. Given social benefits can be regarded as a reward, in broad definition, the social function can therefore be regarded as a variation of UF.

Data from online focus groups indicated that eWOM communication was a popular way for travellers to remember their travelling experiences. They posted their photos to help them record their pleasant experiences or published bad comments to complain about a hotel having terrible service. In addition, eWOM communication can help provide them with rewards, such as free accommodation or a free meal through their posting of articles and sharing photos. Participants inclined to agree that people expressed eWOM because they may receive incentives. However, the credibility of such eWOM was doubtful. One participant mentioned that several online opinions which are created by "paid writers" were biased, while other participants also voiced concerns regarding fake opinions online. Some professional bloggers earned their living via posting reviews and photos online.

*Many travel companies create biased comments with travel writers (e.g. by paying for a free trip) – Participant 7, Group 2*

Additionally, participants used eWOM communication to get some feedback from both friends and strangers. They also found other people who shared similar interests through eWOM communication. It enabled expansion of their personal network which may benefit future personal development.

*I can find similar users (like education background, interest, habits, age etc.) this is the online world, we don't have to restrict to acquaints – Participant 2, Group 1*

The UF is confirmed by online focus groups through focusing only on gaining rewards. The rewards are not only related to monetary incentives but also the



intangible benefits, such as networking. Within this research, the individual is motivated to express eWOM because they believe it enables them to gain monetary rewards, non-monetary rewards and social benefits.

#### 7.3.2.2 Knowledge Function

The original definition of knowledge function (KF) adopted from the model by Katz is "Need for understanding, for meaningful cognitive organizations, for consistency and clarity" (Katz, 1960, p.192). Given the impossibility to know everything in the social world, people need to organise and handle new stimuli based on their limited knowledge and information. Therefore, individuals form an attitude which attempts to understand society and to eventually make sense of the chaotic world.

Online focus group participants mentioned that eWOM communication can help to clarify their understanding. They could post a question or receive feedback alongside their articles, photos or descriptions. Such eWOM communication helped broaden their understanding. Also, eWOM communication posted by other communicators provided various information and ideas when needing to make decisions, e.g. decide a holiday destination.

*I read a lot of online review when I'll book hotel. Sometime, I found both good and bad comments about the exactly same issue. I still need own judgement at the end, but it did help a lot I think. It's more like I already lists of preference. Then, I need a bit of help and then, eWOM plays its role. – Participant 5, Group 1.*

In summary, eWOM communication can help people extend their knowledge, obtain new knowledge and ultimately understand themselves. The new definition of KF is not amended in comparison to the original definition.

#### 7.3.2.3 Value-Expressive Function

Attitude to the value-expressive function (VEF) allows individuals to express their central values or how they conceive themselves to be (Katz, 1960). This attitude helps to establish self-identity, maintain self-image and enhance self-expression. Variations of VEF are discussed by researchers according to

different personal or situational factors. Perloff (2010) divides the VEF into three parts: Value-Expressive Function, Social-Adjustment Function, and Social-Identity Function. Perloff (2010) defines the VEF as having the same definition as that of Katz (1960). Moreover, when the attitude serves with the social adjustment function, it enables people to adjust themselves to fit into a reference group, whereas people hold attitudes within the social identity function to communicate who they are and what they aspire to be. To conclude, people express themselves through their own central beliefs, values, or dispositions. Through the expression, it enhances personal self-image and self-conception and also enables adoption into the reference group.

Online focus group participants confirmed that the attitude towards eWOM communication was held with VEF. eWOM communication gave participants more freedom to express opinions. It allowed them to describe their true story and feelings. Electronic media also provided a platform to flaunt their unique experiences which may further receive admiration from others. Through online expression, they can enhance their thoughts and beliefs. Individuals can present their interests and beliefs and further strengthen their self-identity and image.

*I feel comfortable to publish the true feeling...Anonymous does give freedom to express the true feeling – Participant 5, Group 2*

*Anonymity helps (eWOM communication) especially if it is bad and about a hotel where you are known it also opens a window for those that are afraid of exposing themselves – Participant 4, Group 3*

When posting eWOM communication, participants considered the use of proper words or phrases to describe their true stories. In relation to negative or sensitive opinions, they did wonder that such opinions may damage others or create harmful effects. For example, participants pointed out that they only express negative opinions such as complaints to their friends or family, but post them on an open forum. Participants were aware of the possible negative effects of eWOM communication as it can disseminate to strangers.

*I would try to be rather frank, unless it is about something very sensitive and might hurt others' feeling – Participant1, Group 2*

*Generally, I prefer the good when I'm sharing info or pics (pictures) since I usually want to create a good impression; however, I would share smthg (something) bad if it stands out in my experience / memory – Participant 2, Group 2*

VEF is confirmed through the primary data produced from online focus groups. Being more specific, it includes the VEF from Katz (1960) and the social-identity and social-adjustment function from Perloff (2010). The new definition is given that the attitude with VEF can help present the central value and belief of individuals. It further helps them find their self-identity and adapt to the reference group.

#### 7.3.2.4 Ego-Defensive Function

The original definition of ego-defensive function (EDF) adopted from the model by Katz is “protecting against internal conflicts and external dangers” (Katz, 1960, p.192). People can have anxieties and frustrations when receiving undesirable truth or facts through their internal insecurity or external threats. The ego-defensive attitude is formed when people want to protect themselves through coping with anxieties generated from internal conflicts or threats.

Through online word posting, it provides a channel for people to reduce their frustration or anxieties and further protect or defend themselves (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). Some participants mentioned that they can release their stress and unpleasant experiences via publishing their negative experiences online. Many participants used these statements to advise others about experiencing the same problem in the future. They also took the negative eWOM as a warning before making any purchase decisions. Therefore, negative WOM can be regarded as a punishment to retailers or service providers.

*I would post a review in an emotional state if it's me being very frustrated or very happy – Participant 8, Group 3*

*A bad thing is a warning to other / a punishment to create bad WOM.....(I have published words) on TripAdvisor or official website about created any negative WOM as a punishment as it's an effective*

Research literature conveys that attitude with EDF can “help an individual cope with anxieties generated by internal conflicts” (Shavitt, 1989, p.313). To further maintain the individual’s ego, Shavitt (1989) defines another function, ‘ego-esteem maintenance function’, which supports the individual to maintain their self-esteem via distancing themselves from disliked or threatening objects or associating with positively regarded objects. For example, people will join their favourite sport fan club to show their support or ‘anti-group (e.g. anti-facebook)’ when they dislike a specific thing. Clary *et al.* (1998) indicate the ‘enhancement function’ when employing functional theory based on volunteering. People volunteer because it makes them feel more important and gives them a feeling of being needed. Thus, the individual can enhance their self-esteem and ego by volunteering.

Online focus group analysis indicated that eWOM communication showed that the individuals perceived their importance when receiving an enquiry from friends or being able to answer questions from strangers online. They felt needed by others. One participant mentioned that he received many requests from friends to recommend somewhere for them to for visit, a restaurant to eat at or a hotel to stay in, because he has a lot of travel experience. Friends consider this information with high credibility.

*(I Have received enquires from friends) many times. It is always nice to tell them (friends) about my travel experience. – Participant 3, Group 2*

Thus, this function is confirmed by the online focus groups as being of primarily importance. It contains the ideas from both the EDF from Katz (1960) and the enhancement function from Clary *et al.* (1998). The new definition is given as attitude with EDF and can help to protect against internal conflicts and enhance self-esteem.

### 7.3.3 Subjective Norm

Subjective norm (SN) refers to various influences or pressures from someone's social network. Such norm will impact on one's behaviour explicitly or implicitly. SN, also known as social norm, is defined as "the person's perception that most people who are important to him think he should or should not perform the behaviour in question" (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p. 302).

Adopting the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) or the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), SN refers to the pressures received from a peer group (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Later studies (e.g. Manning, 2009) suggest that SN should not only refer to perceived pressures, but also to those behaviours that mimic the peer group. Injunctive norm (IN) and descriptive norm (DN) are named so as to describe two different types of norm. These two types of norm do not violate the definition proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen in TRA or TPB (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Instead, they intend to enhance the explanatory ability of the SN. This study therefore adapts two dimensions within SN.

#### 7.3.3.1 Injunctive Norm

Injunctive norm (IN) implies that the referents are implicitly or explicitly forced to behave in a particular way. In the context of eWOM, as an IN, the intention of individuals to communicate via eWOM could be formed by peer pressure from reference groups. It is a mandatory situation whereby individuals feel obligated to express via eWOM. Online focus group participants mentioned that they have not sent any request to their friends to participate in any specific platform of eWOM communication. However, they occasionally received gentle invitations from their friends to join a social network website.

*(Would you recommend your friends to use the same eWOM platform or programme to talk to you?) MSN, yes. Skype, yes. FB, when my friends ask for my FB a/c, i always tell them i try not to update my FB.*

*– Participant 4, Group 1*

This construct is confirmed by online focus groups. The new definition is confirmed as the individual receiving pressure, suggestion, or a requirement to perform eWOM communication from their peer groups.

#### 7.3.3.2 Descriptive Norm

Descriptive norm (DN) refers to situations whereby behaviour is the result of mimicking the conduct of others (Rivis and Sheeran, 2003). As a DN, eWOM sharing can be trendy within the reference group. Individuals are encouraged to participate in order to gain the recognition of their peers or to reinforce their social network of friends.

*I use FB only because lots of my friends are all using it. I suppose through that I can give and take some of my friends' ideas or the latest news about everything. – Participant 1, Group 1.*

*I use (electronic media) because most of my friends are using them.....I stop using Skype because my prof. (who is on the contact list) – Participant 3, Group 3.*

Different from IN, DN was better informed by the online focus groups. This finding is very different than that of TRA or TPB which regard IN as the complete construct of SN. Several participants expressed their participation within a specific platform or network because their friends were doing the same thing.

#### 7.3.4 Summary of the Definition of eWOM Antecedents

Three eWOM antecedents with nine dimensions are all confirmed by the online focus group discussions, although some are strongly supported, others are not. The definition of each construct and variables are amended according to the opinions of participants and the characteristics of this research context. The original and amended definitions of each construct are summarised in Table 7.9.

Table 7.9 Definition of eWOM Antecedents

| Construct  | Original Definition   | Definition in This Study   |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology</b> |   |  |
| Perceived Usefulness (PU)                              | The degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance" (Davis, 1989)  | The perception of Individuals regarding using electronic communication technology to enhance their communication efficiency or / and effectiveness               |
| Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)                            | The degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort" (Davis, 1989)   | The perception of Individuals regarding using electronic communication technology to communicate to be free of effort  |
| Perceived Enjoyment (PE)                               | The activity of using the computer is perceived to be enjoyable in its own right, apart from any performance consequences that may be anticipated" (Davis <i>et al.</i> , 1992) | The perception of Individuals regarding using electronic communication technology to communicate is pleasant and enjoyable, apart from communication performance |
| <b>Motivation for eWOM Communication</b>               |   |  |
| Utilitarian Function (UF)                              | In need of satisfaction, maximizing external rewards and minimizing punishments (Katz, 1960)  | Enabling individuals to gain monetary rewards, non-monetary rewards and social benefits  |
| Knowledge Function (KF)                                | The need for understanding of meaningful cognitive organizations, for consistency and clarity (Katz, 1960)  | Helping individuals to expand their knowledge, obtain new knowledge, and ultimately understand themselves  |
| Value-Expressive Function (VEF)                        | Maintaining self-identity, enhancing a favourable self-image, self-expression, and self-determination (Katz, 1960)  | Enabling individuals to express personal moral belief (standards of good and evil) or value (altruism, freedom, etc), and build up self-image                    |
| Ego-Defensive Function (EDF)                           | Protecting against internal conflicts and external dangers (Katz, 1960)   | Helping individuals to protect against internal conflicts and to feel a sense of belonging   |
| <b>Subjective Norm</b>                                 |   |  |
| Injunctive Norm (IN)                                   | Injunctive norm implies that the referents are implicitly or explicitly forced to behave in a particular way (Manning, 2009)  | Individuals receive pressure, suggestion, or a requirement to perform eWOM communication   |
| Descriptive Norm (DN)                                  | Descriptive norm refers to situations where behaviour is the result of mimicking another's conduct (Manning, 2009)  | eWOM communication is a fashion trend within one's reference group.  |

Shown in Table 7.9, some dimensions of antecedents are adapted from previous research and applied to eWOM communication, such as PU, PEU, 172

and PE. Others are adopted having the original definition but incorporate more implications from the online focus groups, for example, UF and EDF. These definitions will be employed to design the questionnaire which will be discussed in a later section.

#### 7.4 The Revised Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Three antecedents within the proposed conceptual framework were confirmed by the online focus groups with the definitions being amended to fit into the context of eWOM communication. Two remaining focal constructs were employed in the conceptual framework: overall attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. The former is identified as a mediating construct which leads the latter to become a proxy in understanding travellers' eWOM communication. Definitions of the overall attitude and behavioural intention are both adopted from the literature, but focus purely on eWOM communication context. All five focal constructs are therefore confirmed.

Hypotheses are developed based upon underpinned theories and previous research. Three antecedents, Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology, Motivation for eWOM Communication and Subjective Norm, are proposed to have a direct influence on the overall attitude, thereafter on the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Data from the online focus groups confirmed these hypotheses. Participants agreed that the influences from antecedents were on overall attitude, as well as the direct effects being on behavioural intention. In other words, the relationship between antecedents and behavioural intention may be fully or partially mediated by overall attitude.

All hypotheses can be claimed as existing within the context of eWOM which will be empirically tested by quantitative data within the main study. No further elements were mentioned by online focus group participants to influence their eWOM communication behaviour. All antecedents and hypotheses were therefore supported. Statements within the questionnaire should be checked further and amended before processing the main survey (Oppenheim, 1996).



## 7.5 Questionnaire Development and Scale Amendment

The primary statements of focal constructs within the questionnaire are adapted from researched literature. The structure of the questionnaire is also proposed in the methodology chapter. The purpose of this section is to discuss the questionnaire and its screening questions, questions for use of behaviour, and to amend the statements of constructs based upon results from the online focus groups.

### 7.5.1 Key Terms and Screening Question

Several online focus group participants strongly suggested providing the definition of key terms at the start of the questionnaire. By doing so, the respondents could get a clearer picture and definition of the topic. Therefore, the definition of Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), Electronic Media, eWOM Communication and eWOM of travel and tourism opinions, are given in the first section of the questionnaire.

All survey respondents were required to have experience of eWOM communication. A screening question was necessary to check if potential participants had the relevant experience. Therefore, a simple yes/no question was proposed to screen whether the participant had used electronic media to communicate with others regarding travel and tourism related experiences or opinions.

### 7.5.2 Questions regarding Use of Behaviour

This section intends to understand the general use of behaviour through electronic communication technology. Questions include the types of eWOM communication, platform to conduct eWOM communication and frequency of eWOM communication use. The platforms used for eWOM communication are categorised into two types, synchronised and non-synchronised. Opinions are generated from responses by the online focus group participants.

### 7.5.3 Statements Amendment

The main part of the questionnaire was to examine five focal constructs. Firstly, a set question regarding the adoption of electronic communication technology

by employing statements from TAM is introduced. Secondly, questions adapting the functional theory of attitude are explored to find the motivation for eWOM communication. Thirdly, statements are put forward to understand the subjective norm. Fourthly, semantic scales, being pairs of adjectives, are used to measure the overall attitude of participants toward eWOM communication. Lastly, questions regarding the likelihood of intentions to use eWOM communication media are listed.

#### 7.5.3.1 Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology

This construct employs TAM from which statements are adapted for the questionnaire. Online focus group participants provided further information regarding this construct. Table 7.10 lists the related statements by participants in relation to this construct.

Table 7.10 Statements of Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology

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**Perceived Usefulness (PU)**

---

- Using electronic media to communicate is convenient
- Using electronic media to communicate is easy to trace the conversation
- Using electronic media to communicate is easy to share personal opinions / photos / feelings with friends
- Using electronic media to communicate is easy to talk to others who are located in the different countries
- Using electronic media to communicate is easy to generate more information
- Using electronic media to communicate is help to socialise
- Using electronic media to communicate is useful to express pressure
- Using electronic media to communicate can receive prompt reply
- Using electronic media to communicate has more freedom to express
- Using electronic media (specific to E-mail) is easier to track of important documents
- Using electronic media (specific to Facebook and Twitter) is easier to keep updated

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**Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)**

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- Using electronic media to communicate is cheaper
- Electronic media is easy to use
- Electronic media is flexible to use as there are various channels and platforms
- Electronic media make our life easier
- Using electronic media has a skill consideration
- Electronic media may be interfered by ads.
- Electronic media costs lots of time to use (e.g. keeping updates, searching information, etc)
- Electronic media takes time to learn how to use
- One electronic media is easier to be replaced by alternative
- Using electronic media has a language consideration

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**Perceived Enjoyment (PE)**

---

- Using electronic media to communicate is (not) enjoyable
  - Using electronic media is (not) fun
  - Using electronic media is (not) pleasant
- 

Most participants expressed positive opinions of the PU. One point not shown within the original PU scale, but is mentioned by the majority of participants, is added to the survey being, 'Using electronic media to communicate is convenient'. Several points echo the original scale, such as using electronic media improves communication ability, enables communication more quickly and makes communication easier. In PEU, both positive and negative opinions are mentioned by participants. Most statements have adapted the original

scales proposed by Davis (1989) with wording amendment. The statement 'electronic communication technology is cheap to use' has been mentioned by several participants but is not shown in previous studies. This point is therefore added to the questionnaire. The three adapted statements of PE are all confirmed by participants, but from the opposite point of view. Therefore, no further statement is added into the scale, but a negative relationship may be expected between PE and the intention to use eWOM media.

### 7.5.3.2 Motivation for eWOM Communication

The Functional theory of attitude is employed to discuss this construct. Statements related to this construct by participants are listed in Table 7.11.

Table 7.11 Statements of Motivation for eWOM Communication

|  |
|--|
| <b>Utilitarian Function (UF)</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• eWOM communication can help to get rewards, such as free meal or free accommodation</li> <li>• eWOM communication is a way to earn money</li> <li>• eWOM communication can help to build up my social network</li> <li>• eWOM communication enables to find people who has similar interests</li> </ul> |
| <b>Knowledge Function (KF)</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• eWOM communication allows me to learn new things (e.g. from the feedback)</li> <li>• eWOM communication helps me to make my purchase decision</li> <li>• eWOM communication broadens my horizon of thinking</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Ego-Defensive Function (EDF)</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• eWOM communication helps me to get out of sad memories</li> <li>• eWOM communication helps me to release stress</li> <li>• eWOM communication makes me feel important</li> <li>• eWOM communication makes me feel being needed</li> <li>• eWOM communication lets me express my anger</li> </ul>        |
| <b>Value-Expressive Function (VEF)</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• eWOM communication enables me to express my true stories</li> <li>• eWOM communication gives freedom to express</li> <li>• eWOM communication makes me to find who I am</li> <li>• eWOM communication enables me to complain</li> <li>• eWOM communication enables me to recommend</li> </ul>           |

UF within this study focuses on both financial and social benefits which motivate individuals to communicate via eWOM. The financial benefits refer to

both monetary and non-monetary rewards. Statements related to financial benefits are amended as 'eWOM communication enables me to gain income, incentives, or compensation'. On the other hand, statements related to social benefits are added in order to measure this construct. For example, 'eWOM communication enables me to build up my social network'. Within KF, the phrase "broadens my horizon of thinking" is directly adopted from the word of participants and added to the statement. Within EDF and VEF, adapted statements are mostly supported by the opinions of participants, but are expressed in plain words. For instance, one participant mentioned that eWOM provides a chance to compliment a friendly guest house host, which implies the compliment is based on her personal value. Therefore, plain statements are added into the scale based on the opinions expressed by participants.

### 7.5.3.3 Subjective Norm

SN is widely discussed within TRA and TPB which focus purely on IN. This study includes both IN and DN to explore their influences on eWOM communication. The relative statements of subjective norm expressed by participants are listed in Table 7.12.

Table 7.12 Statements of Subjective Norm

|  |
|--|
| <b>Injunctive Norm (IN)</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I participate in eWOM communication because of friends' invitations</li> <li>• I simply ask if they have MSN or SKYPE account</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Descriptive Norm (DN)</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I participate in eWOM communication because I think my friends would like to share my enjoyment</li> <li>• I participate in eWOM communication on a particular platform because my friends do the same thing</li> <li>• I participate in Facebook because all my friends are there</li> </ul> |

As previous studies employing TRA or TPB focus mainly on IN, statements adapted from those studies show more in relation to IN. However, opinions generated from online focus groups inform DN better, although those opinions are really helpful in building the statements for the study questionnaire. As a result, statements of IN are mainly adapted from previous literature, whereas

statements of DN are amended based on the opinions from online focus group discussions.

#### 7.5.3.4 Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication

Overall attitude implies individual's evaluation of eWOM communication. Previous studies normally use pairs of adjectives to ask how participants would evaluate his/her attitude. Adjectives mentioned by online focus group participants include positive, good and enjoyable, etc., which is consistent with previous literature. Adjectives to measure overall attitude do not need to be amended.

#### 7.5.3.5 Behavioural Intention to Use eWOM Communication Media

This construct is not discussed by the online focus groups. Therefore, statements of measuring behavioural intention are adapted from researched literature, but changes are made to fit within the context of eWOM.

#### 7.5.4 Demographic Questions

Demographic questions from most studies contain those of gender, age and educational background. One common question, income, is not included in this study, as it is regarded as a personal privacy and is usually skipped by participants. Also, income is not the concern of this study. This research also conducts both the pilot test and the main study online; therefore the participants should be able to participate in the survey worldwide. The location of the communicator should not be a concern. Questions are asked about nationality and the place of residence of the participant to identify whether their nationality is identical to his/her place of residence. This question also echoes one characteristic of eWOM, in that people can participate in eWOM communication wherever they are in the world. In total, five questions are included in this section.

#### 7.6 Pilot Testing of the Online Questionnaire

By conducting and analysing online focus groups, the conceptual framework is confirmed and the questionnaire is amended. However, some statements added to the questionnaire may have reliability and validity issues. The pilot

test is therefore required to ensure reliability and validity of the draft questionnaire. Firstly, several individuals were invited to check the content validity of the questionnaire. In addition, a small number of participants responded to the pilot survey to examine reliability of the six measures.

### 7.6.1 Validity Testing

Content validity ensures that “the measure includes an adequate and representative set of items that tap the concept” (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010, p. 158). Face validity, which is a basic and minimum index of content validity, is employed to check whether proposed items are intended to measure the concept. In total, six people reviewed the draft questionnaire. Three academics were invited to check items related to the measured constructs; and three native speakers were invited to check the accuracy of wording. Some items were deleted when two or more reviewers voiced concerns over the relevance between the statement and construct. In addition, some items were revised to ensure the meaning of expression. Any confusing sentences pointed out by the native speakers were either deleted or revised to avoid any possible misunderstanding. The amended questionnaire (see Appendix I) is used for the reliability test.

### 7.6.2 Reliability Testing

The reliability test simply represents that a scale should consistently reflect the construct it is measuring (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). In other words, the high reliable scales should provide a consistent result on a different research context, or at a different period in time.

The questionnaire was distributed through the researcher’s online link to her social network. In total, 55 responses were received. Of these only 35 responses were valid. Some respondents selected to answer “no” at the screening question and were therefore disqualified. Other respondents did not finish the whole survey and dropped out in the middle of the process. SPSS is used to analyse the reliability test at this stage.

Analysis steps to test reliability suggested by Pallant (2010) are used to examine the reliability of scales within this study. 1) Checking the Inter-Item

Correlation Matrix. If any item receives a negative value, this item should not be related or is reversed; 2) Checking Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha is preferable when the score is higher than 0.80. It is an acceptable scale when the Alpha is greater than 0.70; 3) Checking Corrected Items -Total Correlation. An item may be deleted if the correlation score is lower than 0.30.

Following the above steps, only one item within PEU showed a negative value in the correlation matrix. This item was reversed for further analysis. The Cronbach's Alpha statistics in relation to the measures are shown in Table 7.13.

Table 7.13 Cronbach's Alpha of Constructs / Dimensions

| <b>Construct / Dimension</b>                                 | <b>Number of items</b> | <b>Cronbach's Alpha</b> |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Adoption of Electronic Technology Communication</b>       |                        |                         |
| Perceived Usefulness   | 5                      | 0.80                    |
| Perceived Ease of Use  | 5                      | 0.81                    |
| Perceived Enjoyment  | 3                      | 0.69                    |
| <b>Motivation for eWOM Communication</b>                     |                        |                         |
| Utilitarian Function   | 6                      | 0.71                    |
| Knowledge Function   | 8                      | 0.84                    |
| Ego-Defensive Function                                       | 7                      | 0.90                    |
| Value-Expressive Function                                    | 8                      | 0.83                    |
| <b>Subjective Norm</b>                                       |                        |                         |
| Injunctive Norm  | 3                      | 0.68                    |
| Descriptive Norm   | 3                      | 0.78                    |
| <b>Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication</b>           |                        |                         |
| Overall Attitude   | 5                      | 0.78                    |
| <b>Behavioural Intention to Use eWOM Communication Media</b> |                        |                         |
| Behavioural Intention  | 3                      | 0.73                    |

The reliability shows a satisfactory result in that almost all measures are reliable. Only two constructs, PE and IN, had slightly lower scores. Following the suggested step, the Corrected Item-Total Correlation is checked so that there is no item below 0.30. In sum, no item should be deleted.



As the Cronbach's Alpha of PE and IN is lower than the expected standard, the statements were revised again by checking previous literature and data from online focus groups. The PE has no further amendments as statements are similar between various studies held under a different research context and online focus groups. Statements of IN are considered to be revised. Because the originality of SN is proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), the statements in TRA or TPB are re-considered to measure IN (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). DN and IN are two dimensions of SN therefore statements from both constructs are revised. The new statements are shown Table 7.14. The remaining statements are not amended and used within the main study. The full main study questionnaire is shown in Appendix II.

Table 7.14 Revised Statements of Subjective Norm

| <b>Injunctive Norm (IN)</b>   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most people who are important to me would support my participation in eWOM communication</li> <li>• Most people who are important to me would approve of my participating in eWOM communication</li> <li>• Most people who are important to me would expect that I should participate in eWOM communication</li> <li>• Most people who are important to me would require me to participate in eWOM communication</li> <li>• Most people who are important to me would think that I should participate in eWOM communication</li> </ul> |
| <b>Descriptive Norm (DN)</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most people who are important to me have participated in eWOM communication before</li> <li>• Most people in my social network have participated in eWOM communication before</li> <li>• Most people whose opinion I value have eWOM communication experience before</li> </ul>  |

As this pilot survey was sent to the researcher's acquaintances through her social network, they were asked for additional suggestions or comments on the survey. Some participants could not understand the term 'eWOM' as they did not read the key words description carefully. Therefore, the explanation of eWOM and purpose of the study should be declared and highlighted repeatedly in the e-mail invitation to complete the survey along with the first page of the web-based survey. Secondly, some people suggested deleting the

yes/no screening question and to use the second question 'What type of opinions have you posted' as a screening question instead. An extra option 'none of the above' can be applied to identify a participant without any experience. Such a question can also give the participant examples of eWOM communication which can enable them to become familiar with the research topic.

## 7.7 Summary

Online focus groups and pilot testing were conducted in preparation for the upcoming survey. Data produced by the online focus groups confirms the proposed antecedents and hypotheses within the context of eWOM communication. Because of the exploratory nature of the focus groups, the definition of each construct and statements used in the survey were amended accordingly. In addition, no further antecedents were considered for the proposed conceptual framework. Regarding the pilot study, validity and reliability were tested to ensure the quality of statements. Although statements of subjective norm were amended, the remaining statements received good reliability scores having been screened by several reviewers. These two steps ensured the questionnaire was correctly developed and ready to be administered.

# Chapter 8

## Findings of the Survey

### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings from the main survey. The survey questionnaire was used as a means to collect primary data and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed as the data analysing technique. The purpose of the data analysis was to assess validity and reliability of the measures and to test the research hypotheses. This chapter contains five parts: 1) demographic and behavioural characteristic of the sample, 2) data screening, 3) reliability and validity of the measures, 4) testing of the research hypotheses, and 5) multiple group comparisons.

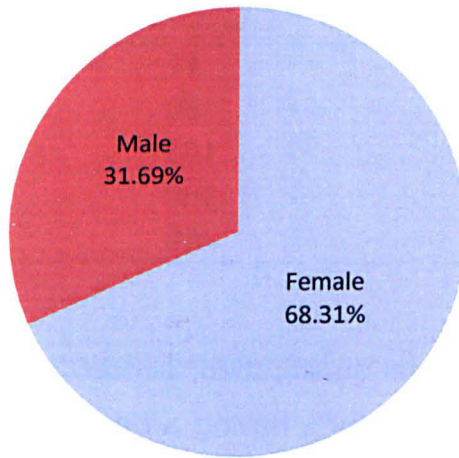
### 8.2 The Sample

Data were collected from international travellers having experience of eWOM communication. A reasonable attempt was made to randomise the sampling process for data collection. After assessment of incomplete responses, missing values and outliers, 533 valid responses were retained.

#### 8.2.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

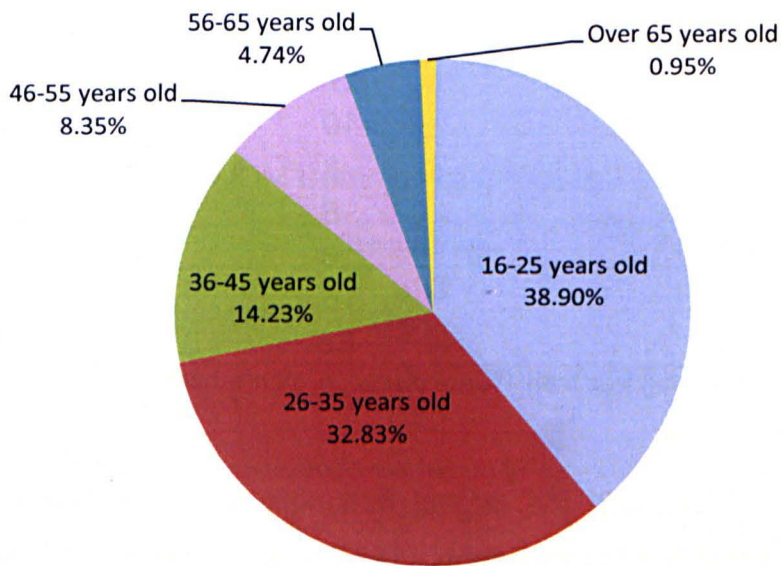
The gender of respondents is shown in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1 Gender of the Sample (n=527)



As can be seen in Figure 8.2, 68% of respondents were female with 32% being male. The age group of participants was thereafter investigated and is presented in Figure 8.2.

Figure 8.2 Age Group of the Sample (n=527)



As shown in Figure 8.2, the largest age group was that of 16-25 year olds, accounting for 39%. The second largest, being a third of the overall group was those of 26-35 years of age. These two groups accounted for more than 70% of total participants. The smallest group was those of over 65 years old.

Their educational qualification was a question required in understanding the background of participants. The results are shown in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1 Educational Qualification of the Sample (n=519)

|                   | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|-----------|----------------|
| High School       | 41        | 7.90           |
| College Diploma   | 80        | 15.41          |
| Bachelor's Degree | 153       | 29.48          |
| Master's Degree   | 180       | 34.68          |
| Doctoral Degree   | 65        | 12.52          |

In terms of their educational qualification, almost 35% of participants held a master's degree, followed by 29% having a bachelor's degree. In addition to gender, age and educational qualification, this study recorded their nationality and place of residence. Table 8.2 lists the nationality of respondents.

Table 8.2 Nationality of the Sample (n=512)

|            | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|------------|-----------|----------------|
| Taiwanese  | 155       | 30.27          |
| Chinese    | 118       | 23.05          |
| British    | 94        | 18.36          |
| American   | 27        | 5.27           |
| Vietnamese | 10        | 1.95           |
| German     | 8         | 1.56           |
| Canadian   | 6         | 1.17           |
| Thai       | 6         | 1.17           |
| Turkish    | 6         | 1.17           |
| Others     | 82        | 16.02          |

Note: Nationality being less than 1% are placed in 'others' category.

As shown in Table 8.2, the largest nationality group is that of Taiwanese accounting for 30% of respondents. The second and third nationalities were those of Chinese and British accounting for 23% and 18% of all participants respectively. Additionally, Table 8.3 shows the residential status of respondents, which do not necessarily match their nationality.

Table 8.3 Place of Residence of the Sample (n=518)

|                | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| United Kingdom | 151       | 29.15          |
| Taiwan         | 133       | 25.68          |
| China          | 90        | 17.37          |
| United States  | 62        | 11.97          |
| Hong Kong      | 11        | 2.12           |
| Singapore      | 7         | 1.35           |
| Others         | 64        | 12.36          |

Note: Places of residence being less than 1% are placed in 'others' category.

29% of respondents lived within the UK with almost 26% living in Taiwan. The third largest group was China, accounting for 17% of participants.

### 8.2.2 Behavioural Characteristics of the Sample

The survey was initiated by a screening question which not only filtered the non-qualified participants, but also recorded the most popular activities of eWOM communication. Table 8.4 shows the usage of eWOM communication by respondents.

Table 8.4 eWOM Communication Usage (n=533)

|                       | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Photos                | 388       | 72.80          |
| Comments              | 305       | 57.22          |
| E-Mails               | 267       | 50.09          |
| Ticking 'Like'        | 220       | 41.28          |
| Answering Question    | 213       | 39.96          |
| Private Conversations | 211       | 39.59          |
| Reviews               | 181       | 33.96          |
| Articles              | 179       | 33.58          |
| Ratings               | 161       | 30.21          |
| Direct Communication  | 125       | 23.45          |
| Online Surveys        | 116       | 21.76          |
| Videos                | 116       | 21.76          |
| Raising Questions     | 79        | 14.82          |

Note: Multiple records were allowed.

More than 70% of respondents accessed photo uploading as their eWOM communication. The second most common eWOM activity was to make comments, resulting in 57% of participants being involved. E-mail occupied the third place, attracting more than half of participants in the use of eWOM communication.

In addition to types of eWOM communication, different communication channels were also investigated. Table 8.5 shows the percentage of behaviour usage between different real-time platforms.

Table 8.5 eWOM Communication of Real-Time Platform (n=533)

|                  | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Facebook Chat    | 295       | 55.35          |
| Skype            | 253       | 47.47          |
| MSN Messenger    | 207       | 38.84          |
| Google Talk      | 71        | 13.32          |
| Yahoo! Messenger | 71        | 13.32          |
| ICQ              | 34        | 6.38           |

Note: Multiple answers were allowed.

Approximately 55% of participants engaged in Facebook Chat to communicate their opinions on real-time communication platforms. Skype, being the second most popular channel, accounted for 47% of respondents.

On the other hand, the frequency and percentage of usage behaviour of non-real-time platforms is presented in Table 8.6.

Table 8.6 eWOM Communication of Non-Real-Time Platform (n=533)

|               | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------|-----------|----------------|
| Facebook      | 355       | 66.60          |
| E-Mail        | 314       | 58.91          |
| Blog          | 170       | 31.89          |
| TripAdvisor   | 158       | 29.64          |
| YouTube       | 103       | 19.32          |
| Twitter       | 85        | 15.95          |
| Google+       | 73        | 13.70          |
| Wikipedia     | 67        | 12.57          |
| Company Forum | 59        | 11.07          |
| LinkedIn      | 34        | 6.38           |
| Flickr        | 27        | 5.07           |
| MySpace       | 31        | 5.82           |
| Plurk         | 21        | 3.94           |
| Bebo          | 9         | 1.69           |

Note: Multiple records were allowed.

With reference to communication of non-real-time platforms (see Table 8.6), Facebook was the most popular non-real-time platform for participants to exchange their travel opinions online. Two-thirds of participants (67%) were involved in Facebook for travel-related eWOM communication. E-mail was shown to be the second most common way of engaging in eWOM communication, this being an asynchronous channel (59%).

Through comprehensive evaluation of all eWOM channels, the most popular eWOM communication platform is presented in Table 8.7, summarised by each participant answer.



Table 8.7 The Most Frequently Used eWOM Platform (n=527)

|                     | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Facebook            | 182       | 34.54          |
| E-Mail              | 84        | 15.94          |
| Travel Info Website | 62        | 11.76          |
| Blog                | 40        | 7.59           |
| Skype               | 22        | 4.17           |
| Twitter             | 19        | 3.61           |
| MSN Messenger       | 19        | 3.61           |
| ICQ                 | 14        | 2.66           |
| Facebook Chat       | 12        | 2.28           |
| Forum               | 7         | 1.33           |
| YouTube             | 7         | 1.33           |
| Y! Messenger        | 6         | 1.14           |
| Google+             | 5         | 0.95           |
| Wikipedia           | 4         | 0.76           |
| LinkedIn            | 3         | 0.57           |
| MySpace             | 3         | 0.57           |
| Plurk               | 2         | 0.38           |
| Bebo                | 1         | 0.19           |
| Others              | 35        | 6.64           |

As shown in Table 8.7, approximately 34% of participants claimed that their most frequently used channel for eWOM communication was Facebook. This finding echoes the most popular real-time platform as being Facebook Chat, whereas the most commonly used non-real-time platform was Facebook. E-mail was the second most frequently used platform to communicate travel relevant information.

### 8.3 Data Screening

Data screening is an important procedure to all studies prior to processing the data analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2009; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). It can identify and correct potential problems within the dataset which may distort the analysis results and its generalisability. Four issues: incomplete / unqualified data, missing values, outliers and normality, were discussed respectively prior to data analysis.

The first step of data screening was to delete the unqualified and/or incomplete responses. Unqualified responses accounted for those participants without any experience of eWOM communication. Even though the self-selective sampling strategy was applied within the main study, participants without any experience may still participate in the survey. Therefore, to avoid this, the screening question was arranged to ensure all participants have had relevant eWOM communication experience. 23 responses were excluded based on the screening question. Additionally, some participants did not fully complete the survey. Reasons for this may be that participants did not pay clear attention to the question or they did not feel comfortable in completing the survey. After deletion of the unqualified and incomplete responses, 585 surveys were retained for further analysis.

The second step of data screening was to detect missing values. Within 585 usable responses, 98 cases had one or more missing value. As there was only a small number of missing values, the substitution method was chosen. The substitution method requires assigning an estimated value to the missing value (Allison, 2009). The advantage is to keep most available data in comparison to deletion methods. It is also simpler than imputation techniques which require a more statistical technique and additional software. To be specific, this study applied linear correlation to replace the missing values.

The third issue, outlier, requires attention and gives the appropriate dealing process. Both univariate and multivariate outliers were detected and managed within this research. The univariate outlier refers to any cases having an extreme score on one variable, whereas multivariate outliers are a combination of values of two or more variables (Frane, 1976; Hair *et al.*, 2009). By using Z scores of all values, 52 cases were identified as univariate outliers within the dataset. The listwise method was used to delete all outliers as it was not a big portion of the complete dataset. Moreover, multivariate outliers were detected by assessing Mahalanobis Distance ( $D^2$ ). There was no multivariate outlier within this study. After deletion of the univariate outliers, 533 cases were used to examine the normality assumption.

Normality is the fundamental assumption for multivariate data analysis. Univariate normality is sufficient to assess the normality assumption given the

sample size is large enough (Hair *et al.*, 2009; Kline, 2011). Skewness and kurtosis were used to detect univariate normality within this research. The absolute Skewness Index (SI) values of all items ranged between 0.006 and 1.303, whereas the absolute Kurtosis Index (KI) scores ranged from 0.001 to 1.233. These values are shown in Appendix III. According to Kline (2011), items having a SI value of more than 3.0 should be regarded as extreme skewness, whereas KI values exceeding 20 indicates serious kurtosis. All single items were inferred as having normal univariate distribution, having no severe problem toward data analysis.

#### 8.4 Assessing Validity of the Measures: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Two steps in analysing SEM was used to test validity of the conceptual framework and the research hypotheses (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is the first step in validating the measurement model with underlying latent factors and corresponding indicators. The maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method was used for this research (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Given that there is no violation of normality, CFA was used to test validity of the measurement model.

This study integrates three theories in the process of building a conceptual framework. All constructs employed in the conceptual framework are underpinned by theories drawn from research literature. The measures were adopted and amended based upon the online focus groups to fit into the context of eWOM communication. The measures are shown in Table 8.8.

Table 8.8 The Measures

| Code  | Measure  |
|---|--|
| <b>Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology (Adoption)</b> |  |
| <b>Perceived Usefulness (PU)</b>                                  |  |
| PU1:  | Using electronic media improves my ability to communicate                            |
| PU2:  | Using electronic media enables me to communicate more quickly                        |
| PU3:  | Using electronic media enables my communication more effectively                     |
| PU4:  | Using electronic media makes my communication with others easier                     |
| PU5:  | Using electronic media to communicate is inexpensive                                 |
| <b>Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)</b>                                |  |
| PEU1:   | Using electronic media to communicate is convenient                                  |
| PEU2:   | Learning to use electronic media to communicate is easy                              |
| PEU3:   | I find that electronic media is easy to use for communication                        |
| PEU4:   | It is easy for me to become proficient at using electronic media to communicate      |
| PEU5:   | It is difficult for me to use electronic media without training (R)                  |
| <b>Perceived Enjoyment (PE)</b>                                   |  |
| PE1:  | Using electronic media to communicate is enjoyable                                   |
| PE2:  | The process of using electronic media to communicate is pleasant                     |
| PE3:  | I find it fun to communicate through electronic media                                |
| <b>Motivation for eWOM Communication (Motivation)</b>             |  |
| <b>Utilitarian Function (UF)</b>                                  |  |
| UF1:  | eWOM communication is my primary source of income                                    |
| UF2:  | eWOM communication enables me to earn extra income                                   |
| UF3:  | eWOM communication enables me to have non-financial benefits (e.g. free meal)        |
| UF4:  | eWOM communication enables me to receive incentives (e.g. discount)                  |
| UF5:  | eWOM communication enables me to meet people   |
| UF6:  | eWOM communication enables me to make new friends                                    |
| UF7:  | eWOM communication enables me to stay connected with others                          |
| UF8:  | eWOM communication is a way to build up my social network                            |
| <b>Knowledge Function (KF)</b>                                    |  |
| KF1:  | eWOM communication enables me to reflect upon myself                                 |
| KF2:  | eWOM communication enables me to find out who I am                                   |
| KF3:  | eWOM communication enables me to understand who I would like to be                   |
| KF4:  | eWOM communication enables me to obtain new knowledge                                |
| KF5:  | eWOM communication enables me to have new perspectives on my knowledge               |
| KF6:  | eWOM communication enables me to better understand my perspectives on the world      |
| KF7:  | eWOM communication enables me to clarify my thinking                                 |
| KF8:  | eWOM communication provides an opportunity to get feedback from others               |
| <b>Value-Expressive Function (VEF)</b>                            |  |
| VEF1:   | eWOM communication allows me to express my personal standards of right and wrong     |
| VEF2:   | eWOM communication allows me to express the ideas I cherish                          |
| VEF3:   | eWOM communication allows me to express my values (e.g. altruism, freedom of speech) |
| VEF4:   | eWOM communication allows me to express my own opinions                              |
| VEF5:   | eWOM communication reflects my values of good and evil (moral values)                |
| VEF6:   | eWOM communication allows me to build-up my personal image to others                 |
| VEF7:   | eWOM communication provides me an opportunity to give advice to others               |
| VEF8:   | eWOM communication enables me to help others   |
| <b>Ego-Defensive Function (EDF)</b>                               |  |
| EDF1:   | eWOM communication helps me to be released from bad feelings                         |
| EDF2:   | eWOM communication helps me work through my own personal problems                    |
| EDF3:   | eWOM communication enables me to escape from my negative emotions                    |
| EDF4:   | eWOM communication makes me feel important   |
| EDF5:   | eWOM communication enhances my self-esteem   |
| EDF6:   | eWOM communication makes me feel needed  |
| EDF7:   | eWOM communication makes me feel better about myself                                 |

Table 8.8 The Measures (Continued)

| Code   | Measure   |
|--|---|
| <b>Subjective Norm (Norm)</b>  |   |
| <b>Injunctive Norm (IN)</b>  |   |
| IN1:   | Most people who are important to me would support my participation in eWOM communication                |
| IN2:   | Most people who are important to me would approve of my participating in eWOM communication             |
| IN3:   | Most people who are important to me would expect that I should participate in eWOM communication        |
| IN4:   | Most people who are important to me would require me to participate in eWOM communication               |
| IN5:   | Most people who are important to me would think that I should participate in eWOM communication         |
| <b>Descriptive Norm (DN)</b>   |   |
| DN1:   | Most people who are important to me have participated in eWOM communication before                      |
| DN2:   | Most people in my social network have participated in eWOM communication before                         |
| DN3:   | Most people whose opinion I value have eWOM communication experience before                             |
| <b>Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication (Attitude)</b>            |   |
| <b>Overall Attitude (ATT)</b>  |   |
| ATT1:  | Very Negative ----- Very Positive   |
| ATT2:  | Dislike Very Much ----- Like Very Much  |
| ATT3:  | Very Worthless ----- Very Valuable  |
| ATT4:  | Very Undesirable ----- Very Desirable   |
| ATT5:  | Very Unpleasant ----- Very Pleasant   |
| ATT6:  | Very Useless ----- Very Useful  |
| <b>Behavioural Intention to Use eWOM Communication Media (Intention)</b> |   |
| <b>Behavioural Intention (BI)</b>  |   |
| BI1:   | I will use eWOM to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in the next 12 months                |
| BI2:   | I will spend more time on eWOM to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in the next 12 months |
| BI3:   | I will recommend others to communicate their travel and tourism related opinions via eWOM               |

As can be seen in Table 8.8, five main constructs are split into nine dimensions with 61 scale items. A coding was assigned to each item and construct for the AMOS graphic analysis. Only one item, PEU5, had a reversed coded statement. This was reversed and recoded as PEU6 and used in later analysis.

#### 8.4.1 Assessing Reliability and Validity of Measures

Reliability of the measures was examined by both Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (CR) statistics. The value of Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability should exceed 0.70 to indicate sufficient reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2009; Pallant, 2010).

As reliability is not sufficient to ensure the goodness of data, validity of the scale was further assessed. Discriminate validity and convergent validity were applied to check validity of the measures within the study. Convergent validity is observed when all standardised factor loadings are statistically significant and are higher than 0.50 or preferably larger than 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, according to Fornell and Larcker (1981) discriminate validity is observed when Average Variances Extracted (AVEs) from each latent constructs is greater than the square of the inter-construct correlation estimates (SICs).

In addition to the reliability and validity assessment, the primary interest in the use of structural equation modelling is testing the theory by assessing the model fitness (Byrne, 2010; Schumacker and Lomax, 2010). Goodness-of-fit (GOF) tests refer to the assessment of whether the sample data can 'fit' the hypothesised model. If the value of goodness-of-fit is higher, the model fitness is better, which implies the observed data is closer to the theoretical model. Goodness-of-fit indices are those of scores to evaluate the adequate fit of sample data. Chi-square is the conventional statistic to examine the model fitness and is expected to be non-significant in the indication of a good model fit. However, Chi-square is seriously affected by the sample size, therefore the model complexity becomes an insufficient basis in evaluation of model fitness (Hu and Bentler, 1995). A group of fit statistics are cautiously scrutinised in accessing model fitness, including Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). GFI, NFI, CFI surpassing 0.90 are considered to be an acceptable model fit (MacCallum *et al.*, 1996), whereas the RMSEA value being below 0.07 shows a good fit (Steiger, 2007). Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is also taken into consideration when evaluating the residual fit of the overall model (Kline, 2011). The value of SRMR which is lower than 0.08 shows the cut-off standard of a good model fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

#### 8.4.2 Construct Validity of Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology Scale

This research has employed three dimensions within TAM to understand travellers' adoption of electronic media communication technology. Five items were included in perceived usefulness (PU), five items for perceived ease of use (PEU), and three items for perceived enjoyment (PE). Table 8.9 shows the goodness-of-fit indices of the original and revised adoption of the electronic communication technology scale.

Table 8.9 Goodness-of-Fit Indices of Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology Scale

| Competing Models            | $\chi^2$ | df | p     | GFI   | NFI   | CFI   | RMSEA | SRMR  |
|-----------------------------|----------|----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                             | -        | -  | >0.05 | >0.90 | >0.90 | >0.90 | <0.07 | <0.08 |
| The Base Model (13 items)   | 199.52   | 62 | 0.00  | 0.94  | 0.94  | 0.95  | 0.065 | 0.05  |
| The Revised Model (6 items) | 6.89     | 8  | 0.00  | 1.00  | 1.00  | 1.00  | 0.000 | 0.01  |

As can be seen from the base model results, the model fit indices showed good results ( $\chi^2 = 199.52$ ,  $df = 62$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $GFI = 0.94$ ,  $NFI = 0.94$ ,  $CFI = 0.95$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.065$ , and  $SRMR = 0.05$ ). Although all model fit indices were satisfactory, some items required deletion due to low item loadings. The standardised factor loading is suggested to be higher than 0.50 and ideally above 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2009). PEU6 (It is difficult for me to use electronic media without training), was deleted because the loading was only 0.23. Furthermore, PU and PEU revealed a high correlation score (0.86) which threatened discriminate validity of the scale. PU and PEU were therefore merged.

The model was re-analysed after combining PU and PEU and deleting PEU6. The revised model concluded at  $\chi^2 = 198.70$ ,  $df = 53$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $GFI = 0.94$ ,  $NFI = 0.93$ ,  $CFI = 0.95$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.072$ , and  $SRMR = 0.04$ . Although factor loading exceeded 0.50, the RMSEA was slightly higher than the recommended cut-off criteria (Steiger, 2007). In addition, nine items representing a single construct did not fit the model parsimony notion. Some items were deleted according to whether the factor loading was above 0.70 or not. To avoid relying exclusively on goodness of fit indices, the description, discriminate

validity, and significance of each parameter were also taken into consideration to help diagnose the sources of model misspecification. After several trials, PU1 (Using electronic media improves my ability to communicate), PU2 (Using electronic media enables me to communicate more quickly), PU3 (Using electronic media enables my communication more effectively), PU4 (Using electronic media makes my communication with others easier), PU5 (Using electronic media to communicate is inexpensive) and PEU4 (It is easy for me to become proficient at using electronic media to communicate) were deleted.

As can be seen from Table 8.9, the revised measurement model having six items suggested to be of good model fit ( $\chi^2 = 6.89$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.55$ ,  $GFI = 1.00$ ,  $NFI = 1.00$ ,  $CFI = 1.00$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.000$ , and  $SRMR = 0.01$ ) and also satisfies the parsimony principle. The factor loadings are shown in Table 8.10.

Table 8.10 Factor Loadings of Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology Scale

| Statements  | Item loading |
|---|--------------|
| <b>Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)</b>                                    |              |
| PEU1: Using electronic media to communicate is convenient             | 0.73         |
| PEU2: Learning to use electronic media to communicate is easy         | 0.76         |
| PEU3: I find that electronic media is easy to use for communication   | 0.83         |
| <b>Perceived Enjoyment (PE)</b>                                       |              |
| PE1: Using electronic media to communicate is enjoyable               | 0.82         |
| PE2: The process of using electronic media to communicate is pleasant | 0.79         |
| PE3: I find it fun to communicate through electronic media            | 0.77         |

Factor loadings for each item were above 0.70. The remaining three items combining PU and PEU were originally from PEU. In other words, items within PU were all deleted at the construct was completely eliminated at the end of the CFA process.

The reliability and validity of the adoption of electronic communication technology scale was further calculated. Table 8.11 lists the average variances extracted (AVE) of PEU and PE, correlation estimates (IC) and squares of correlation estimates (SIC).



Table 8.11 Reliability, AVEs & Correlations of Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology Scale

|                             | PEU         | PE          | $\alpha$ | CR   |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|------|
| Perceived Ease of Use (PEU) | <b>0.60</b> | 0.73        | 0.82     | 0.82 |
| Perceived Enjoyment (PE)    | 0.53        | <b>0.63</b> | 0.84     | 0.84 |

Note: The diagonal figures in bold indicate the average variances extracted (AVE) for each construct. The scores in the upper diagonal are the correlation (IC). The scores in the lower diagonal are the squares of the correlation (SIC). " $\alpha$ " indicates Cronbach's Alpha, whereas "CR" represents composite reliability.

As shown in Table 8.11, the Cronbach's Alpha of PEU and PE are 0.82 and 0.84 whereas the composite reliability stands at 0.82 and 0.84 respectively. Both scores demonstrated that the scales were reliable (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Convergent validity was achieved as all factor loadings were statistically significant. The item loadings were above 0.70. All AVEs were higher than 0.50 as well as being larger than corresponding SICs. Therefore, discriminate validity of the adoption of the electronic communication technology scale was confirmed.

#### 8.4.3 Construct Validity of Motivation for eWOM Communication Scale

The functional theory of attitude is employed as an underpinning theory to understand the travellers' motivation for eWOM communication. This theory is originally developed by Katz (1960) who proposed four motivation functions: Utilitarian Function (UF), Knowledge Function (KF), Value-Expressive Function (VEF), and Ego-Defensive Function (EDF). This study has developed a conceptual framework based on Katz's model (1960) of attitude to explain the travellers' motivation for eWOM communication.

In later research, the utilitarian function splits into two different functions: Monetary-Utilitarian Function (MUF) and Social-Utilitarian Function (SUF) (Gastil, 1992). Both the MUF and SUF infer that an individual creates a positive attitude toward behaviour because they can receive advantages by applying a specific behaviour. The difference between these two functions is that the MUF addresses the monetary advantages whereas the SUF advocates social benefits. In addition, the EDF is divided into two functions: Ego-Protective Function (EPF) and Ego-Enhance Function (EEF). The EPF

and EEF emphasises that a positive attitude is created by the individual because of their ego consideration. Some would prefer to protect their ego by applying a specific behaviour, which is referred to as EPF. On the other hand, the EEF means that people would like to enhance their ego through the execution of a specific behaviour. Given that there are different classifications of functions, four competing models with different function combinations were firstly assessed. 31 items were used to measure the travellers' motivation for eWOM communication. Table 8.12 shows the results of competing models in relation to the travellers' motivation for eWOM communication.

Table 8.12 Goodness-of-Fit Indices for Motivation for eWOM Communication Scale

| Competing Models                        | $\chi^2$ | df  | p     | GFI   | NFI   | CFI   | RMSEA | SRMR  |
|---|----------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|   | -        | -   | >0.05 | >0.90 | >0.90 | >0.90 | <0.07 | <0.08 |
| Model 1: UF+KF+VEF+EDF                  | 2316.76  | 428 | 0.00  | 0.72  | 0.80  | 0.83  | 0.075 | 0.08  |
| Model 2: MUF+SUF+KF+VEF+EDF             | 1906.70  | 424 | 0.00  | 0.77  | 0.84  | 0.87  | 0.068 | 0.07  |
| Model 3: UF+KF+VEF+EPF+EEF              | 2151.49  | 424 | 0.00  | 0.74  | 0.82  | 0.85  | 0.074 | 0.07  |
| Model 4: MUF+SUF+KF+VEF+EPF+EEF         | 1739.31  | 419 | 0.00  | 0.79  | 0.85  | 0.89  | 0.067 | 0.07  |
| Model 5 (5 sub constructs and 18 items) | 359.227  | 125 | 0.00  | 0.93  | 0.94  | 0.96  | 0.059 | 0.03  |

Note: UF = Utilitarian Function, KF = Knowledge Function, VEF = Value-Expressive Function, EDF = Ego-Defensive Function, MUF = Monetary-Utilitarian Function, SUF = Social-Utilitarian Function, EPF = Ego-Protective Function and EEF = Ego-Enhancive Function.

This research model has six functions obtaining the best goodness-of-fit indices, which are shown in Table 8.12. However, the model fit indices showed a poor model fit. Modifications were thus required to improve the model (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Accordingly, constructs highly correlated with others were deleted to improve discriminate validity. Items having low factor loadings were deleted to improve convergent validity. Items with cross-loadings were eliminated.

Based on these steps, the EEF was firstly eliminated from the model because it was highly correlated to the KF (0.82) and EPF (0.85). The remaining constructs demonstrated good discriminate validity. As the model goodness-of-fit indices did not yet reach a satisfactory level, factor loadings of each item were observed. Factor loadings above 0.70 were ideal and above 0.50 were acceptable for convergent validity. As a result the following items were deleted: KF8 (eWOM communication provides an opportunity to get feedback from

others), KF4 (eWOM communication enables me to obtain new knowledge), UF7 (eWOM communication enables me to stay connected with others), VEF8 (eWOM communication enables me to help others), VEF7 (eWOM communication provides me an opportunity to give advice to others) and KF5 (eWOM communication enables me to have new perspectives on my knowledge). The revised model did not produce satisfactory model fit indices yet. Therefore, the following three items were eliminated from the measurement model: UF1 (eWOM communication is my primary source of income), VEF4 (eWOM communication allows me to express my own opinions) and VEF6 (eWOM communication allows me to build-up my personal image to others).

As shown in the last line of Table 8.12, Model 5 with 18 items received a good model fitness of  $\chi^2 = 359.23$ ,  $df = 125$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $GFI = 0.93$ ,  $NFI = 0.94$ ,  $CFI = 0.96$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.059$ , and  $SRMR = 0.03$ . Given the modest fitness, factor loadings of the remaining items are listed in Table 8.13.

Table 8.13 Factor Loadings of Motivation for eWOM Communication Scale

| Statements   | Item loading |
|--|--------------|
| <b>Monetary-Utilitarian Function (MUF)</b>   |              |
| UF2: eWOM communication enables me to earn extra income                                    | 0.71         |
| UF3: eWOM communication enables me to have non-financial benefits (e.g. free meal)         | 0.84         |
| UF4: eWOM communication enables me to receive incentives (e.g. discount)                   | 0.74         |
| <b>Social-Utilitarian Function (SUF)</b>   |              |
| UF5: eWOM communication enables me to meet people  | 0.82         |
| UF6: eWOM communication enables me to make new friends                                     | 0.85         |
| UF8: eWOM communication is a way to build up my social network                             | 0.71         |
| <b>Knowledge Function (KF)</b>   |              |
| KF1: eWOM communication enables me to reflect upon myself                                  | 0.79         |
| KF2: eWOM communication enables me to find out who I am                                    | 0.88         |
| KF3: eWOM communication enables me to understand who I would like to be                    | 0.85         |
| KF6: eWOM communication enables me to better understand my perspective on the world        | 0.75         |
| KF7: eWOM communication enables me to clarify my thinking                                  | 0.76         |
| <b>Value-Expressive Function (VEF)</b>   |              |
| VEF1: eWOM communication allows me to express my personal standards of right and wrong     | 0.78         |
| VEF2: eWOM communication allows me to express the ideas I cherish                          | 0.77         |
| VEF3: eWOM communication allows me to express my values (e.g. altruism, freedom of speech) | 0.80         |
| VEF5: eWOM communication reflects my values of good and evil (moral values)                | 0.75         |
| <b>Ego-Protective Function (EPF)</b>   |              |
| EDF1: eWOM communication helps me to be released from bad feelings                         | 0.86         |
| EDF2: eWOM communication helps me work through my own personal problems                    | 0.82         |
| EDF3: eWOM communication enables me to escape from my negative emotions                    | 0.85         |

Three items remained within the MUF, SUF and EPF scales. Four items were retained within the VEF while five items were left within the KF. All item loadings were statistically significant and surpassed the ideal standard of 0.70 as shown in Table 8.13.

The validity and reliability of the scales were also assessed as illustrated in Table 8.14.

Table 8.14 Reliability, AVEs & Correlations of Motivation for eWOM Communication Scale

|                                     | MUF         | SUF         | KF          | VEF         | EDF         | $\alpha$ | CR   |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------|------|
| Monetary-Utilitarian Function (MUF) | <b>0.58</b> | 0.65        | 0.65        | 0.41        | 0.52        | 0.81     | 0.81 |
| Social-Utilitarian Function (SUF)   | 0.42        | <b>0.64</b> | 0.69        | 0.56        | 0.57        | 0.84     | 0.84 |
| Knowledge Function (KF)             | 0.43        | 0.47        | <b>0.64</b> | 0.73        | 0.78        | 0.90     | 0.90 |
| Value-Expressive Function (VEF)     | 0.17        | 0.31        | 0.54        | <b>0.60</b> | 0.76        | 0.85     | 0.86 |
| Ego-Protective Function (EPF)       | 0.27        | 0.33        | 0.60        | 0.58        | <b>0.71</b> | 0.88     | 0.88 |

Note: The diagonal figures in bold indicate the average variances extracted (AVE) for each construct. The scores in the upper diagonal are the correlations (IC). The scores in the lower diagonal are the squares of the correlations (SIC). " $\alpha$ " indicates Cronbach's Alpha, whereas "CR" represents composite reliability.

Convergent validity was confirmed as all scale item loadings were above 0.70. Cronbach's Alpha scores showed that the scales were reliable. The reliability scores are shown as  $\alpha_{MUF} = 0.81$ ,  $\alpha_{SUF} = 0.84$ ,  $\alpha_{KF} = 0.90$ ,  $\alpha_{VEF} = 0.85$ ,  $\alpha_{EDF} = 0.88$ . As shown in Table 8.13, the composite reliability of scales is above 0.8 and the AVEs are all higher than 0.50. The AVEs are larger than the corresponding SICs, confirming the discriminant validity of the scales of motivation for eWOM communication.

#### 8.4.4 Construct Validity of Subjective Norm Scale

Subjective Norm is estimated by two dimensions: Injunctive Norm (IN) and Descriptive Norm (DN). Five items were used to reflect IN and three items were employed to estimate DN. Table 8.15 summarises the goodness-of-fit indices of the subjective norm scale.

Table 8.15 Goodness-of-Fit Indices of Subjective Norm Scale

| Competing Models  | $\chi^2$ | df | p     | GFI   | NFI   | CFI   | RMSEA | SRMR  |
|-------------------|----------|----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                   | -        | -  | >0.05 | >0.90 | >0.90 | >0.90 | <0.07 | <0.08 |
| Model 1 (8 items) | 240.74   | 19 | 0.00  | 0.88  | 0.91  | 0.92  | 0.148 | 0.06  |
| Model 2 (6 items) | 33.776   | 8  | 0.00  | 0.98  | 0.98  | 0.98  | 0.078 | 0.03  |

CFA, having the 8-item subjective norm, did not demonstrate good model fitness. The chi-square statistic produced 240.472 with 19 degrees of freedom. GFI totalled 0.88, NFI 0.90, CFI 0.92, RMSEA 0.148 and SRMR being 0.06. The model fit indices suggested that further modification was required to refine

the research model. Having the lowest factor loading, the following were deleted: IN1 (Most people who are important to me would support my participation in eWOM communication) and IN2 (Most people who are important to me would approve of my participating in eWOM communication).

As shown in Table 8.15, the modified model received as having acceptable fit indices ( $\chi^2 = 33.77$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.00$ , GFI = 0.98, NFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.078, and SRMR = 0.03). Although the RMSEA did not fit to the desired level (0.07), suggested by Steiger (2007), it reached the minimum acceptable level being less than 0.08 (MacCallum *et al.*, 1996). Additionally, three items were the minimum indicators to reflect a latent variable. Therefore, no further modification was taken. Given the satisfactory model fitness, the factor loadings of revised measures within subjective norm was then assessed in Table 8.16.

Table 8.16 Factor Loadings of Subjective Norm Scale

| Statements  | Item loading |
|---|--------------|
| <b>Injunctive Norm (IN)</b>   |              |
| IN3: Most people who are important to me would expect that I should participate in eWOM communication | 0.85         |
| IN4: Most people who are important to me would require me to participate in eWOM communication        | 0.82         |
| IN5: Most people who are important to me would think that I should participate in eWOM communication  | 0.86         |
| <b>Descriptive Norm (DN)</b>  |              |
| DN1: Most people who are important to me have participated in eWOM communication before               | 0.89         |
| DN2: Most people in my social network have participated in eWOM communication before                  | 0.74         |
| DN3: Most people whose opinion I value have eWOM communication experience before                      | 0.82         |

Both IN and DN contained three items. Factor loadings from each of the indicators ranged from 0.74 to 0.89. All were statistically significant and greater than 0.70, which demonstrated good convergent validity. The reliability, AVEs, and SICs were further calculated for validity assessment as shown in Table 8.17.

Table 8.17 Reliability, AVEs & Correlations of Subjective Norm Scale

|                       | IN          | DN          | A    | CR   |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|------|------|
| Injunctive Norm (IN)  | <b>0.71</b> | 0.71        | 0.88 | 0.88 |
| Descriptive Norm (DN) | 0.57        | <b>0.67</b> | 0.86 | 0.86 |

Note: The diagonal figures in bold indicate the average variances extracted (AVE) for each construct. The scores in the upper diagonal are the correlations (IC). The scores in the lower diagonal are the squares of the correlations (SIC). "α" indicates Cronbach's Alpha, whereas "CR" represents composite reliability.

The subjective norm scale reliability was tested through the use of composite reliability and Cronbach's Alpha statistics. Scores from both reliability of IN and DN were over 0.80, as shown in Table 8.17. As the convergent validity was satisfied, discriminant validity was further evaluated. The AVE of the injunctive norm scale was 0.71, and the descriptive norm was 0.67. The correlation between IN and DN was 0.71 and 0.57. Both AVEs were greater than SIC. Hence the discriminant validity of scales was verified.

#### 8.4.5 Construct Validity of Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication Scale

The overall attitude towards eWOM communication scale included six items. The CFA results of this scale are presented in Table 8.18.

Table 8.18 Goodness-of-Fit Indices of Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication Scale

| Competing Models  | $\chi^2$ | df | p     | GFI   | NFI   | CFI   | RMSEA | SRMR  |
|-------------------|----------|----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                   | -        | -  | >0.05 | >0.90 | >0.90 | >0.90 | <0.07 | <0.08 |
| Model 1 (6 items) | 137.37   | 9  | 0.00  | 0.92  | 0.94  | 0.95  | 0.164 | 0.03  |
| Model 2 (4 items) | 0.543    | 2  | 0.76  | 1.00  | 1.00  | 1.00  | 0.000 | 0.00  |

The overall attitude towards eWOM communication scale did not produce acceptable model fit indices. Chi-Square was 137.37 with nine degrees of freedom. Other model fit indices were as follows: GFI = 0.92, NFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.164 and SRMR = 0.03. Judging by the high RMSEA scores, the original model was trimmed in order to provide better fit indices. Two items, ATT1 (positive – negative) and ATT6 (very useless – very useful), were deleted because of low factor loadings.

The revised model having four items received statistically insignificant p-value and sufficient chi-square as presented in Table 8.18. Non-significant chi-square implied that there was no significant difference between the actual model and the proposed model. In addition, other indices supported the fact that the revised model is a good-fit to the data (GFI = 1.00, NFI = 1.00, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.000, and SRMR = 0.00). Table 8.19 lists factor loadings of the revised measures.

Table 8.19 Factor Loadings of Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication Scale

| Statements                                  |       | Item loading        |
|---|-------|---------------------|
| Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication |       |                     |
| ATT2: Dislike Very Much                     | ----- | Like Very Much 0.80 |
| ATT3: Very Worthless                        | ----- | Very Valuable 0.90  |
| ATT4: Very Undesirable                      | ----- | Very Desirable 0.90 |
| ATT5: Very Unpleasant                       | ----- | Very Pleasant 0.85  |

All item loadings were statistically significant and greater than 0.70 which satisfied the criteria of convergent validity. Moreover, Cronbach's Alpha of the revised the overall attitude scales as being 0.92 and the composite reliability being 0.92. Both scores supported the fact that this scale was reliable. In addition, AVE was calculated as 0.74 which was acceptable as recommended. The discriminant validity was not relevant to this measure as it was formed with one dimension.

#### 8.4.6 Construct Validity of Behavioural Intention to Use eWOM Communication Media Scale

Similar to the overall attitude, behavioural intention was one dimension, holding only three items. Three items were the minimum requirement of a single construct for factor loadings. These are summarised in Table 8.20.



**Table 8.20 Factor Loadings of Behavioural Intention to Use eWOM  
Communication Media Scale**

| Statements   | Item loading |
|--|--------------|
| <b>Behavioural Intention (BI)</b>  |              |
| BI1: I will use eWOM to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in the next 12 months                | 0.75         |
| BI2: I will spend more time on eWOM to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in the next 12 months | 0.87         |
| BI3: I will recommend others to communicate their travel and tourism related opinions via eWOM               | 0.75         |

The composite reliability was 0.84 whereas Cronbach's Alpha was 0.83. Both stand as reliably satisfied. AVE measured 0.63 and held the acceptance of construct validity. As this scale was formed by a single dimension, discriminant validity was not relevant.

#### 8.4.7 Validity of the Research Model

After individually assessing the construct validity of each scale, 11 constructs and 37 items were retained within the revised research model. Indices of goodness-of-fit of the revised model with 37 items are presented in Table 8.21.

**Table 8.21 Goodness-of-Fit Indices of the Revised Model**

| Competing Models   | $\chi^2$ | df  | P     | GFI   | NFI   | CFI   | RMSEA | SRMR  |
|--------------------|----------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                    | -        | -   | >0.05 | >0.90 | >0.90 | >0.90 | <0.07 | <0.08 |
| Model 1 (37 items) | 1191.33  | 547 | 0.00  | 0.88  | 0.91  | 0.95  | 0.045 | 0.05  |
| Model 2 (33 items) | 934.22   | 440 | 0.00  | 0.91  | 0.92  | 0.96  | 0.042 | 0.05  |

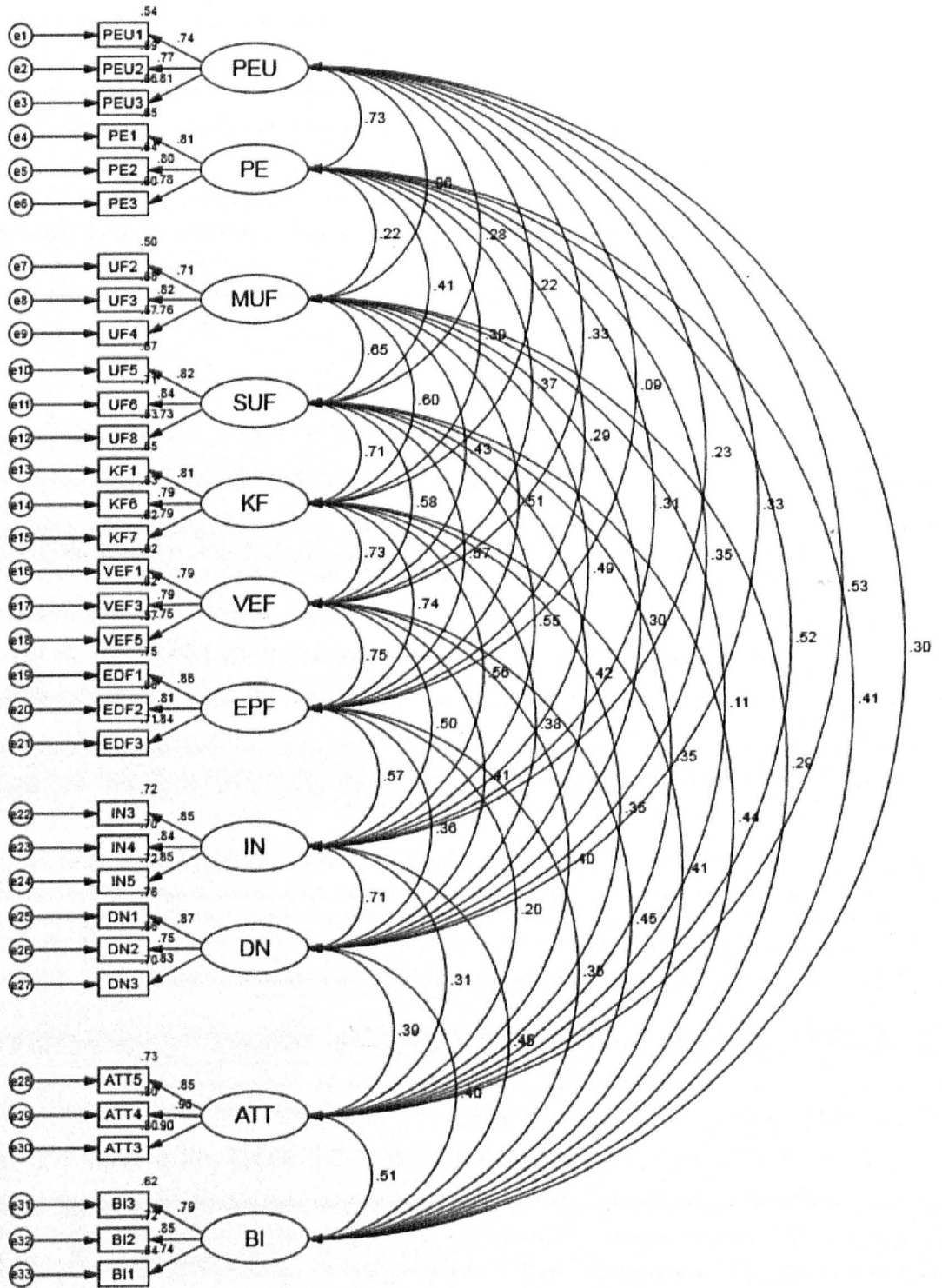
As can be seen from Table 8.21, the revised measurement model obtained scores of fitness at chi-square equalled 1191.33 ( $p = 0.00$ ) with 547 degrees of freedom. Other indices obtained the following scores: GFI = 0.88, NFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.045 and SRMR = 0.05.

All items received a loading of 0.70 or higher, therefore convergent validity of the scales were confirmed. AVEs of each construct exceeded 0.50. Discriminant validity was hence verified. No construct or item was further deleted.

MI revealed parameters indicative of cross-loading for items KF2 (eWOM communication enables me to find out who I am), KF3 (eWOM communication enables me to understand who I would like to be) and ATT2 (dislike very much – like very much). Model specification was therefore performed to remove these items and enhance the parsimony of the model fitness (Byrne, 2010). Meanwhile, some of the errors showed a high correlation with others. The independence of errors is an assumption of SEM analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2009). Adding error covariance may help to improve the model fitness, but require proper justifications as to why the correlations exist (Kline, 2011). Alternatively, if high correlation is shown between errors, one of the others can be considered for deletion. VEF2 (eWOM communication allows me to express the ideas I cherish) was therefore removed from the scale.

The trimmed model containing 11 constructs and 33 items having 440 degrees of freedom is presented in Table 8.21. The chi-square of model fitness standing at 934.220 suggested the overall model was well fitted to the data. The fit indices were as follows: GFI = 0.91, NFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.96 and RMSEA = 0.042, SRMR = 0.05. Figure 8.3 presents the revised measurement model.

Figure 8.3 The Measurement Model



As displayed in Figure 8.3, the revised measurement model is formed of 33 items and 11 latent variables. The factor loadings of the final revised research model are illustrated in Table 8.22.

Table 8.22 Factor Loadings of the Revised Model

| Statements   | Item loading |
|--|--------------|
| <b>Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)</b>   |              |
| PEU1: Using electronic media to communicate is convenient  | 0.74         |
| PEU2: Learning to use electronic media to communicate is easy  | 0.77         |
| PEU3: I find that electronic media is easy to use for communication  | 0.81         |
| <b>Perceived Enjoyment (PE)</b>  |              |
| PE1: Using electronic media to communicate is enjoyable  | 0.81         |
| PE2: The process of using electronic media to communicate is pleasant  | 0.80         |
| PE3: I find it fun to communicate through electronic media   | 0.78         |
| <b>Monetary-Utilitarian Function (MUF)</b>   |              |
| UF2: eWOM communication enables me to earn extra income  | 0.71         |
| UF3: eWOM communication enables me to have non-financial benefits (e.g. free meal)                           | 0.82         |
| UF4: eWOM communication enables me to receive incentives (e.g. discount)                                     | 0.76         |
| <b>Social-Utilitarian Function (SUF)</b>   |              |
| UF5: eWOM communication enables me to meet people  | 0.82         |
| UF6: eWOM communication enables me to make new friends   | 0.84         |
| UF8: eWOM communication is a way to build up my social network   | 0.73         |
| <b>Knowledge Function (KF)</b>   |              |
| KF1: eWOM communication enables me to reflect upon myself  | 0.81         |
| KF6: eWOM communication enables me to better understand my perspectives on the world                         | 0.79         |
| KF7: eWOM communication enables me to clarify my thinking  | 0.79         |
| <b>Value-Expressive Function (VEF)</b>   |              |
| VEF1: eWOM communication allows me to express my personal standards of right and wrong                       | 0.79         |
| VEF3: eWOM communication allows me to express my values (e.g. altruism, freedom of speech)                   | 0.79         |
| VEF5: eWOM communication reflects my values of good and evil (moral values)                                  | 0.75         |
| <b>Ego-Protective Function (EPF)</b>   |              |
| EDF1: eWOM communication helps me to be released from bad feelings   | 0.86         |
| EDF2: eWOM communication helps me work through my own personal problems                                      | 0.81         |
| EDF3: eWOM communication enables me to escape from my negative emotions                                      | 0.85         |
| <b>Injunctive Norm (IN)</b>  |              |
| IN3: Most people who are important to me would expect that I should participate in eWOM communication        | 0.85         |
| IN4: Most people who are important to me would require me to participate in eWOM communication               | 0.84         |
| IN5: Most people who are important to me would think that I should participate in eWOM communication         | 0.85         |
| <b>Descriptive Norm (DN)</b>   |              |
| DN1: Most people who are important to me have participated in eWOM communication before                      | 0.87         |
| DN2: Most people in my social network have participated in eWOM communication before                         | 0.75         |
| DN3: Most people whose opinion I value have eWOM communication experience before                             | 0.83         |
| <b>Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication (ATT)</b>   |              |
| ATT3: Very Worthless ----- Very Valuable   | 0.90         |
| ATT4: Very Undesirable ----- Very Desirable  | 0.90         |
| ATT5: Very Unpleasant ----- Very Pleasant  | 0.85         |
| <b>Behavioural Intention (BI)</b>  |              |
| BI1: I will use eWOM to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in the next 12 months                | 0.74         |
| BI2: I will spend more time on eWOM to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in the next 12 months | 0.85         |
| BI3: I will recommend others to communicate their travel and tourism related opinions via eWOM               | 0.79         |

As can be seen in Table 8.22, the standardised factor loadings of 33 indicators ranged from 0.71 to 0.90. All factor loadings of each item surpassed 0.70. Also, all indicators had a statistically significant relationship with the corresponding constructs. The convergent validity of the revised scales was therefore verified. Reliability and discriminant validity were further calculated.

Table 8.23 summarises the AVEs and correlations of each construct as well as the Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability. The mean and standard deviation of each construct are also provided.

Table 8.23 Reliability, AVEs & Correlations of the Revised Model

|                                     | PEU         | PE          | MUF         | SUF         | KF          | VEF         | EPF         | IN          | DN          | ATT         | BI          | $\alpha$ | CR   | Mean | SD   |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------|------|------|------|
| Perceived Ease of use (PEU)         | <b>0.60</b> | 0.73        | 0.06        | 0.28        | 0.18        | 0.36        | 0.09        | 0.23        | 0.33        | 0.53        | 0.31        | 0.82     | 0.82 | 5.94 | 0.85 |
| Perceived Enjoyment (PE)            | 0.53        | <b>0.63</b> | 0.22        | 0.41        | 0.36        | 0.38        | 0.29        | 0.32        | 0.35        | 0.52        | 0.41        | 0.84     | 0.84 | 5.37 | 0.99 |
| Monetary-Utilitarian Function (MUF) | 0.00        | 0.05        | <b>0.59</b> | 0.65        | 0.65        | 0.41        | 0.52        | 0.49        | 0.30        | 0.11        | 0.29        | 0.81     | 0.81 | 3.31 | 1.50 |
| Social-Utilitarian Function (SUF)   | 0.08        | 0.17        | 0.42        | <b>0.64</b> | 0.71        | 0.56        | 0.57        | 0.55        | 0.42        | 0.35        | 0.44        | 0.84     | 0.84 | 4.60 | 1.44 |
| Knowledge Function (KF)             | 0.03        | 0.13        | 0.42        | 0.51        | <b>0.63</b> | 0.75        | 0.77        | 0.58        | 0.39        | 0.34        | 0.40        | 0.84     | 0.87 | 4.34 | 1.35 |
| Value-Expressive Function (VEF)     | 0.13        | 0.15        | 0.16        | 0.32        | 0.56        | <b>0.60</b> | 0.76        | 0.50        | 0.43        | 0.40        | 0.43        | 0.82     | 0.86 | 4.63 | 1.28 |
| Ego-Protective Function (EPF)       | 0.01        | 0.08        | 0.27        | 0.33        | 0.60        | 0.57        | <b>0.71</b> | 0.57        | 0.37        | 0.20        | 0.35        | 0.88     | 0.88 | 4.08 | 1.50 |
| Injunctive Norm (IN)                | 0.05        | 0.10        | 0.24        | 0.30        | 0.34        | 0.25        | 0.33        | <b>0.71</b> | 0.72        | 0.32        | 0.45        | 0.88     | 0.88 | 4.30 | 1.46 |
| Descriptive Norm (DN)               | 0.11        | 0.12        | 0.09        | 0.17        | 0.15        | 0.18        | 0.13        | 0.52        | <b>0.67</b> | 0.39        | 0.40        | 0.86     | 0.86 | 4.71 | 1.32 |
| Overall Attitude (ATT)              | 0.28        | 0.27        | 0.01        | 0.12        | 0.11        | 0.16        | 0.04        | 0.10        | 0.15        | <b>0.78</b> | 0.51        | 0.91     | 0.91 | 5.78 | 0.95 |
| Behavioural intention (BI)          | 0.09        | 0.17        | 0.08        | 0.20        | 0.16        | 0.18        | 0.12        | 0.20        | 0.16        | 0.26        | <b>0.63</b> | 0.83     | 0.84 | 4.95 | 1.36 |

Note: The diagonal figures in bold indicate the average variances extracted (AVE) for each construct. The scores in the upper diagonal are the correlations (IC). The scores in the lower diagonal are the squares of the correlations (SIC). "α" indicates Cronbach's Alpha, whereas "CR" represents composite reliability. "SD" refers to standard deviation.

Cronbach's Alphas were between 0.81 and 0.91 while the composite reliability of the scales ranged from 0.82 to 0.91. Both sets of statistics showed that the scales were reliable. In addition, the AVEs are greater than 0.50 and larger than the corresponding SICs, demonstrating the discriminant validity of the measurement model. To conclude, the measurement model of 33 items was well fitted and the reliability and validity of 11 constructs were verified.

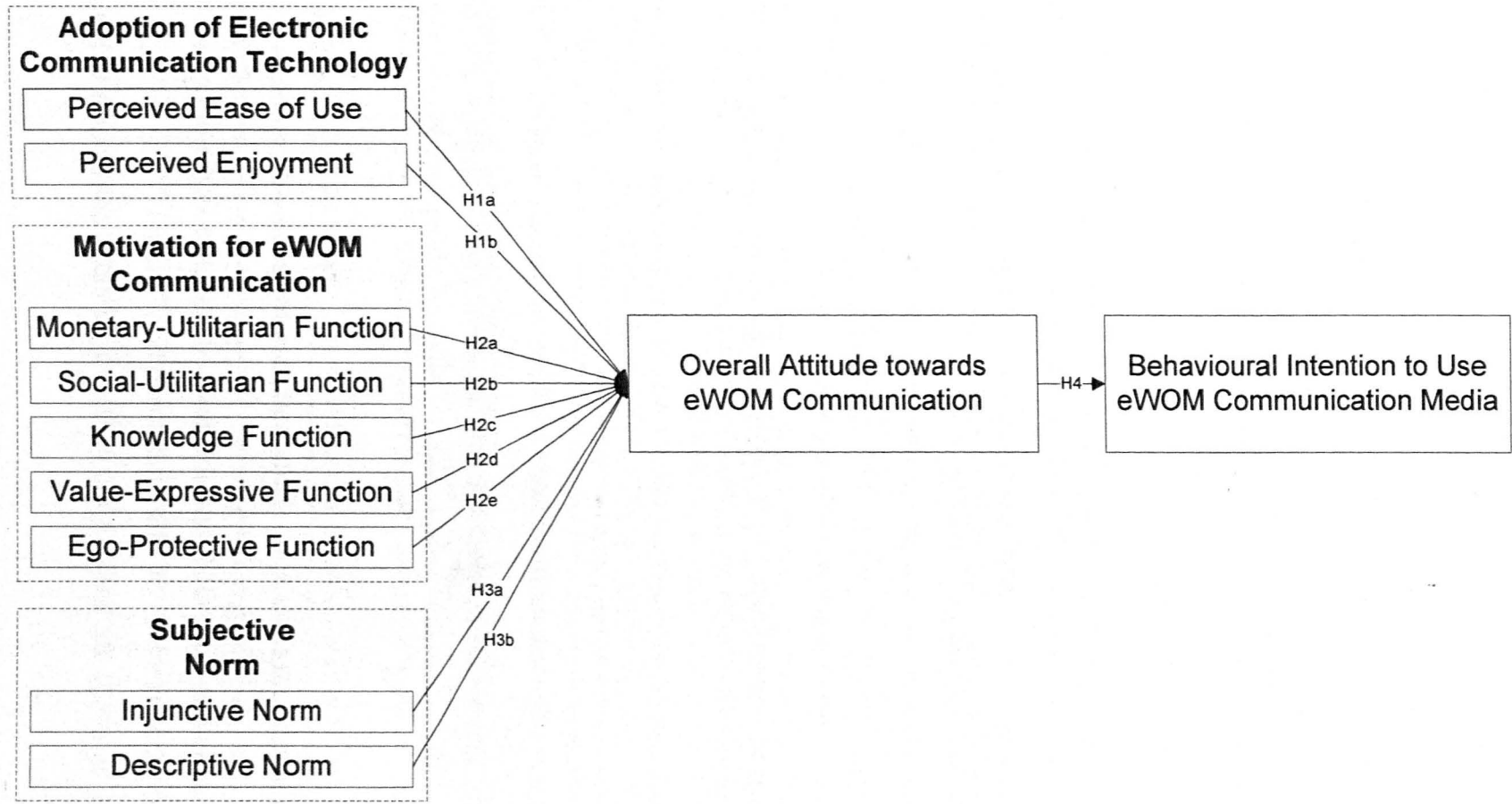
## 8.5 Testing Research Hypotheses: Structural Model Analysis

Subsequent to examining the measurement models, the structural model was processed to explore the hypothesised relationships between variables of interest. The hypotheses were developed in Chapter 6. Three antecedents - adoption of electronic communication technology, motivation for eWOM communication, and subjective norm - are proposed to influence travellers' behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. The Overall attitude towards eWOM communication plays as a mediating role between three antecedents and behavioural intention. Arguments for the full-mediation or partial-mediation effect of the overall attitude are discussed, with both models therefore estimated and examined.

### 8.5.1 The Full-Mediation Model

Recalling the conceptual framework and proposed hypotheses in Chapter 6, there were hypotheses to examine the relationships between three antecedents, the overall attitude and the behavioural intention. The results from CFA helped to revise the research model and the research hypotheses. Antecedents of eWOM are proposed to have a direct influence on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. In turn, the overall attitude towards eWOM communication was proposed as a full-mediator between antecedents of eWOM and intentions to use eWOM communication media. The revised conceptual framework – full-mediation model – is shown in Figure 8.4.

Figure 8.4 Revised Conceptual Framework – Full-Mediation Model





As can be seen in Figure 8.4, two dimensions remain within the adoption of electronic communication technology: perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment. Motivation for eWOM communication comprises of five dimensions. Utilitarian functions were split into monetary- and social- utilitarian functions, whereas the ego-protective function replaced the ego-defensive function. The knowledge and value-expressive function remained the same. The two proposed dimensions within subjective norm were retained as before. In total, nine dimensions were proposed as influencing the overall attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. The hypotheses between constructs are listed in Table 8.24.

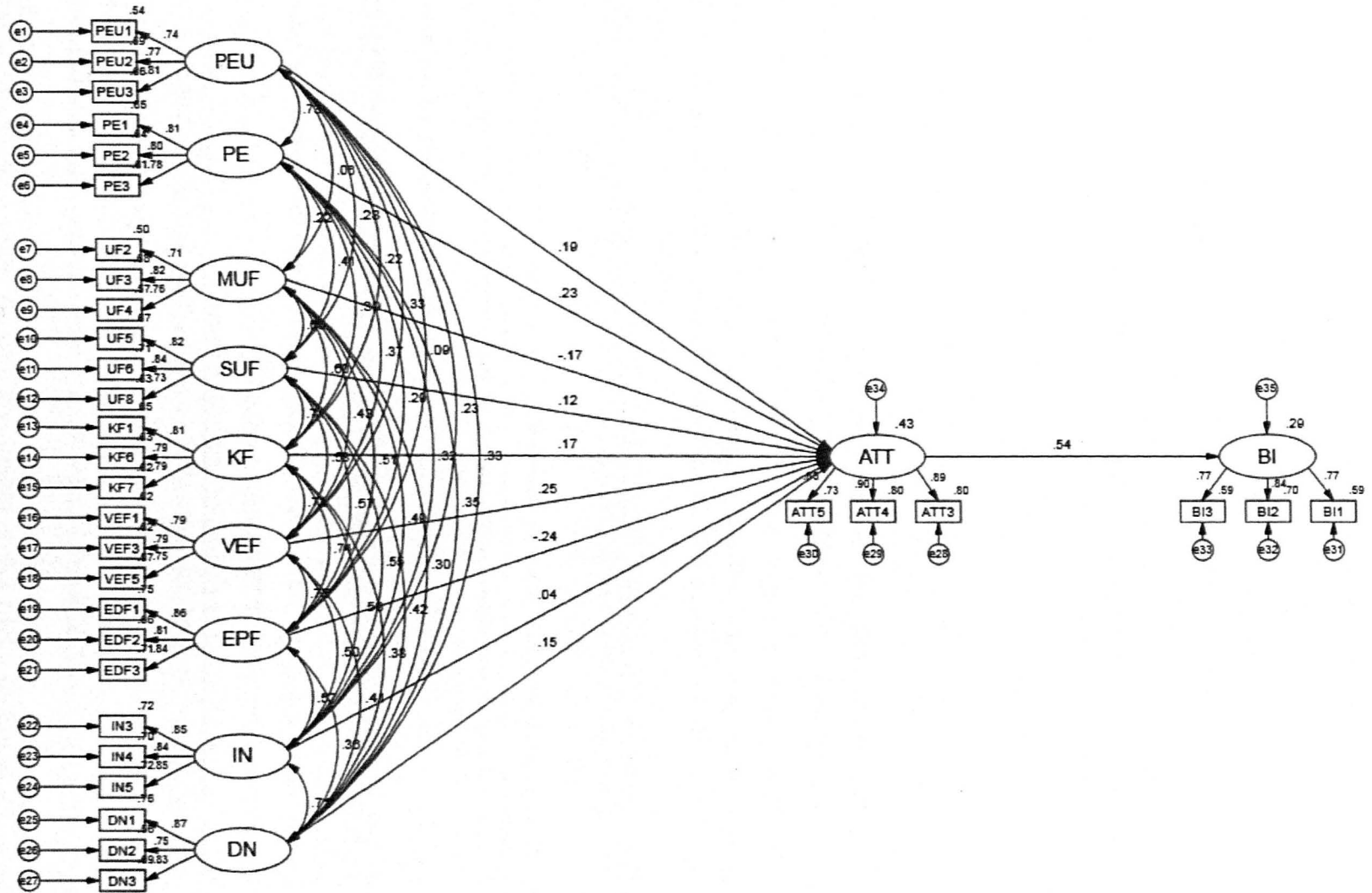
Table 8.24 Revised Hypotheses – Full-Mediation Model

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| H1a | Perceived ease of use of electronic communication technology will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication       |
| H1b | Perceived enjoyment of electronic communication technology will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication         |
| H2a | Monetary-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication |
| H2b | Social-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication   |
| H2c | Knowledge function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication            |
| H2d | Value-expressive function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication     |
| H2e | Ego-protective function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication       |
| H3a | Injunctive norm will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  |
| H3b | Descriptive norm will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication   |
| H4  | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication will have a positive influence on behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media              |

As can be seen from the revised research model, there were 10 hypotheses. Following the literature review, all relationships were positively proposed.

By use of the results from CFA and the revised conceptual framework, Figure 8.5 displays the results of the full-mediation model. The standardised estimates of all paths as well as the squared multiple correlation values are also included.

Figure 8.5 Results of the Full-Mediation Structural Model



As shown in Figure 8.5, two dimensions of the adoption of electronic communication, five dimensions of the motivation for eWOM communication, and two dimensions of the subjective norm are regarded as exogenous variables, whereas behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media served as an endogenous variable. The overall attitude towards eWOM communication is assigned as a mediating variable affecting the relationship between the antecedents of eWOM communication and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Each of the latent variables was estimated by three indicators. Details of the standardised path coefficient, t-value, and significance of hypotheses are shown in Table 8.25.

Table 8.25 Results of the Full-Mediation Structural Model

| No.   | Hypothesised Relationship                                      | SPC <sup>+</sup> | t-value  |
|---|--|------------------|----------|
| H1a   | Perceived Ease of Use -> Overall Attitude towards eWOM         | 0.19             | 2.24*    |
| H1b   | Perceived Enjoyment -> Overall Attitude towards eWOM           | 0.23             | 2.92**   |
| H2a   | Monetary-Utilitarian Function -> Overall Attitude towards eWOM | -0.17            | -2.59**  |
| H2b   | Social-Utilitarian Function -> Overall Attitude towards eWOM   | 0.12             | 1.54     |
| H2c   | Knowledge Function -> Overall Attitude towards eWOM            | 0.17             | 1.79*    |
| H2d   | Value-Expressive Function -> Overall Attitude towards eWOM     | 0.25             | 2.60**   |
| H2e   | Ego-Protective Function -> Overall Attitude towards eWOM       | -0.24            | -2.62**  |
| H3a   | Injunctive Norm -> Overall Attitude towards eWOM               | 0.04             | 0.56     |
| H3b   | Descriptive Norm -> Overall Attitude towards eWOM              | 0.15             | 2.30**   |
| H4  | Overall Attitude towards eWOM -> Behavioural Intention         | 0.54             | 10.92*** |
| <b>Model Fit Statistics</b>                           |  |                  |          |
| $\chi^2$  |  | 914.79           |          |
| Df  |  | 449              |          |
| RMSEA   |  | 0.044            |          |
| GFI   |  | 0.90             |          |
| NFI   |  | 0.92             |          |
| CFI   |  | 0.96             |          |
| <b>Variance Explained (R<sup>2</sup>)</b>             |  |                  |          |
| Overall attitude towards eWOM communication           |  | 0.43             |          |
| Behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media |  | 0.29             |          |

Note: <sup>+</sup>SPC = Standardised Path Coefficient; \* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001

The structural model yielded fitness of  $\chi^2 = 914.79$ ,  $df = 449$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $GFI = 0.90$ ,  $NFI = 0.92$ ,  $CFI = 0.96$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.044$  and  $SRMR = 0.06$ . According to the suggested fitness criteria, this model was well-fitted to the data. Three antecedents with nine dimensions explained 43% variance of the overall

attitude towards eWOM communication and 29% variance of the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media.

Not all parameters from the antecedents on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication were significant. Within the adoption of the electronic communication technology construct, perceived ease of use (SPC = 0.19,  $t = 2.24$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and perceived enjoyment (SPC = 0.23,  $t = 2.92$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) showed significant influences on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication at the  $p < 0.05$  significant level. Within the motivation for eWOM communication construct, four functional motivations demonstrated a significant influence on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. In detail, the knowledge function (SPC = 0.17,  $t = 1.79$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and value-expressive function (SPC = 0.25,  $t = 2.60$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) produced a positive and significant impact on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication; whereas, negative and significant influences was formed from the monetary-utilitarian function (SPC = -0.17,  $t = -2.59$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and the ego-protective function (SPC = -0.24,  $t = -2.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). On the contrary, the influence from the social-utilitarian function on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication was positive but not statistically significant (SPC = 0.12,  $t = 1.54$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). In terms of subjective norm construct, injunctive norm did not significantly influence the overall attitude towards eWOM communication (SPC = 0.04,  $t = 0.56$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), while the relationship between descriptive norm and the overall attitude towards eWOM communication was significantly positive (SPC = 0.15,  $t = 2.30$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Lastly, the overall attitude towards eWOM communication produced a significant impact on the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media (SPC = 0.56,  $t = 10.93$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) as proposed. The results confirmed that eight out of ten hypotheses were statistically significant.

### 8.5.2 The Partial-Mediation Model

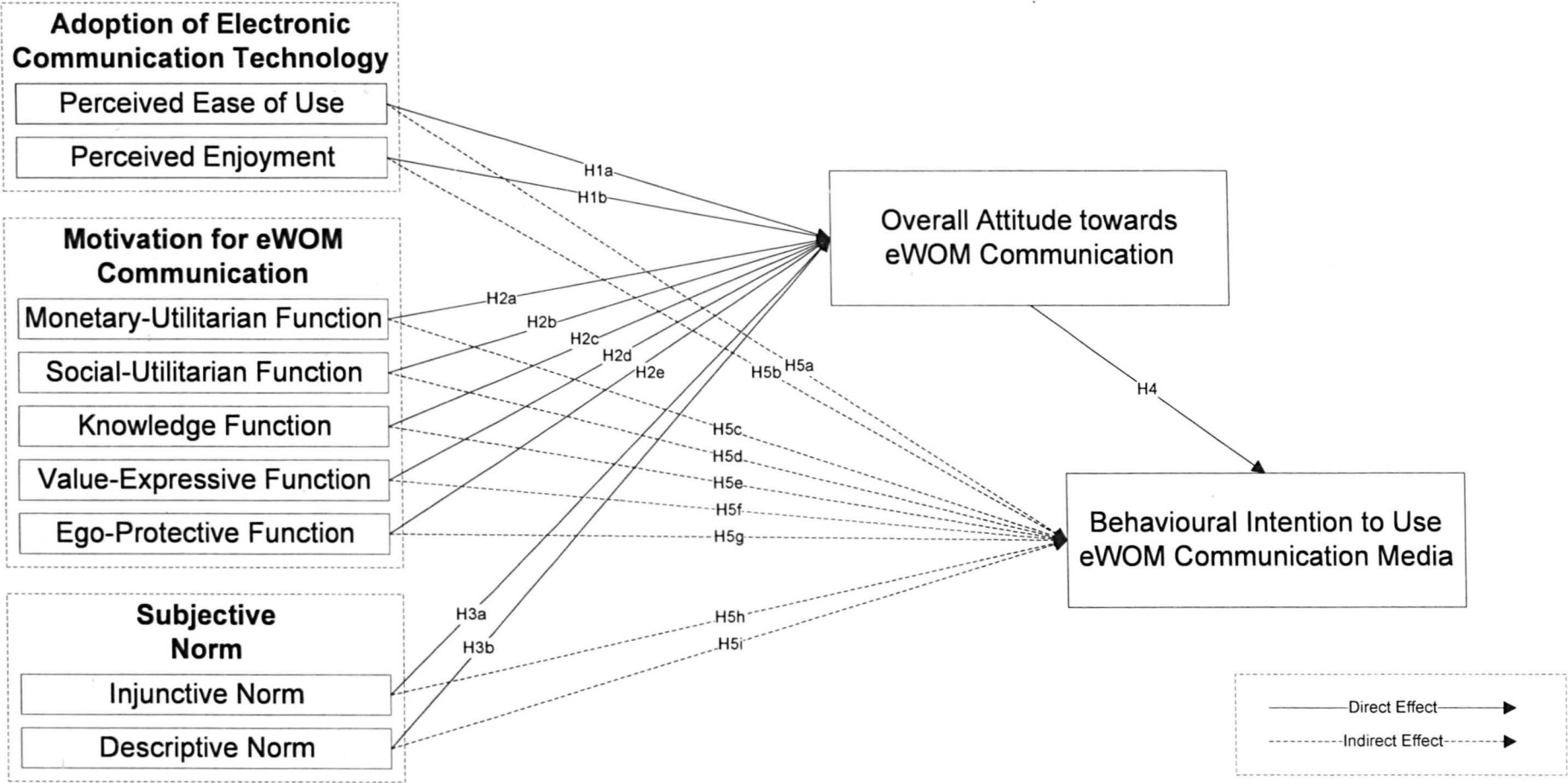
An alternative model suggests whether travellers' overall attitude towards eWOM communication fully or partially mediates the effect of the antecedents on their behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. In other words, antecedents may have a direct influence on the behavioural intention to

use eWOM communication media or indirect influence through the overall attitude towards eWOM communication on the behavioural intention.

Being similar to the full-mediation model, the partial-mediation model was also revised based on CFA results. Additional direct influences from three antecedents, evaluating by nine dimensions, on the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media were added into the research model.

The partial-mediation model is illustrated in Figure 8.6.

Figure 8.6 Revised Conceptual Framework – Partial-Mediation Model



As shown in Figure 8.6, indirect paths were placed into the model. The direct paths from antecedents of eWOM communication to the overall attitude towards eWOM communication were presented as solid lines whereas the indirect paths were displayed as dashed lines. Hypotheses capturing indirect paths are shown in Table 8.26.

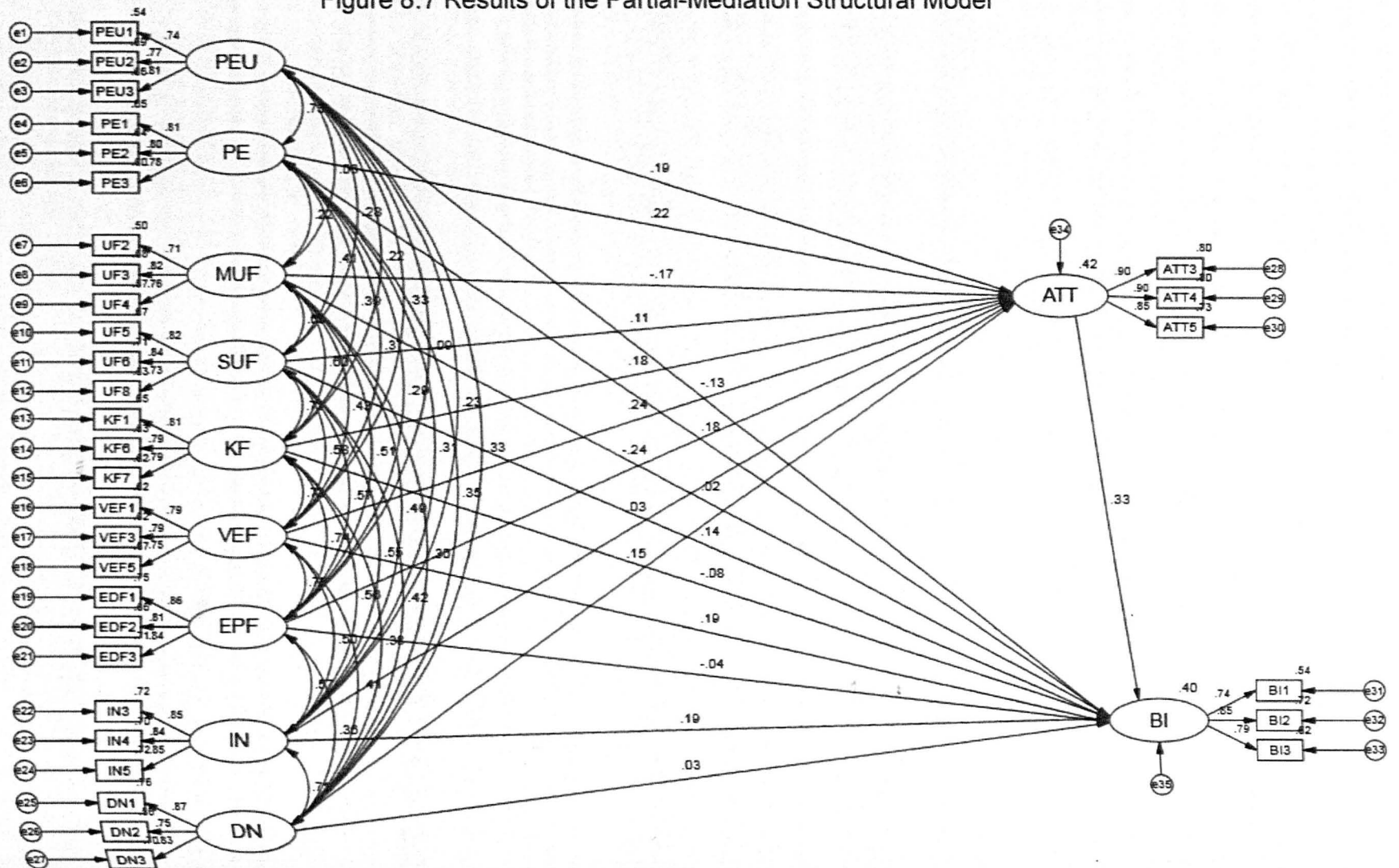
Table 8.26 Revised Hypotheses – Partial-Mediation Model

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| H1a | Perceived ease of use of electronic communication technology will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  |
| H1b | Perceived enjoyment of electronic communication technology will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  |
| H2a | Monetary-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  |
| H2b | Social-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  |
| H2c | Knowledge function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication   |
| H2d | Value-expressive function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  |
| H2e | Ego-protective function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  |
| H3a | Injunctive norm will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication   |
| H3b | Descriptive norm will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  |
| H4  | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication will have a positive influence on behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media   |
| H5a | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's perceived ease of use of electronic communication technology on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media       |
| H5b | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's perceived enjoyment of electronic communication technology on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media         |
| H5c | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's monetary-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media |
| H5d | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's social-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media   |
| H5e | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's knowledge function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media            |
| H5f | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's value-expressive function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media     |
| H5g | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's ego-protective function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media       |
| H5h | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's injunctive norm on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media  |
| H5i | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's descriptive norm on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media   |

An additional nine hypotheses were proposed to assess the mediating effect of the overall attitude towards eWOM communication between the influences of antecedents and behavioural intention. By using the same set of indicators, the results of the partial-mediation model postulates in Figure 8.7.



Figure 8.7 Results of the Partial-Mediation Structural Model



As can be seen in Figure 8.7, the partial-mediation model was validated. Table 8.27 displays the standardised path coefficient of each antecedent and their corresponding t-values are presented for both the full-mediation model and the partial-mediation model.

Table 8.27 Results of the Partial-Mediation Structural Model

| No.   | Hypothesised Relationship                              | Full-Mediation Model |          | Partial-Mediation Model |         |
|---|--|----------------------|----------|-------------------------|---------|
|   |  | SPC                  | t-value  | SPC                     | t-value |
| H1a   | Perceived Ease of Use -> Overall Attitude              | 0.19                 | 2.24*    | 0.20                    | 2.33**  |
| H1b   | Perceived Enjoyment -> Overall Attitude                | 0.23                 | 2.92**   | 0.22                    | 2.80**  |
| H2a   | Monetary-Utilitarian Function -> Overall Attitude      | -0.17                | -2.59**  | -0.17                   | -2.60** |
| H2b   | Social-Utilitarian Function -> Overall Attitude        | 0.12                 | 1.54     | 0.11                    | 1.45    |
| H2c   | Knowledge Function -> Overall Attitude                 | 0.17                 | 1.79*    | 0.18                    | 1.85*   |
| H2d   | Value-Expressive Function -> Overall Attitude          | 0.25                 | 2.60**   | 0.24                    | 2.48**  |
| H2e   | Ego-Protective Function -> Overall Attitude            | -0.24                | -2.62**  | -0.24                   | -2.60** |
| H3a   | Injunctive Norm -> Overall Attitude                    | 0.04                 | 0.56     | 0.03                    | 0.42    |
| H3b   | Descriptive Norm -> Overall Attitude                   | 0.15                 | 2.30**   | 0.15                    | 2.28**  |
| H4  | Overall Attitude -> Behavioural Intention              | 0.54                 | 10.92*** | 0.33                    | 5.54*** |
| H5a   | Perceived Ease of Use -> Behavioural Intention         |                      |          | -0.13                   | -1.50   |
| H5b   | Perceived Enjoyment -> Behavioural Intention           |                      |          | 0.18                    | 2.04*   |
| H5c   | Monetary-Utilitarian Function -> Behavioural Intention |                      |          | 0.02                    | 0.23    |
| H5d   | Social-Utilitarian Function -> Behavioural Intention   |                      |          | 0.14                    | 1.69*   |
| H5e   | Knowledge Function -> Behavioural Intention            |                      |          | -0.08                   | -0.76   |
| H5f   | Value-Expressive Function -> Behavioural Intention     |                      |          | 0.19                    | 1.82*   |
| H5g   | Ego-Protective Function -> Behavioural Intention       |                      |          | -0.04                   | -0.43   |
| H5h   | Injunctive Norm -> Behavioural Intention               |                      |          | 0.19                    | 2.26**  |
| H5i   | Descriptive Norm -> Behavioural Intention              |                      |          | 0.03                    | 0.36    |
| <b>Model Fit Statistics</b>                           |  |                      |          |                         |         |
| $\chi^2$  |  | 914.79               |          | 845.22                  |         |
| df  |  | 449                  |          | 440                     |         |
| RMSEA   |  | 0.044                |          | 0.042                   |         |
| GFI   |  | 0.90                 |          | 0.91                    |         |
| NFI   |  | 0.92                 |          | 0.92                    |         |
| CFI   |  | 0.96                 |          | 0.96                    |         |
| <b>Variance Explained (R<sup>2</sup>)</b>             |  |                      |          |                         |         |
| Overall attitude towards eWOM communication           |  | 0.43                 |          | 0.42                    |         |
| Behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media |  | 0.29                 |          | 0.40                    |         |

Note: SPC = Standardised Path Coefficient; \* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001.

The partial mediating model achieved chi-square at 845.22 on 440 degrees of freedom. Not surprisingly, the p-value was significant because of the big sample size. However, other supporting indices, such as GFI = 0.91, NFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.042 and SRMR = 0.04, verified that the model was well-fitted. 42% variance on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication and 40% variance on behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media were explained by three antecedents, of which were explained by nine dimensions respectively.

Being similar to the full-mediated model, not all parameters were significant. The results showed that perceived enjoyment (SPC = 0.18,  $t = 2.04$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), the social-utilitarian function (SPC = 0.14,  $t = 1.69$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), the value-expressive function (SPC = 0.19,  $t = 1.82$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and injunctive norm (SPC = 0.19,  $t = 2.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) produced significant direct influences on the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. The relationships from perceived ease of use (SPC = -0.13,  $t = -1.50$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), the monetary-utilitarian function (SPC = 0.02,  $t = 0.23$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), the knowledge function (SPC = -0.08,  $t = -0.76$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), the ego-protective function (SPC = -0.04,  $t = -0.43$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and descriptive norm (SPC = 0.03,  $t = 0.36$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) on the behavioural intention were not significantly supported. Therefore, the overall attitude towards eWOM communication was claimed to fully mediate between perceived ease of use, the monetary-utilitarian function, the knowledge function, the ego-protective function and descriptive norm, and the behavioural intention. The social-utilitarian function and injunctive norm only had direct influences on behavioural intention. The partial-mediating effects of the overall attitude from perceived enjoyment and value-expressive function on behavioural intention were verified by the statistical results. The relationship between the overall attitude and behavioural intention was still supported significantly (SPC = 0.33,  $t = 5.54$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The three antecedents including nine dimensions represent three hierarchical antecedents: adoption of electronic communication technology (estimated by perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment), motivation for eWOM communication (estimated by the monetary-utilitarian function, the social-utilitarian function, the knowledge function, the value-expressive function and the ego-protective function), and subjective norm (estimated by injunctive norm and descriptive norm). The hierarchical CFA and SEM were also conducted to re-assess and re-validate the research model and hypotheses. The results can be found in Appendix IV.

## 8.6 Re-Assessing Validity: Multigroup Analysis

Multigroup analysis has received much attention in recent years (Cheung and Rensvold, 2002; Hong *et al.*, 2003; Milfont and Fischer, 2010). Employed to validate the proposed framework, it has the same structure across different

groups of interest. In this study, multigroup analysis is taken to compare the invariance between different demographic groups, including gender, age, educational background, nationality and place of residence. The purpose is to ensure the equivalence through different groups of sample data and may process further comparisons.

Multigroup analyses are assessed in two different ways: testing for measurement invariance and testing for structural invariance (Byrne, 2010; Milfont and Fischer, 2010). The former refers to “assess invariance of construct, factor loading, item intercepts and error variance” whereas the latter is to “assess variance of the variances, covariances, means of the latent variable” (Milfont and Fischer, 2010, p. 113). Measurement invariance is a prerequisite for structural invariance. If the measurement is non-invariant, the subsequent invariance testing of the structural model may be problematic (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). Therefore, this study examines the invariance of the measurement model. Structural invariance will be processed only if the measurement invariance is supported.

The baseline model is required as a comparison basis of other constrained models in the process of invariance testing. The baseline measurement model is set with freely estimated parameters for each subgroup. Data from each subgroup are combined and analysed simultaneously for invariance (Byrne, 2010). The baseline model is expected to receive well fitness and the values of goodness-of-fit indices are used to compare other models. Given the well-fitted baseline model, one constraint, equal factor loading, is entered into the measurement model to specify cross-group equality. Once the measurement model is verified as invariance, another constraint, equal variance between latent constructs, is added to assess the structural invariance between groups. The multigroup analysis within this study only employs the partial-mediation structural model as a representative model. This is because it was classed as the best fit between models.

Chi-square difference is the general rule in assessing whether the invariance between multigroups are supported or not (Chen, 2007; Cheung and Rensvold, 2002; Kline, 2011). If the difference of chi-square ( $\Delta\chi^2$ ) is non-significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), there is no difference between the compared groups. However, Cheung

and Rensvold (2002) argue that chi-square is particularly sensitive to sample size. They suggest using the difference of CFI ( $\Delta\text{CFI}$ ) to assess the invariance. In addition, the difference of RMSEA ( $\Delta\text{RMSEA}$ ) is suggested as a supplement to indicate invariance (Chen, 2007). The thumb of rule of  $\Delta\text{CFI}$  is less than 0.01 with a cut-off point of  $\Delta\text{RMSEA}$  being less than 0.015, which implies the invariance is supported.  $\Delta\chi^2$ ,  $\Delta\text{CFI}$  and  $\Delta\text{RMSEA}$  are considered as the criteria for assessing invariance in this study.

### 8.6.1 Multigroup Analysis by Gender

The complete sample data was divided into two groups: male ( $n = 137$ ) and female ( $n = 360$ ). The results of multigroup analysis by gender are shown in Table 8.28.

Table 8.28 Results of Multigroup Analysis by Gender

| <b>Measurement Invariance Test: Supported</b>   |   |
|---|---|
| Baseline Model:   | $\chi^2_{(880)} = 1432.07$ , $p = 0.00$ , $\text{CFI} = 0.95$ , and $\text{RMSEA} = 0.035$                        |
| Constrained Model 1:  | $\chi^2_{(902)} = 1454.26$ , $p = 0.00$ , $\text{CFI} = 0.95$ , and $\text{RMSEA} = 0.034$                        |
|   | $\Delta\chi^2 = 22.19$ , $\Delta df = 22$ , $p > 0.05$ ; $\Delta\text{CFI} = 0.00$ ; $\Delta\text{RMSEA} = 0.001$ |
| <b>Structural Invariance Test: Supported</b>  |   |
| Constrained Model 1:  | $\chi^2_{(902)} = 1454.26$ , $p = 0.00$ , $\text{CFI} = 0.95$ , and $\text{RMSEA} = 0.034$                        |
| Constrained Model 2:  | $\chi^2_{(921)} = 1470.72$ , $p = 0.00$ , $\text{CFI} = 0.95$ , and $\text{RMSEA} = 0.034$                        |
|   | $\Delta\chi^2 = 16.46$ , $\Delta df = 19$ , $p > 0.05$ ; $\Delta\text{CFI} = 0.00$ ; $\Delta\text{RMSEA} = 0.000$ |
| Note: Baseline model is set with freely estimated parameters; Constrained Model 1 is set with equal factor loadings; Constrained Model 2 is set with equal factor loadings and equal path parameters. |   |

The baseline model of these two groups received  $\chi^2 = 1432.071$ ,  $df = 880$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $\text{CFI} = 0.95$  and  $\text{RMSEA} = 0.035$ . Provided the baseline model was well fitted, a constraint was put into the model to analyse the measurement invariance. All factor loadings were set as equal between the male and female group. The equal factor loading model obtained Chi-Square of 1454.262 with 902 degrees of freedom with  $\text{CFI} = 0.95$  and  $\text{RMSEA} = 0.034$ . The  $\Delta\chi^2 = 22.192$  was at the probability of 0.50,  $\Delta\text{CFI}$  equalled 0.00 and  $\Delta\text{RMSEA}$  equalled 0.001. The measurement invariance was therefore concluded in that the proposed measurement model could apply to both male and female groups.

Given the invariance of the measurement model, the structural invariance was next examined. Path parameters between latent variables were set equally for

the purpose of testing structural invariance. The constrained model generated  $\chi^2 = 1470.72$ ,  $df = 921$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $CFI = 0.95$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.034$ . To assess the difference of Chi-Square (16.46,  $p > 0.05$ ), CFI (0.00), and RMSEA (0.000) structural invariance between different gender groups was verified.

### 8.6.2 Multigroup Analysis by Age Group

In respect to age groups, the overall sample was divided into three groups: 16-25 year olds, 26-35 year olds and 36 years or above. 205 people were aged 16-25 and 173 were aged 26-35 years old. The remaining age groups recruited less than 100 participants, so were therefore combined as a single group. Table 8.29 shows the results of multigroup analysis by different age groups.

Table 8.29 Results of Multigroup Analysis by Age Group

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Measurement Invariance Test: Supported</b> |   |
| Baseline Model:                               | $\chi^2_{(1320)} = 2024.69$ , $p = 0.00$ , $CFI = 0.93$ , and $RMSEA = 0.032$                         |
| Constrained Model 1:                          | $\chi^2_{(1364)} = 2083.98$ , $p = 0.00$ , $CFI = 0.93$ , and $RMSEA = 0.032$                         |
|   | $\Delta\chi^2 = 59.28$ , $\Delta df = 44$ , $p > 0.05$ ; $\Delta CFI = 0.00$ ; $\Delta RMSEA = 0.000$ |
| <b>Structural Invariance Test: Supported</b>  |   |
| Constrained Model 1:                          | $\chi^2_{(1364)} = 2083.98$ , $p = 0.00$ , $CFI = 0.93$ , and $RMSEA = 0.032$                         |
| Constrained Model 2:                          | $\chi^2_{(1402)} = 2117.55$ , $p = 0.00$ , $CFI = 0.93$ , and $RMSEA = 0.031$                         |
|   | $\Delta\chi^2 = 33.57$ , $\Delta df = 38$ , $p > 0.05$ ; $\Delta CFI = 0.00$ ; $\Delta RMSEA = 0.001$ |

Note: Baseline model is set with freely estimated parameters; Constrained Model 1 is set with equal factor loadings; Constrained Model 2 is set with equal factor loadings and equal path parameters.

The baseline model, having three different age groups, produced chi-square at 2024.69 ( $p = 0.00$ ) with 1320 degrees of freedom. CFI stood at 0.93 and RMSEA at 0.032. As expected, the baseline model was well fitted. The measurement invariance test suggested that the baseline model having equality-constrained factor loadings obtained moderate goodness-of-fit statistics:  $\chi^2 = 2083.98$ ,  $df = 1364$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $CFI = 0.93$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.032$ . No significant difference was found by chi-square ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 59.28$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), with supplement indices of CFI ( $\Delta CFI = 0.00$ ) and RMSEA ( $\Delta RMSEA = 0.000$ ). The measurement invariance across age groups was demonstrated.

In the same manner, the structural invariance across three age groups was tested through constraining equal path parameters of the baseline model. The

model achieved  $\chi^2 = 2117.548$ ,  $df = 1402$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $CFI = 0.93$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.031$ . By accessing the  $\Delta\chi^2 = 33.57$ ,  $\Delta CFI = 0.00$  and  $\Delta RMSEA = 0.001$ , the structural model was verified to be invariant across the different age groups.

### 8.6.3 Multigroup Analysis by Education Qualification

Education qualification was divided into five categories within the questionnaire design: high school, college diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctoral degree. Given that some groups received a small sample size, they were combined to process the multigroup invariant test. Three groups, comprising of 121 high school or college diplomas, 153 undergraduate degrees and 245 postgraduate degrees respectively, were used to test the invariance of participants with different educational qualifications. Multigroup analysis by different education qualifications was processed and the results are displayed in Table 8.30.

Table 8.30 Results of Multigroup Analysis by Education Qualification

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**Measurement Invariance Test: Supported**

Baseline Model:  $\chi^2_{(1320)} = 2010.11$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $CFI = 0.93$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.032$

Constrained Model 1:  $\chi^2_{(1364)} = 2056.78$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $CFI = 0.93$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.031$

$\Delta\chi^2 = 46.66$ ,  $\Delta df = 44$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ;  $\Delta CFI = 0.00$ ;  $\Delta RMSEA = 0.001$

---

**Structural Invariance Test: Supported**

Constrained Model 1:  $\chi^2_{(1364)} = 2056.78$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $CFI = 0.93$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.031$

Constrained Model 2:  $\chi^2_{(1402)} = 2086.84$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $CFI = 0.93$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.031$

$\Delta\chi^2 = 30.07$ ,  $\Delta df = 38$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ;  $\Delta CFI = 0.00$ ;  $\Delta RMSEA = 0.000$

---

Note: Baseline model is set with freely estimated parameters; Constrained Model 1 is set with equal factor loadings; Constrained Model 2 is set with equal factor loadings and equal path parameters.

The baseline model achieved fitness at  $\chi^2 = 2010.11$ ,  $df = 1320$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $CFI = 0.93$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.032$ . As a well fitted baseline model, factor loadings were constrained across different groups for measurement invariant test. The nested model (equal factor loadings) obtained  $\chi^2 = 2056.78$ ,  $df = 1364$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $CFI = 0.93$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.031$ . The difference of chi-square was non-significant ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 46.66$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and the difference of CFI was less than 0.01 ( $\Delta CFI = 0.00$ ). Additionally, the difference of RMSEA was less than 0.015. Figures supported that the measurement model was invariant between groups with different educational qualifications.

The same comparative procedure was employed in testing the structural invariance across the subgroups with different educational degrees. The parameters between each latent construct were set equally. The constrained model produced chi-square of 2086.84 with degrees of freedom at 1402. CFI was 0.93 and RMSEA was 0.031. The chi-square difference was not significant ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 76.73$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Moreover, the calculation of  $\Delta\text{CFI}$  equalled 0.00 and  $\Delta\text{RMSEA}$  equalled 0.000. Structural invariance between groups with different educational backgrounds was thereby supported.

#### 8.6.4 Multigroup Analysis by Nationality

The valid sample data came from 533 participants having 49 different nationalities. Several sub-groups with different nationalities provided less than 100 samples which may not be statistically comparable. The multigroup invariance test across subgroups with different nationalities took the first three large groups as representative: Taiwanese ( $n = 155$ ), Chinese ( $n = 118$ ) and British ( $n = 94$ ). The multigroup analysis by nationality is based upon these three groups and the results are presented in Table 8.31.

Table 8.31 Results of Multigroup Analysis by Nationality

| <b>Measurement Invariance Test: Supported</b>   |   |
|---|---|
| Baseline Model:   | $\chi^2_{(1320)} = 2002.62$ , $p = 0.00$ , $\text{CFI} = 0.91$ , and $\text{RMSEA} = 0.038$                       |
| Constrained Model 1:  | $\chi^2_{(1364)} = 2074.03$ , $p = 0.00$ , $\text{CFI} = 0.90$ , and $\text{RMSEA} = 0.038$                       |
|   | $\Delta\chi^2 = 71.41$ , $\Delta df = 44$ , $p < 0.05$ ; $\Delta\text{CFI} = 0.00$ ; $\Delta\text{RMSEA} = 0.000$ |
| <b>Structural Invariance Test: Supported</b>  |   |
| Constrained Model 1:  | $\chi^2_{(1364)} = 2074.03$ , $p = 0.00$ , $\text{CFI} = 0.90$ , and $\text{RMSEA} = 0.038$                       |
| Constrained Model 2:  | $\chi^2_{(1402)} = 2108.96$ , $p = 0.00$ , $\text{CFI} = 0.90$ , and $\text{RMSEA} = 0.037$                       |
|   | $\Delta\chi^2 = 34.93$ , $\Delta df = 38$ , $p > 0.05$ ; $\Delta\text{CFI} = 0.00$ ; $\Delta\text{RMSEA} = 0.001$ |
| Note: Baseline model is set with freely estimated parameters; Constrained Model 1 is set with equal factor loadings; Constrained Model 2 is set with equal factor loadings and equal path parameters. |   |

The baseline model within these three subgroups indicated the fitness ( $\chi^2 = 2002.62$ ,  $df = 1320$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ,  $\text{CFI} = 0.91$ , and  $\text{RMSEA} = 0.038$ ) for further comparisons. Thereafter, the equal constraints were assigned to all factor loadings whereby the nested model generated chi-square at 2074.03 with 1364 degrees of freedom. Two other reference indices indicated that CFI equalled 0.90 and RMSEA equalled 0.038. In comparison of indices, the chi-square difference between the three nationality groups was significant. The



measurement invariance was arguable. However, following the discussion of Cheung and Rensvold (2002) and Chen (2007), judging the invariance through the difference of chi-square was in doubt. They suggest that the difference between CFI and RMSEA can produce a more reasonable criterion for invariance. This argument was also supported and employed by Byrne (2010). The CFI difference in this case was 0.00 and the RMSEA difference was 0.000, which verified measurement invariance.

Given the measurement invariance across subgroups with different nationalities, the same procedure was taken to carry out the structural invariance test. The constrained model with equivalent factor loadings and path parameters between latent variables obtained a set of fitness indices being:  $\chi^2 = 2108.96$ ,  $df = 1402$ ,  $p = 0.00$ , CFI = 0.90, and RMSEA = 0.037. Calculating the difference of  $\chi^2$ , the score ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 37.93$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) supported the structural invariance whereby the supplement of  $\Delta$ CFI stood at 0.00 and  $\Delta$ RMSEA equalled 0.001. Therefore, the structural invariance was concluded across the different nationality groups.

#### 8.6.5 Multigroup Analysis by Place of Residence

To determine the measurement invariance between groups having different places of residence, sub-groups were firstly identified in carrying out the multigroup invariant test. 533 participants resided across 41 countries. Only the first three largest groups, UK ( $n = 151$ ), Taiwan ( $n = 133$ ) and China ( $n = 90$ ) were chosen for group comparison to identify the measurement invariance and structural invariance. As similar, the baseline model was first scrutinised. The results of multigroup analysis by place of residence are listed in Table 8.32.

Table 8.32 Results of Multigroup Analysis by Place of Residence

**Measurement Invariance Test: Supported**

Baseline Model:  $\chi^2_{(1320)} = 1971.83$ ,  $p = 0.00$ , CFI = 0.91, and RMSEA = 0.036  
 Constrained Model 1:  $\chi^2_{(1364)} = 2030.62$ ,  $p = 0.00$ , CFI = 0.91, and RMSEA = 0.036  
 $\Delta\chi^2 = 59.28$ ,  $\Delta df = 44$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ;  $\Delta CFI = 0.00$ ;  $\Delta RMSEA = 0.000$

**Structural Invariance Test: Supported**

Constrained Model 1:  $\chi^2_{(1364)} = 2030.62$ ,  $p = 0.00$ , CFI = 0.91, and RMSEA = 0.036  
 Constrained Model 2:  $\chi^2_{(1402)} = 2066.32$ ,  $p = 0.00$ , CFI = 0.91, and RMSEA = 0.036  
 $\Delta\chi^2 = 35.69$ ,  $\Delta df = 38$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ;  $\Delta CFI = 0.00$ ;  $\Delta RMSEA = 0.000$

Note: Baseline model is set with freely estimated parameters; Constrained Model 1 is set with equal factor loadings; Constrained Model 2 is set with equal factor loadings and equal path parameters.

The baseline model, having no constraints, achieved modest fitness of:  $\chi^2 = 1971.833$ ,  $df = 1320$ ,  $p = 0.00$ , CFI = 0.91, and RMSEA = 0.036. Thereupon, equal constraints were added on to all factor loadings receiving slightly different scores of fitness:  $\chi^2 = 2030.63$ ,  $df = 1364$ ,  $p = 0.00$ , CFI = 0.91, and RMSEA = 0.036. The differences of Chi-Square ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 58.79$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), CFI ( $\Delta CFI = 0.00$ ) and RMSEA ( $\Delta RMSEA = 0.000$ ) supported that the measurement was invariant across subgroups having different places of residence.

In testing the structural invariance of the place of residence multigroup, more constraints were placed on the baseline model, with both factor loadings and path parameters being constrained equally. The selected indices demonstrated the model was of moderate fit with  $\chi^2 = 2066.315$ ,  $df = 1402$ ,  $p = 0.00$ , CFI = 0.91 and RMSEA = 0.036. The chi-square difference between the baseline model and nested model was not significant ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 35.69$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), the CFI difference was less than 0.01 ( $\Delta CFI = 0.00$ ) and the RMSEA difference was less than 0.015 ( $\Delta RMSEA = 0.000$ ). The evidence for structural invariance was therefore provided.

The analysis of multigroup invariance confirmed the equivalence of the measurement and structural model across the different demographic subgroups being: gender, age-group, educational qualification, nationality, and place of residence.

## 8.7 Summary

The aim of this chapter is to report the results of the main study data analysis. A variety of statistical techniques are employed for exploratory purposes. Firstly, demographic analysis is applied to understand the background of sampling and the use of electronic media and travel-related eWOM communication behaviour. Secondly, data screening to process and clean incomplete data was carried out thereafter to remedy missing values and eliminate outliers. The normality assumption was also examined at this stage. Thirdly, two-steps of SEM were employed to validate the conceptual framework and examine the hypotheses. For the purpose of validity assessment, the measurement model was examined by individual constructs and overall model sequentially. Reliability and validity of all latent variables were also calculated to ensure the quality of data received. The structural model was then analysed to test the hypotheses and verify the proposed framework. Lastly, multigroup analysis was applied to ensure equivalence of the measurement and structural model across the different demographic groups. These findings will be further addressed and discussed in the next chapter. The conclusions and implications are also extracted from the analysis results.

# Chapter 9

## Conclusion and Implications

### 9.1 Introduction

This study focuses on the antecedents of eWOM communication from the attitudinal perspective. The conceptual framework was adopted from the literature review and integrated to understand the possible antecedents of eWOM communication and their influences on travellers' overall attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Through online focus groups, the proposed conceptual framework and measures for estimating antecedents were informed and modified. Thereafter, quantitative data was generated from the web-based survey questionnaire from international travellers. This data empirically examined the impact of three antecedents of eWOM on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Structural equation modelling was employed to validate the full and partial mediation model. Results verified the conceptual framework, although some of the research hypotheses were rejected.

This chapter begins by discussing the online focus group results and survey. The research objectives are then revisited. The theoretical and methodological implications are presented, followed by managerial implications. Finally, the limitations of this study are noted with future research suggestions.

### 9.2 Discussion

Three antecedents having nine dimensions were adopted from the literature review and revised after conducting online focus groups and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The results of CFA show that: adoption of electronic communication technology is formed by perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment; motivation for eWOM communication includes the monetary-utilitarian function, social-utilitarian function, knowledge function, value-

expressive function, and ego-protective function; while subjective norm consists of injunctive norm and descriptive norm.

### 9.2.1 Indicators of the Antecedents

In Chapter 6, online focus groups and pilot tests were conducted as groundwork to preparing the main survey. Quantitative data was generated and CFA was employed to assess the reliability and validity of measures. Some dimensions and indicators were deleted during the model specification process. The remaining construct and related indicators are discussed respectively below.

#### 9.2.1.1 Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology

Adoption of electronic communication technology employs Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as the theoretical background. The original dimensions: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and perceived enjoyment were proposed on the basis of the literature review. Only perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment were found within CFA, revealing satisfying reliability and validity, therefore being retained for structural equation modelling (SEM) testing.

Perceived Usefulness and related indicators were eliminated within CFA and not used to process SEM. Following the specification of the measurement model process, indicators for estimating perceived usefulness was kept and merged with indicators of perceived ease of use. However, all indicators for accessing perceived usefulness constructs received either unsatisfactory factor loadings or revealed cross-loading effects on other indicators. Previous studies employing TAM in understanding the behavioural intention of users are mainly discussed within the workplace (e.g. Davis, 1989; Davis *et al.*, 1992). In such research contexts, perceived usefulness is a very important determinant in identifying the adoption of technology. Within the eWOM environment, plenty of electronic communication technology choices are available for eWOM communication. People can easily find alternative electronic media to communicate with others. Therefore, the importance of perceived usefulness may weaken. Similar opinions were raised by online focus group participants.

They confirmed that they could easily switch to another platform if they found

any particular media not useful or not satisfying their needs. Perceived usefulness is not the main consideration when considering the use of electronic technology for communication.

In terms of perceived ease of use, originally five indicators were employed, but only three items (Using electronic media to communicate is convenient / learning to use electronic media to communicate is easy / I find that electronic media is easy to use for communication) were retained after completion of CFA and further analysis within SEM. These three statements address the 'ease' and 'convenience' of using electronic media for communication. In comparison to the original definition proposed by Davis *et al.* (1989), perceived ease of use focuses mainly on the 'ease of use'. Within the context of eWOM, the convenience of electronic media is also emphasised. This aspect was also mentioned by online focus group participants.

Three adjectives were used to measure perceived enjoyment: enjoyable, pleasant and fun. Within the context of eWOM communication, these items received a high consistency of results (composite reliability = 0.84), also satisfying scores of validity (factor loadings standing at 0.81, 0.80, 0.78, respectively). Extracted from the literature, PE is an extra construct serving as the intrinsic motivation in addition to the original TAM (Davis *et al.*, 1992). According to Davis *et al.* (1992), perceived enjoyment, as an intrinsic motivation, leads to extrinsic motivation, being PU. This point implies that PE is more important as a determinant in affecting the technology adoption by the individual. In addition, perceived enjoyment is the only construct within TAM to be employed by Kang and Schuett (2013) to identify reasons to share travel experiences through social media. Their research suggests that perceived enjoyment contributes a strong influence on the actual travel-experience sharing by individuals.

#### 9.2.1.2 Motivation for eWOM Communication

According to Katz's model (1960), four functions: utilitarian function, knowledge function, value-expressive function, and ego-defensive function, are concluded to form one's attitude. Later studies further consider other functions. Through the CFA, six functions received optimal model fitness. In

other words, the data generated from this research represents six different functions of motivation for eWOM communication.

The monetary-utilitarian function and social-utilitarian function are presented as the utilitarian function in Katz's classification. According to the definition by Katz (1960), the utilitarian function of attitude is formed when individuals would like to gain rewards or avoid punishment. In the current study, punishment was not mentioned by online focus groups so related statements were omitted in the survey. On the contrary, rewards covered monetary benefits and social advantages. This included four items of the monetary-utilitarian function and social-utilitarian function, respectively. CFA confirmed the discrimination of these two utilitarian functions. The scores of reliability for both functions were above 0.80, confirming high consistency between items. Three items (to earn extra income, to have non-financial benefits and to receive incentives), represented the monetary-utilitarian function. On the other hand, meeting people, making new friends and building social networks, were the phrases used in reflecting the social-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication. Previous research confirms that maintaining social relationships is an important function for electronic media communication (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). The CFA results echo this point, having three items in which to estimate the social-utilitarian function.

The original definition of the knowledge function of attitude is the need to understand cognitive organizations for consistency and clarity (Katz, 1960). Based upon results from online focus groups, the knowledge function of attitude was defined to be formed when individuals have the need to expand their knowledge, obtain new knowledge, or ultimately understand themselves. The major differences between the two definitions are that the former focuses on the understanding of the chaotic world, but the latter emphasises the understanding of the individual himself / herself. The focus on clarification of this is further supported by the results of CFA. Eight items were developed to estimate this construct, including gaining new knowledge and understanding oneself. Three items: reflect upon myself, better understanding of my perspectives on the world, clarify my thinking, remained within this construct according to CFA results. These three items reflect the individual's need in

understanding himself / herself. The definition of knowledge function does not address obtaining new knowledge. Instead, this construct focuses on the clarification of understanding oneself.

Within the context of eWOM, the value-expressive function addresses how to express personal values, beliefs, and build one's image. Such definition was concluded through online focus groups. In comparison to the definition given by Katz (1960), the self-determination and self-identity maintenance elements of the value-expressive function were missing from the online focus group results. Katz (1960) depicts that the value-expressive function enable individuals to express their personal values and beliefs. By expressing personal values and beliefs, individuals can further determine who they really are and enhance their self-identity. Three out of eight items were retained to represent the value-expressive function from CFA results: express personal standards of right and wrong, express personal values and reflect personal moral values. The remaining three items narrowed the definition of the value-expressive function. The original eight statements proposed a form of perception such as building one's personal image and giving advice to others. Those items were deleted, either due to the low factor loadings or cross-loading effect. The remaining items retain the focus in line with the online focus group results.

Ego-defensive function is initially proposed by Katz (1960) as a single function within the functional theory of attitude, whereas it further classifies into the ego-protective function and ego-enhancive function as different functions of attitude (Clary *et al.*, 1998). The definition concluded by the online focus groups covers both the ego-protective function and ego-enhancive function. Therefore, the amended items comprise of both functions. The ego-enhancive function failed to demonstrate discriminate validity within other constructs, so the ego-enhancive function was eliminated for further analysis. Three items were allocated to reflect the ego-protective function: be released from bad feelings, work through my own personal problems and escape from my negative emotions. Three focus group statements also address the fact that eWOM can help people to deal with their negative feelings and protect their ego.



### 9.2.1.3 Subjective Norm

Subjective norm refers to the pressure from peer groups as an antecedent of eWOM communication. In the theory of reasoned action or theory of planned behaviour, only injunctive norm is proposed as a determinant influencing personal behaviour directly (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Researchers argue that by ignoring descriptive norm, it will bias the influences of subjective norm on the behaviour of individuals (Borsari and Carey, 2003; Povey *et al.*, 2000). This research therefore addresses both injunctive norm and descriptive norm to identify their influences upon eWOM communication.

Online focus group discussions did not explicitly address injunctive norm. Although subjective norm originally refers to injunctive norm in the theory of *reasoned action and theory of planned behaviour*, this influence seems to be omitted within online focus groups. Participants mentioned the fact that they received only a few invitations to participate in some form of electronic media, but rarely experienced any strong requirement from their peer group regarding that of a particular electronic media to communicate through. By referring to previous research and online focus groups, five items were developed to reflect injunctive norm, but only three remaining items (Most people who are important to me would expect that I should participate in eWOM communication / would require me to participate in eWOM communication / would think that I should participate in eWOM communication) were used for the structural model analysis after the measurement model specification was concluded. The three items retained the definition focus, which was refined by the online focus groups and used in the structural model analysis.

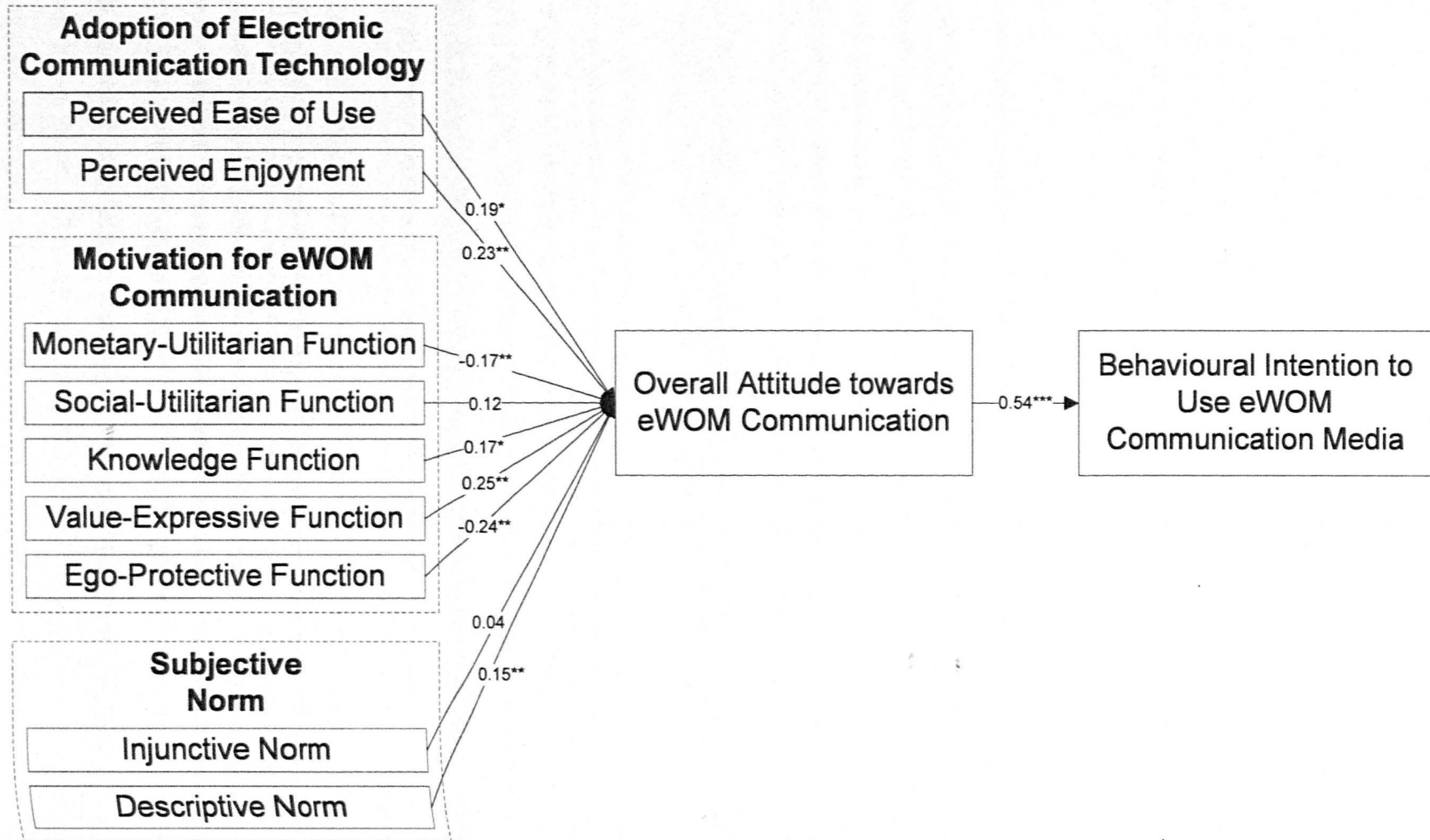
Suggested by Ravis and Sheeran (2003), descriptive norm should be included for a better understanding and prediction of the individual's behaviour. Online focus group participants put more emphasis on descriptive norm and its influences on their eWOM communication in comparison to discussions regarding injunctive norm. This study adapted three items for descriptive norm estimation which received satisfactory scores in the reliability and validity testing. Therefore, three items (Most people who are important to me have participated in eWOM communication before / Most people in my social network have participated in eWOM communication before / Most people

whose opinion I value have eWOM communication experience before) were brought forward for further SEM analysis.

### 9.2.2 Overall Model Performance and Hypotheses Testing

After confirming the adequacy of CFA and reassessing the validity through hierarchical CFA, hypothetical relationships and fitness of the proposed model were further examined by SEM. Firstly, three antecedents, explained by nine dimensions, were tested to establish their direct influences on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. The behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media served as a proximal predictor of the actual behaviour of eWOM communication. The results of the structural model are shown in Figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1 Results of SEM – Full-Mediation Model



As seen in Figure 9.1, three antecedents together with nine dimensions explain 43% variance of the overall attitude towards eWOM communication and 29% variance of the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Not all hypotheses are significantly supported. Hypotheses results are listed in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1 Summary of Results of Hypotheses in the Full-Mediation Model

| No. | Hypothesised Relationship  | Result          |
|-----|--|-----------------|
| H1a | Perceived ease of use of electronic communication technology will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication       | Significant     |
| H1b | Perceived enjoyment of electronic communication technology will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication         | Significant     |
| H2a | Monetary-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication | Rejected        |
| H2b | Social-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication   | Non-Significant |
| H2c | Knowledge function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication            | Significant     |
| H2d | Value-expressive function of motivation will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication                            | Significant     |
| H2e | Ego-protective function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication       | Rejected        |
| H3a | Injunctive norm will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  | Non-Significant |
| H3b | Descriptive norm will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication   | Significant     |
| H4  | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication will have a positive influence on behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media              | Significant     |

Listed in Table 9.1, six out of ten hypotheses are significantly supported. H2b and H3a are not significantly supported. Additionally, H2a and H2e are rejected due to the negative results. Hypotheses are proposed to have positive relationships, but this data demonstrate a negative relationship. Each relationship will be further discussed in the following section.

### 9.2.2.1 Influences on Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication

Three antecedents explained by nine dimensions produce the influences on overall attitude towards eWOM communication. Each relationship is discussed respectively in detail.

#### 9.2.2.1.1 Adoption of Electronic Communication Technology

Both perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment demonstrate a significant and positive influence on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. H1a and H1b are thus both significantly supported. From the literature, this confirms that perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment produce positive influences on the overall attitude (e.g. Davis *et al.*, 1992; Lee *et al.*, 2005; Moon and Kim, 2001). When travellers perceive a higher ease of use, or enjoyment about using electronic communication technology, they produce a more positive attitude towards eWOM communication.

By comparing these two dimensions under the adoption of electronic communication technology, perceived enjoyment obtains a higher influential score and has a stronger significance on the overall attitude than perceived ease of use. This finding differs to previous studies in that perceived enjoyment has less influence on individuals' adoption of technology (e.g. Davis *et al.*, 1992; Moon and Kim, 2001; Teo *et al.*, 1999). Earlier work by Deci (1971), indicates that intrinsic motivation tends to be decreased when the extrinsic motivation is increased. Teo *et al.* (1999) confirm this point in that the effect of perceived usefulness, as an extrinsic motivation, weakens the effect of perceived enjoyment, as an intrinsic motivation. In the current study, perceived usefulness has been eliminated after CFA. Perceived enjoyment received a stronger influence on the overall attitude which argues the conclusion proposed by the existing literature.

Heijden (2004) proposes that perceived enjoyment should contribute more than perceived usefulness when discussing the acceptance of the hedonic information system. This finding is confirmed in the context of television-commerce (Yu *et al.*, 2005) and the internet-based learning medium (Lee *et al.*, 2005). These studies support the argument that perceived enjoyment is a more important antecedent in understanding the travellers' overall attitude

towards eWOM communication. Travellers treat eWOM communication in such a way as to share their happiness and record their memorable moments. Travellers may not emphasise the usefulness, effectiveness or performance of eWOM communication. Instead, they pay more attention as to whether they feel enjoyment or pleasure when communicating via electronic media. In the context of electronic communication, enjoyment is therefore regarded as an important factor in developing a positive attitude by the individual and further attracting their behavioural intention.

#### 9.2.2.1.2 Motivation for eWOM Communication

In terms of motivation for eWOM communication, five functions are employed to discuss different motivations for eWOM communication. Four out of five revealed significant influences on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. However, only the knowledge function and value-expressive function showed a positive influence. The relationships from the monetary-utilitarian function and ego-protective function to the overall attitude are significant but negative. Therefore, the results support H2c and H2d, but reject H2a and H2e. The social-utilitarian function demonstrated a positive influence, but does not reach a significant level. Therefore, H2b is not significantly supported.

In Katz's model (1960), there is no specific directional influence between each function and the influence on forming attitude. Katz (1960) takes four functions as the motivational basis for forming a personal attitude, which can be either positive or negative. The directional influences between functions and attitude are identified through later studies, which employ the model to discuss different behaviours. For example, Clary *et al.* (1998) conclude six functions as being positively related to the attitude towards volunteer activity, but Francis (2011) denies this result when studying university student volunteers. Only understanding and the social function demonstrate a positive association with volunteer behaviour, while six functions as motivations explain only 11% of volunteer behaviour (Francis, 2011). Additionally, Daugherty *et al.* (2005) employ functional theory to discuss online panel participation and, later (2008) explore online user-generated content creation. Different results are found across these two studies. The first study, conducted in 2005, shows that the

utilitarian function and social function reveal negative influences on the overall attitude towards online panel participation, whereas in the 2008 study, the knowledge function and value-expressive function demonstrate a negative relationship to the overall attitude towards creating a user-generated context.

Five functions are proposed to influence the overall attitude towards eWOM communication (Daugherty *et al.*, 2008; Daugherty *et al.*, 2005). The knowledge function, social-utilitarian function and value-expressive function produce a positive effect on the overall attitude, whereas the monetary-utilitarian function and ego-protective function generate a negative effect. The value-expressive function recognises that individuals are driven by the need to express their opinions and values. In this study, travellers have a high level of motivation to express their opinions through eWOM communication. Likewise, the knowledge function, as a motivation, bolsters travellers to gain a better self-understanding through eWOM communication. The social-utilitarian function creates a positive but non-significant influence on overall attitude. Such a result shows that travellers may still be motivated to communicate through eWOM in order to build their social networks. However, this motivation is weaker than the knowledge function or value-expressive function. In sum, a positive impact is created from the value-expressive function, knowledge function, and social-utilitarian function on the overall attitude. Individuals embrace the positive attitude towards eWOM communication when they have a need to express their own opinions (the value-expressive function), clarify their own thoughts (the knowledge function) and develop social networking (the social-utilitarian function).

On the contrary, negative and significant relationships are found between the monetary-utilitarian function and ego-protective function on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication, respectively. The negative influence from the monetary-utilitarian function on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication was implicitly discussed by participants within the online focus groups. They indicated that there are many fake online opinions written by paid writers expressing negative evaluations on such opinions. This implies a negative relationship from the monetary-utilitarian function on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. Such findings support the arguments

regarding fraudulent online reviews (Hu *et al.*, 2011; Sakaeeny, 2011). They suggest that online reviews may be manipulated by vendors or publishers, but consumers can do very little about that. The manipulation only creates biased online reviews which result in a lower attitude towards eWOM communication. In terms of the ego-protective function, eWOM communication can help escape bad feelings and release negative emotions. This type of eWOM tends to be in the form of complaints or negative statements. Participants of online focus groups expressed their concerns when producing complaints or warnings. They emphasised that only if the opinions did not hurt the third party, were they willing to produce such opinions. Several studies discuss variables that affect whether people complain or not (e.g. Bodey and Grace, 2006; Bodey and Grace, 2007; Chebat *et al.*, 2005). As eWOM can be reached by many audiences, the publicity of online opinions and influences to others, such as the producers or service providers, can be a consideration when travellers put their complaints online. This point partially supports the fact that individuals tend to complain privately when they have an unsatisfactory experience (Heung and Lam, 2003).

#### 9.2.2.1.3 Subjective Norm

Both injunctive norm and descriptive norm are hypothesised to have influences on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. Descriptive norm is confirmed to produce a significant impact on overall attitude, whereas the relationship between injunctive norm and overall attitude is positive but not significant. To conclude, H3a is not significantly supported, and H3b is supported.

This study employs both injunctive norm and descriptive norm to discuss their influences on the overall attitude, and then the behavioural intention. Such an attempt fulfils the information gap of previous studies in that subjective norm focuses on injunctive norm only, and addresses the direct influences on the behavioural intention directly. Subjective norm is well-recognised in the Theory of Reasoned Behaviour (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), but receives less attention than the other personal factors such as overall attitude and perceived behavioural control. One possibility is the ignorance of descriptive norm (Armitage and Conner, 2001; Sheeran and Orbell, 1999). By



employing the compliance, identification, and internalisation of attitude (Kelman, 1958), subjective norm is argued to produce influences on the overall attitude. Such an argument is also supported in that a high correlation is found between an attitude and norm (Warshaw, 1980). Previous studies conclude the positive relationship between injunctive norm and overall attitude empirically (e.g. Bock *et al.*, 2005; Choo *et al.*, 2004). However, such a relationship between injunctive norm and the attitude is not supported significantly within this research. Instead, the findings confirm that descriptive norm obtains a significant positive influence on overall attitude. Information recorded from the online focus groups indicate that participants often join a particular electronic media because their friends were doing the same. However, they have rarely received any invitation or asked their friends explicitly to join any particular social network. Therefore, the results from online focus groups are consistent with the survey results.

According to the three processes of attitude change by Kelman (1958), the influence from descriptive norm is internalised to form a positive impact on personal attitude. Travellers recognise the benefits from observing eWOM communication by their peers. They therefore form a positive attitude towards eWOM communication. In addition, Ridings and Gefen (2004) claim that individuals would like to become a member of the virtual community because they have a need to belong. Therefore, individuals mimic similar behaviour and gain recognition from others. The results also identify the motivation 'feel a sense of belonging to the online community' as influencing the travellers' social media involvement (Leung and Bai, 2013, p. 66). In this study, a positive attitude towards eWOM communication is stimulated if eWOM behaviour is popular within one's reference group.

#### 9.2.2.2 Influences on Behavioural Intention to Use eWOM Communication Media

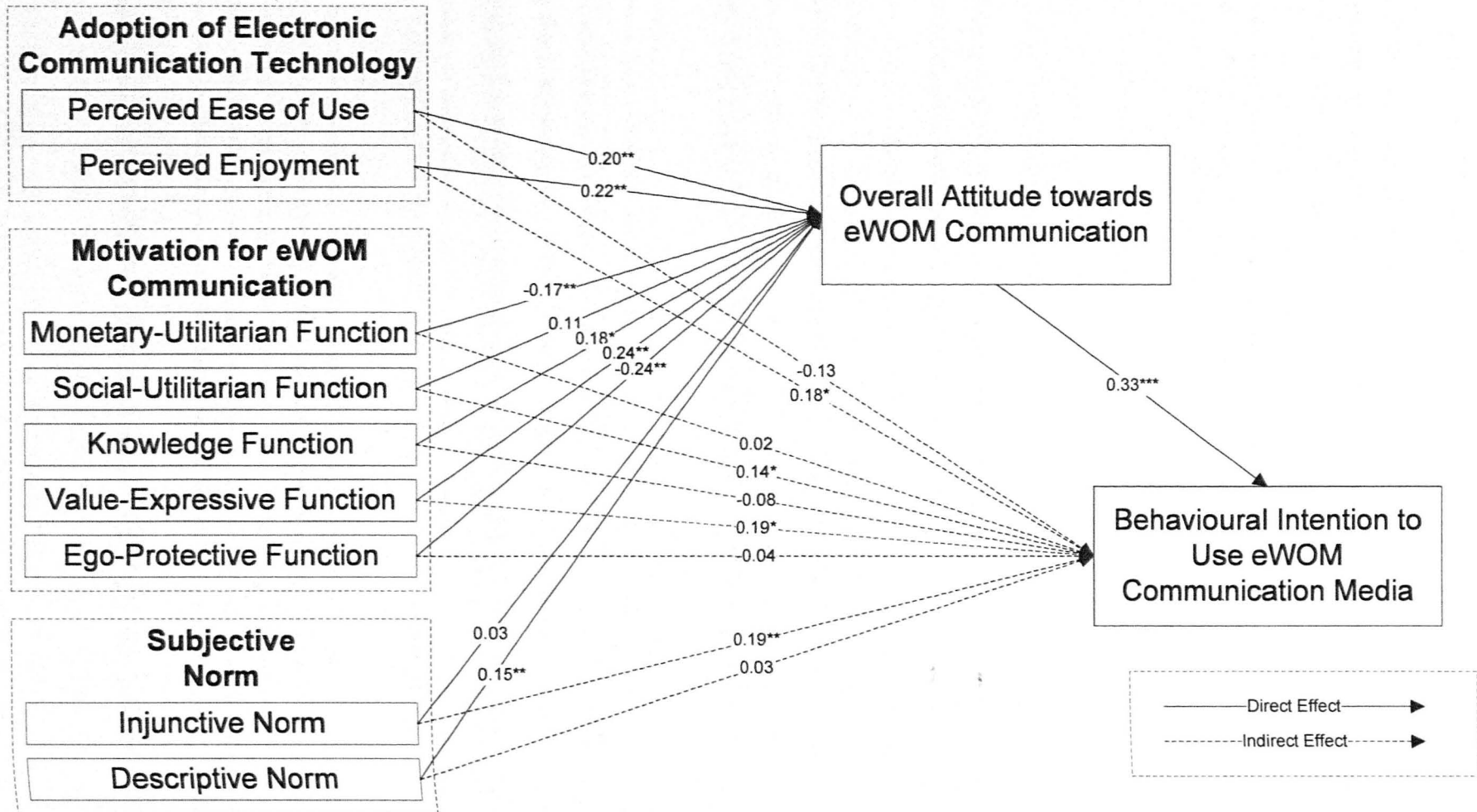
Wide discussions and several empirical studies have been conducted on the relationship between overall attitude and behavioural intention (e.g. Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005; Campbell, 1950; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; LaPiere, 1934). Although other factors may be considered to enhance the explanation of behavioural intention, the influence from the overall attitude is undeniable. The

individuals' preferential behavioural intentions are based on positive or negative attitudes and initial evaluations from other beliefs. In this study, the influence from the overall attitude towards eWOM communication on the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media is supported as expected. The attitude explains 28.7% variance of behavioural intention. Hence, H4 is strongly supported.

#### 9.2.2.3 Mediating Effect of Overall Attitude towards eWOM Communication

H5 suggests that traveller's overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the effect from the antecedents of his / her behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. The mediation model results are shown in Figure 9.2.

Figure 9.2 Results of SEM – Partial-Mediation Model



Three antecedents together with nine dimensions explain 42% variance of the overall attitude towards eWOM communication and 40% variance of behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Similarly, not all hypotheses are supported in the partial-mediation model. The hypotheses results are listed in Table 9.2.

Table 9.2 Summary of Results of Hypotheses in the Partial-Mediation Model

| No. | Hypothesised Relationship   | Result                          |
|-----|---|---------------------------------|
| H1a | Perceived ease of use of electronic communication technology will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  | Significant                     |
| H1b | Perceived enjoyment of electronic communication technology will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  | Significant                     |
| H2a | Monetary-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  | Rejected                        |
| H2b | Social-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  | Non-Significant                 |
| H2c | Knowledge function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication   | Significant                     |
| H2d | Value-expressive function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  | Significant                     |
| H2e | Ego-protective function of motivation for eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  | Rejected                        |
| H3a | Injunctive norm will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication   | Non-Significant                 |
| H3b | Descriptive norm will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  | Significant                     |
| H4  | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication will have a positive influence on behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media   | Significant                     |
| H5a | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's perceived ease of use of electronic communication technology on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media       | Significant (Full-Mediation)    |
| H5b | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's perceived enjoyment on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media  | Significant (Partial-Mediation) |
| H5c | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's monetary-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media | Significant (Full-Mediation)    |
| H5d | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's social-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media   | Not Applicable                  |
| H5e | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's knowledge function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media            | Significant (Full-Mediation)    |
| H5f | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's value-expressive function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media     | Significant (Partial-Mediation) |
| H5g | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's ego-protective function of motivation for eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media       | Significant (Full-Mediation)    |
| H5h | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's injunctive norm on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media  | Not Applicable                  |
| H5i | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of traveller's descriptive norm on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media   | Significant (Full-Mediation)    |

Table 9.2 lists 19 hypotheses and their results. The hypotheses testing mediation effect (H5), obtained non-significant relationships between perceived ease of use, the monetary-utilitarian function, knowledge function, ego-protective function and descriptive norm. The overall attitude is therefore concluded as a full-mediator of the relationships between the monetary-utilitarian function, the knowledge function, the ego-protective function and descriptive norm, and the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media respectively. Accordingly, H5a, H5c, H5e, H5g and H5i are supported with the full-mediation effect.

Meanwhile, perceived enjoyment, the social-utilitarian function, the value-expressive function and injunctive norm produce significant influences on the behavioural intention. Given that the relationship between perceived enjoyment and the overall attitude towards eWOM communication, and the value-expressive function and the overall attitude towards eWOM communication are also significant, the partial-mediation effect is thus supported between these antecedents and the behavioural intention. H5b and H5f are also supported with a partial-mediation effect. 'Not Applicable' is shown in the results for H5d and H5h because the relationship between antecedent and the overall attitude is not significant. Therefore, the overall attitude cannot serve as a mediator in testing the mediation effect.

Perceived ease of use generates a positive and significant influence on the overall attitude, but has an insignificant negative impact on the behavioural intention. H5a is therefore supported. The reasons for this are that overall attitude fully mediates the relationship between perceived ease of use and behavioural intention. Such findings suggest that perceived ease of use is not sufficient to influence the intentions of individuals to use eWOM communication media unless they believe it is useful and desirable for communication.

On the other hand, the overall attitude towards eWOM communication serves as a partial mediator between perceived enjoyment and the behavioural intention. The paths from perceived enjoyment on both overall attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention are positive and significant. Such results are the same as previous studies (e.g. Davis *et al.*, 1992; Lee *et*

*al.*, 2005; Venkatesh, 1999). Therefore, H5b is confirmed as to that the overall attitude partially mediates the influence of perceived enjoyment on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media.

Regarding the motivation for eWOM communication, the functional theory of attitude is employed to discuss the relationship between each motivation, attitude and behavioural intention. This theory is originally proposed to discuss the motivational basis of changing personal attitudes. Only a few studies apply this theory to identify the influences from different functions on behavioural intention empirically (e.g. Clary *et al.*, 1998; Daugherty *et al.*, 2008; Daugherty *et al.*, 2005). The results of this study illustrate a significantly positive relationship from the social-utilitarian function and value-expressive function to the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. A positive and insignificant result is achieved between the monetary-utilitarian function and behavioural intention. In addition, negative and insignificant relationships are found from the knowledge function and ego-protective function on behavioural intention.

H5c is supported in that the overall attitude fully mediates the relationship between the monetary-utilitarian function and behavioural intention. As online focus group participants indicated, eWOM may be biased if produced by paid writers. Participants expressed their negative attitude concerning the monetary-utilitarian function as a motivation for eWOM communication. Thereafter, the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media is affected. Empirical data confirmed that travellers may still have a positive intention to produce statements online if incentives are provided. This finding is supported by other research in that the individual will publish eWOM because of the incentives or other financial benefits (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004).

The social-utilitarian hypothesis H5d is not applicable to discuss as an insignificant relationship is found between this function and overall attitude. However, the significant direct impact is obtained on behavioural intention. This finding suggests that the social-utilitarian function cannot prompt travellers to create a positive attitude towards eWOM communication. Instead, the social-utilitarian function of motivation for eWOM communication will motivate travellers engaging in eWOM communication immediately. This is supported

by previous research whereby people participate in online communication because they can gain social benefits and develop their social networks (Bronner and Hoog, 2011; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004).

An insignificant relationship is concluded from the knowledge function on behavioural intention. Given that the influence is confirmed from the knowledge function on overall attitude, it implies that travellers input eWOM communication only if their positive attitude towards eWOM is created. In other words, overall attitude is a full mediator between the knowledge function and the behavioural intention, therefore H5e is supported. In addition, an unexpected result is found: a negative relationship between the knowledge function and the behavioural intention, although it is then insignificant. One possible reason is the consideration of privacy. When individuals believe that by expressing their deeper feelings can help them to get better understanding about themselves, their positive attitude towards eWOM communication is generated. However, eWOM can be easily accessed by everyone including friends and strangers. Some people may not feel comfortable to express their deeper feelings, particularly in front of strangers. Therefore, a negative relationship is generated between the knowledge function and the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media.

H5f suggests that the overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of value-expressive motivation on the behavioural intention. This hypothesis is supported and the overall attitude is concluded as a partial mediator. The indirect relationship suggests travellers with high levels of motivation to express their own opinions embrace a more favourable attitude towards eWOM communication and therefore have a stronger intention to use eWOM communication media. The primary function of eWOM is for communication. It is not surprising that travellers have a higher intention to use eWOM communication media when they have a higher motivation to express their values. Thus, the overall attitude partially mediates the relationship between the value-expressive function of motivation and the behavioural intention.

Moreover, the ego-protective function produces a significant and negative impact on the overall attitude, also negative but insignificant influences on the



behavioural intention. H5g is therefore supported. The overall attitude as a full-mediator influences the relationship between the ego-protective function and behavioural intention. This finding implies that, travellers who have a higher motivation to protect their ego and identity through eWOM communication, have a less favourable attitude towards eWOM communication. Also, they have less intention to use eWOM communication media.

With reference to the influence of subjective norm, the significant positive relationship between injunctive norm and the behavioural intention is identified. H5h is not discussed here as injunctive norm does not have significant influences on overall attitude. By definition, injunctive norm refers to the perceived pressure from a peer group of performing behaviour (Manning, 2009). Such pressure forces travellers' to get involved in eWOM communication, but not cultivate a desirable attitude towards it. From the studies that employ the Theory of Reasoned Action or Theory of Planned Behaviour, injunctive norm produces a direct influence on behavioural intention or actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1977; Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005) which is of the same findings as this study. Travellers tend to comply with their peer group instead of altering their attitude towards eWOM communication.

On the other hand, an insignificant positive relationship is found between descriptive norm and the behavioural intention. H5i is hence supported. The overall attitude is confirmed to fully mediate the relationship between descriptive norm and the behavioural intention. The influences from descriptive norm on the behavioural intention are made through their positive attitude development. Once travellers believe eWOM is useful and valuable, the stronger perception of descriptive norm results in a higher intention to conduct eWOM communication.

### 9.3 Evaluation of Findings According to the Research Objective

Overall, this research aims to explore the antecedents of eWOM communication and its impact on the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media from the attitudinal perspective. To attain the overriding objectives, comprehensive literature reviews, online focus groups, and a

conscientious survey have been extensively conducted. All proposed research objectives are achieved, as listed below.

1. Three antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication have been identified: Adoption of electronic communication technology, Motivation for eWOM communication, Subjective norm from the attitudinal perspective.
2. A conceptual framework has been developed by integrating three antecedents, overall attitude towards eWOM communication and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media.
3. Full-mediation and partial-mediation relationships between antecedents and behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media have been empirically tested.
4. Contribution to existing theories and knowledge is provided in regard to consumers' attitudes and behavioural intention towards eWOM, and managerial implications are discussed in reference to the tourism industry.

Previous research regarding the reasons for conducting eWOM communication is mainly studied from the motivational perspective and only examines the direct effect between motivation and eWOM behaviour. This study, taking an alternative view from the attitudinal perspective, captures possible antecedents from relevant attitude theories. The three antecedents, adoption of electronic communication technology, motivation for eWOM communication and subjective norm were identified, which satisfies the first objective.

The definition of three antecedents comprised by nine dimensions are proposed and fitted into the context of eWOM communication. The measures for estimating each latent construct are also amended based upon online focus groups and the results from CFA. The revised definition and indicators of the antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication are identified. Therefore, the first objective is achieved.

The second objective is to develop a conceptual framework. This study adopts the S-O-R paradigm and Belk's (1975) findings regarding situational factors

that influence consumer behaviour. Three antecedents are brought together as the stimuli to propose the influences on travellers' behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Additionally, the overall attitude towards eWOM communication is proposed to serve as an organism, being a mediator, between the antecedents and the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media.

After proposing the research model, the next step is to empirically validate it. This research is the first to adapt three theories into the context of eWOM communication and to examine three antecedents simultaneously. Online focus groups were therefore conducted to inform the proposed antecedents and the conceptual framework in the context of eWOM communication. Fruitful results were generated from online focus groups which were used for both revising the conceptual framework and amending statements within the main survey. The main survey was thereby conducted to validate the research model empirically. The research model is successfully verified though not all hypotheses are significantly supported. In the full-mediation model, 43% variance of the overall attitude towards eWOM communication and 29% variance of the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media are explained. Moreover, adding the direct influences from antecedents on the behavioural intention, a similar percentage of variance (42%) on the overall attitude is explained. Additionally, 40% variance of the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media is explained.

The results further support that the overall attitude plays an important role between the antecedents and behavioural intention. The overall attitude is fully mediated on the relationship between antecedents (perceived ease of use, the monetary-utilitarian function, the knowledge function, the ego-protective function, and descriptive norm) and the behavioural intention. Additionally, partial-mediating effects of the overall attitude are found between perceived enjoyment and the behavioural intention, and the value-expressive function and the behavioural intention. As for the social-utilitarian function and injunctive norm, they produce direct influences on the behavioural intention instead of working through the overall attitude. Consequently, all proposed

antecedents are influential on travellers' behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. The third objective is also successfully achieved.

Lastly, the fourth objective aims to provide practical implications for a deeper understanding of travellers' eWOM communication. Through the previous three objectives, antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication were identified. The influences from antecedents on overall attitude, and subsequently on behavioural intention were also verified. Based on the results, several implications can be provided for the tourism industry to better manage customer eWOM communication and provide appropriate feedback. In addition, utilising eWOM communication to promote their business is also an implication for managers and owners within the tourism industry. Practical implication will be discussed in further detail whereby the fourth objective is satisfied by the current study.

#### 9.4 Contributions of the Study

This study contributes to a better understanding of the antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication. Given that eWOM receives considerable attention by both academics and practitioners, little attention has been given to the antecedents in engaging in eWOM communication behaviour. From the attitudinal perspective, three antecedents are identified for a better understanding as to why travellers would like to express their opinions online.

Both the full-mediation and partial-mediation models are proposed and empirically tested. The full-mediation model examines the influences from antecedents on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. Behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media follows, with partial-mediation testing both the direct and indirect influences from antecedents and the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Moreover, the partial-mediation model achieves a better result in terms of the explained variance and the model fit indices. Therefore, the results from the partial-mediation tests are more comprehensive and representative in that they provide further theoretical and practical implications which are addressed below.

### 9.4.1 Theoretical Contributions

Theoretical contributions can be summarised into three major points. Firstly, this study explores the antecedents of eWOM from the attitudinal perspective. Secondly, a conceptual framework is proposed by integrating three antecedents which are empirically validated. Thirdly, this study extends several theories, the Technology Acceptance Model, Functional Theory of Attitude, Subjective Norm and Consumer Attitude toward eWOM communication, in the context of eWOM communication within the tourism industry.

Firstly, antecedents of travellers' eWOM communication are explored from the attitudinal perspective. Previous research has explored eWOM communication to understand its importance, conceptualisation and impact. Recently, the focus has been shifting to understand the reasons as to why people like to publish their eWOM communication. Extant research is largely focused on exploring consumer motivation for eWOM communication, which is assumed to have a direct influence on it. Very limited attention has been given to understand eWOM communication from the attitudinal perspective. As opposed to the motivational factor, attitudinal factor is relatively durable and serves as a mechanism to lead behaviour. By addressing the academic gap and extending eWOM communication studies, this study fulfils the information gap by exploring the factors to facilitate the travellers' attitude and thereafter, influencing their behavioural intention. This is the very first academic attempt to propose that the overall attitude towards eWOM communication is a mediator between the antecedents and the traveller's intention to use eWOM communication media.

Secondly, a conceptual framework is introduced and tested by integrating the three key antecedents that influence travellers' attitudes towards eWOM communication. The antecedents are the adoption of electronic communication technology, motivation for eWOM communication and subjective norm. It is the very first time these three antecedents have been brought together to test the simultaneous effect on travellers' eWOM communication behaviour.

Empirical testing of the research model shows that five dimensions (perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, knowledge function, value-expressive

function and descriptive norm) of antecedents contribute significantly and have a positive influence on overall attitude. In turn, the willingness of travellers' to use eWOM communication is impacted by their overall attitude towards eWOM communication. Two dimensions (monetary-utilitarian function and ego-protective function) reveal significant but negative influences on the overall attitude, and then on behavioural intention. Although the remaining two dimensions (social-utilitarian function and injunctive norm) do not have a significant influence on the overall attitude, they produce a direct impact on the behavioural intention instead. Moreover, previous studies debate whether or not that overall attitude towards eWOM communication plays a mediating role between antecedents and behavioural intention. Findings from this study demonstrate that overall attitude plays a partial mediating role between perceived enjoyment and the value-expressive function, also the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media.

Thirdly, this study adopts theories and examines them in the context of travellers' eWOM communication. The revised dimensions for examining the structural model are different to the adoption of original theories. Within the adoption of electronic communication technology, only two dimensions remained, being those of perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment. TAM, which is the supporting theory of this construct, was originally developed to understand the individual's adoption of technology within the workplace. Once individuals perceive the usefulness of this technology, they are more likely to adopt such technology. However, travellers' eWOM communication is a non-working behaviour in that the usefulness may receive less emphasis when identifying the adoption towards electronic communication media by them. Through the results of CFA within this study, perceived usefulness and related statements are disregarded. This research concludes that travellers' perception of ease of use and enjoyment are verified as determinants of their adoption of communication technology. Additionally, the role of overall attitude within TAM is arguable (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). Amongst those studies employing TAM as a theoretical supporting, some regard overall attitude as a mediator between antecedents (perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment) and behavioural intention (e.g. Davis, 1993; Yu *et al.*, 2005) while others claim the direct influence from antecedents on

behavioural intention (e.g. Adams *et al.*, 1992; Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). The results from this study suggest that overall attitude plays a full-mediator between perceived ease of use and behavioural intention but as a partial-mediator between perceived enjoyment and behavioural intention. In the adoption of electronic communication technology, attitude should receive considerable attention in that it mediates both perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment.

Within the motivation for eWOM communication, the functional theory of attitude has been employed to examine the relationship differences between the functional motivation and the behavioural intention. Five functions are confirmed through the online focus groups and the survey questionnaire found to be influential on both travellers' overall attitude and behavioural intention. Though the functional theory of attitude has been developed for more than fifty years, very few studies have examined the relationship between functions and overall attitude empirically (e.g. Clary *et al.*, 1998; Gastil, 1992). The current study stands as a pioneer in identifying the functional motivations and also empirically tests their impact on the attitude and behaviour intention within the context of eWOM communication. Findings also contribute in the understanding of the direct influences from the functions on the overall attitude and behavioural intention respectively. Moreover, the mediating effect of overall attitude is also addressed. The original work by Katz (1960) does not mention any directional linkage between functions and the overall attitude, but debates occur in later studies (e.g. Daugherty *et al.*, 2008; Daugherty *et al.*, 2005). This result clarifies the directional relationships, from functions of motivation on the overall attitude and behavioural attitude, specifically in the context of eWOM communication, having some possible explanations.

Moreover, subjective norm, comprising of injunctive norm and descriptive norm examines the influences on the overall attitude and behavioural intention. Subjective norm is widely discussed and confirmed in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) or the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), having a direct impact on behaviour. However, several issues remain unclear regarding such relationships. Firstly, subjective norm, as discussed in TRA or TPB, refers to injunctive norm only. The ignorance of descriptive norm causes biased results

on the estimating effect of behavioural intention (Rivis and Sheeran, 2003). Secondly, the effect of overall attitude influencing this relationship is less addressed (Hale *et al.*, 2002). In TRA or TPB, subjective norm is proposed to have direct influence on behavioural intention or actual behaviour. Thirdly, subjective norm is ignored within TAM which could be tested simultaneously (Davis, 1989). Fourthly, developing personal social networking is one of the specific features of eWOM communication behaviour as suggested by previous studies (Brown *et al.*, 2007; Buffardi and Campbell, 2008). In other words, the individual who publishes eWOM may be motivated by the pressure from his / her social network. By addressing such limitations, this research employs subjective norm, including injunctive norm and descriptive norm, to understand travellers' eWOM communication. The findings confirm that descriptive norm creates a positive influence on the behavioural intention only if the individual believes that eWOM communication is favourable. On the other hand, injunctive norm generates the direct influence on the behavioural intention without any change to their overall attitude towards eWOM communication.

#### 9.4.2 Methodological Contributions

Two methodological contributions are produced by this study. Firstly, the measures of all latent variables are verified empirically, thus presenting valuable information for future studies. Secondly, this research purely employs online research techniques to conduct both qualitative and quantitative studies. Much insight can be highlighted as suggestions for future research.

This study is important in that it informs and revises the measurements of several latent constructs. Even though measures were adapted from previous research literature, several attempts have been made to assess the reliability and validity and revise the statements according to characteristics of eWOM communication. Specifically, the scales of TAM were used to examine individuals' adoption of technology within the work place. Statements required scrutinisations and amendments to capture the features of electronic media and eWOM communication. Regarding the scales of the functional theory of attitude, a few empirical papers can be found and provide valid measures. Those papers are less relevant in the context of eWOM communication. This



study firstly uses the qualitative technique to explore the motivation from the travellers' perspective to interpret and deduce each function. Such results also inform the statements for the motivational eWOM communication scale. Thereafter, a valid and reliable scale is verified through CFA. Subjective norm, attitude, and behavioural intention have less amendment applied from the statements of adapted literature. However, internal consistency and content validity are inspected to ensure quality throughout the entire questionnaire. All measures provide valuable contributions for future research.

Online focus groups and a web-based questionnaire were conducted to generate qualitative and quantitative data respectively. The web-based questionnaire is a popular tool in generation of quantitative data. Several advantages have been addressed in the methodology chapter and have been beneficial to this study. On the contrary, the online focus group is a relatively new tool to be employed in marketing research. Feedback generated via the group interviewees provides various implications for future research, as discussed below.

Most participants held a positive evaluation on the online focus group participation. The flexibility is highlighted by several participants as even being located in different places they were still able to participate in the discussion at the same time. Also, the discussion can continue without any interruption, even though some participants join the discussion late or leave early. Additionally, participants feel comfortable during the discussion as some are at home and can relax on the bed or sofa in their own environment. The anonymity also gives most participants the freedom to express their own opinions and they are more willing to share their opinions in terms of quality and quantity. As they do not know the real identity of each other, they can give a more sincere and prompt answer, which may better help present their personal insight.

Challenges are also mentioned by participants and observed by the researcher. Firstly, less interaction takes place during the time of online focus groups. Participants concentrate on their own expression and pay less attention to other's opinions. The commonest interactive reply to appear in the discussion

was simply 'I agree'. An important point when conducting a focus group is that the moderator needs to stimulate interaction between participants. This point becomes more relevant within the online environment. Secondly, discussion domination is another issue during an online focus group session. If a participant raises an interesting question which changes the direction of the discussion, the moderator should re-attract the attention in a very gentle way. These concerns provide some guidance for future studies which intend to employ online focus groups to generate data.

The moderator should have very good typing skills in a synchronised online discussion. Otherwise, participants may lose their attention and interests because of waiting for a slow typist. In order to make sure all issues related to the research are asked, the questions raised by participants have to be answered, even if a participant disappears during the discussion, an assistant is required to monitor the whole discussion.

In terms of the web-based questionnaire, some observations and suggestions can also be summarised. The participants of the survey were international travellers, and the sample technique used was that of snowball sampling. As discussed in the chapter 'Findings of the Survey', participants were of 49 different nationalities living in 45 countries. This is the major benefit to conducting a web-based questionnaire. Apart from the e-mail circulation, online fora are very convenient and helpful channels in generating responses. There are several fora that provide a platform for researchers to exchange research information. Researchers looking for participants for their own studies are more willing to contribute to others' surveys.

As for the difficulties, given the questionnaire is relatively long, it is a bit challenging to ask participants to forward the link to their acquaintances to gather more responses. The cultural background appears to influence participants' willingness to forward the link on to their friends. In the case of this study, it appears easier to ask participants from Chinese backgrounds to circulate the questionnaire. This may be related to the collective culture that people tend to have for each other. Future research wanting to utilise the snowball sampling may need to pay attention to cultural influences.

### 9.4.3 Managerial Implications

Several managerial implications are discussed as the identification for reasons behind travellers' eWOM communication behaviour that can enhance the effectiveness of the use of eWOM as a marketing tool. eWOM serves as a critical resource for travellers when planning their trips. Increasingly, travellers rely on these sources as well as to contribute their opinions to future travel information. Travel service providers can encourage more eWOM communication by understanding the reasons that facilitate travellers' eWOM communication behaviour. Those online opinions should be regarded as effective and efficient marketing strategies which help to promote their business with a very low cost. In addition, eWOM opinions can be seen as feedback given by customers that help to improve the product and service quality of what they can offer the consumer.

Results from research identify several antecedents which influence travellers' attitude towards eWOM communication. Once the overall attitude towards eWOM communication is created, travellers will have a higher intention to express their opinions online. From nine antecedents, not all generated a significant positive influence on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. Travel services and product providers can enhance their positive influential antecedents and avoid negative factors to encourage more eWOM expression.

With the rapid development of the internet and electronic media, businesses can utilise different electronic platforms to generate opinions by customers. Providing communication channels does not seem sufficient in prompting customers' willingness to publish their opinions online. A friendly and enjoyable environment is a key factor in travellers' adoption of online communication technology. In particular, perceived enjoyment received a higher rating than perceived ease of use. Businesses should put more emphasis on creating a pleasant and enjoyable environment that travellers are more willing to use. For instance, some mobile applications (apps) provide an interactive tourist guide for tourists when travelling (Rosenbloom, 2013). Unlike the traditional black-and-white tour book, the interactive app allows tourists to publish their photos, feedback and views while travelling. Once travellers perceive enjoyment when

sharing their opinions, they are happier to do so. At the same time, travellers do not want to put more effort into learning how to use electronic media, such as creating a new account and installing new software. Services can employ the currently available electronic media, such as Facebook or Skype as a communication tool. Many travellers already have their own account so they can express their opinions directly. In addition, multiple channel availability can increase travellers' perception of ease of use. Travellers can decide which channels they would like to use to publish their eWOM.

Some motivational factors that facilitate travellers' attitude are also addressed within this study. Results suggest that travellers believe eWOM communication can help them to express their true opinions, reflect themselves, and build their personal social-network. By emphasising these features, businesses should provide comfortable platforms for travellers to create their eWOM communication. For example, service providers should give a prompt and proper response. Showing empathy and providing proper recovery can pacify any upset travellers. Appreciation and gratefulness should also be replied to those travellers who express positive eWOM. By such actions, travellers will feel their opinions are valued and respected, therefore they are more willing to publish eWOM (Lee *et al.*, 2006). On the contrary, results suggest that incentives have a negative impact on travellers' evaluation of eWOM communication although some customers are still motivated by the incentive to engage in eWOM communication. Incentives such as free meals, coupons or subsidies, can be an effective tool to stimulate travellers' eWOM communication. However, businesses should employ this tool carefully to avoid negative impact (Sakaeeny, 2011). Bloggers should disclose relevant information if they take trial products and publish a review on their personal blog. In such a way, it is a win-win situation whereby fellow customers can get reviews and businesses promote their products.

Another finding of this research highlights the importance of subjective norm in travellers' attitude and behavioural intention towards eWOM communication. Results support the fact that they have a higher desire when they see their friends have created eWOM posts online. From such a feeling, they will mimic their friends to join the same eWOM communication behaviour. Moreover,

when they receive strong suggestions from their friends to share their opinions or views online, they may just comply with the request for e-posting. In the electronic communication environment, subjective norm is not limited to those within their social network. Travellers may participate in the virtual forum and post their opinions because it is 'trendy' among peers. In order to become one of them, travellers join others to publish opinions online. Travel businesses can provide a forum for customers to post their opinions. Popular bloggers or opinion leaders can also be invited to express their opinions on the forum which may stimulate more eWOM communication from fellow travellers.

### 9.5 Limitations and Future Research

Limitations are unavoidable within academic studies and they should be acknowledged. This study is no exception. Some limitations need to be addressed to provide direction for future research. Several issues are discussed in this section along with suggestions for future studies.

Firstly, the conceptual framework has been tested and validated in the tourism industry only. Generalisation in relation to other industries cannot therefore be argued. Future research could focus on applying this model to other industries or to collect data from different countries in order to further test its validity.

The second limitation is regarding the possible influences between antecedents. This study is the very first to bring nine antecedents together to understand travellers' eWOM communication behaviour. However, the influences between antecedents are not discussed in the current study. Possible influences between antecedents can be proposed and examined in future studies.

It is acknowledged that the third limitation of this study lies in its selection of the sample. The study invited Individuals having eWOM communication experience to join the online focus groups or survey by using snowball and self-selection sampling strategy. The use of the snowball and self-selection technique may restrict the possibilities to approach participants with different backgrounds. Although the survey information was posted on different channels such as personal blogs, tourism fora and Facebook, when recruiting a variety of participants the sample bias may still exist. By analysing the

sample structure of both study one and two, there were more female participants than males, with their largest group of educational qualifications at master degree level. The nationality of the major group was mainly Taiwanese, which implies the limitation of using the snowball sampling technique. However, multigroup analysis results of study two suggested that the perception of participants on the questionnaire were invariant, even if they came from a different background in terms of gender, age, educational background, nationality and place of residence. Both measurement invariance and structural invariance were achieved across different groups of interest to ensure the equivalence through varying sample data. Future studies could use other sampling techniques such as quota sampling, to approach participants having a balanced sample structure.

Last but not least, several other variables can be taken into consideration for a better understanding of the antecedents of eWOM communication. For example, the inherent factors, such as cultural differences and personalities, are beyond the scope of this research. Future research can incorporate other possible constructs to discuss eWOM communication behaviour.

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# Appendix I Questionnaire of the Pilot Study

## **Antecedents of Travellers' Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication**

Thank you for expressing an interest in this research project. This survey is being conducted to investigate why travellers express their opinions online.

I would like to invite individuals who have online communication experience to participate in this research. eWOM includes messages delivered via all opinion exchange website (e.g. TripAdvisor) and different social media, (e.g. Facebook, Blogs, YouTube, MSN Messenger, and Skype). Everyone who has relevant experience is more than welcome to participate the survey.

The whole process will take you approximately 15 minutes to complete. All the information provided will be completely confidential and will be analysed for academic purposes only. This study has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee. If you decide to take part, please reading more information [here](#).

Please allow me to offer my sincere thank you for reading the information and considering the possibility of taking part in this research. If you have any enquires, queries or just general questions, please do get in touch with me at anytime.

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## Part I. Key Terms & Screening Questions

### Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM):

eWOM refers to any information made by consumers through the Internet. It includes any expression of personal opinion, whether published broadly/publicly or in a private real-time communication via an Instant Messenger. It also includes non-verbal publication such as photos and videos.

### Electronic Media:

Electronic media refers to different platforms or channels for eWOM; e.g. Facebook, Flickr, MSN Messenger Skype, YouTube, Twitter, etc.

### Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) Communication:

eWOM includes **private communication** through Instant Messenger (e.g. Skype), as well as **public expressions** through electronic platforms (e.g. Facebook).

### eWOM about the travel and tourism experience:

eWOM communications in this study refer **ONLY** to travel and tourism related opinions

1. Have you ever used electronic media to communicate travel and tourism related opinions?
  - Yes (go to question 2)
  - No (End of question, thank you)
  
2. What type of opinions have you posted in the past 6 months? (Please tick as many as appropriate)
  - Articles
  - Comments (e.g. on other's messages or photos)
  - E-Mails
  - Reviews
  - Ratings
  - Photos (with / without caption)
  - Videos
  - Ticking 'like' / 'dislike' (e.g. on Facebook)
  - Participating in online surveys
  - Answering other's enquiries / questions
  - Raising enquiries / questions
  - Private conversations through real-time media (e.g. Skype)
  - Direct communication with a service provider (e.g. sending complaints to a hotel)
  - Other (please specify \_\_\_\_\_)

## Part II. eWOM Communication Behaviour

The following questions describe your eWOM communication behaviour. Please kindly tick the proper item based on your experience.

3. Please identify any **real-time electronic media** that you have used for communicating travel or tourism related opinions. (Please tick as many as appropriate)
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Google Talk                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Skype            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MSN Messenger                | <input type="checkbox"/> Yahoo! Messenger |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify _____) |   |
4. On average, how often do you use real-time electronic media to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in a typical month?
- Less than 7 hours a month  
 8-21 hours a month  
 More than 22 hours a month
5. Please identify any **non real-time electronic media** that you have used for communicating travel and tourism related opinions (Please tick as many as appropriate)
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bebo                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> LinkedIn                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blog (e.g. WordPress)                | <input type="checkbox"/> MySpace                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Company forum (e.g. hotel guestbook) | <input type="checkbox"/> Plurk   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> E-mail                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Travel information website (e.g. TripAdvisor) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Twitter                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flickr                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Wikipedia                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Google+                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Youtube                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify _____)         |  |
6. On average, how often do you use non real-time electronic media to communicate travel and tourism related opinions?
- Less than 7 times a month  
 8-14 times a month  
 More than 15 times a month
7. Please be specific about the most frequently used electronic media for communicating travel and tourism related opinions.
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bebo                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> LinkedIn                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blog (e.g. WordPress)                | <input type="checkbox"/> MySpace                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Company forum (e.g. hotel guestbook) | <input type="checkbox"/> Plurk   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> E-mail                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Travel information website (e.g. TripAdvisor) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Twitter                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flickr                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Wikipedia                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Google+                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Youtube                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify _____)         |  |

### Part III. Adoption of Electronic Media Communication Technology

8. The following statements are about the user's experience of the electronic media for communication. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement by checking one response on each of the scales. 1 = Strongly Agree & 7 = Strongly Disagree

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| Using electronic media improves my ability to communicate                       | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| Using electronic media enables me to communicate more quickly                   | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| Using electronic media enables my communication more effectively                | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| Using electronic media makes my communication with others easier                | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| Using electronic media to communicate is convenient                             | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| Using electronic media to communicate is inexpensive                            | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| Learning to use electronic media to communicate is easy                         | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| I find electronic media is easy to use for communication                        | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| It is easy for me to become proficient at using electronic media to communicate | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| Communication via electronic media is difficult.                                | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| I need training to use electronic media to communicate                          | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| Using electronic media to communicate is enjoyable                              | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| The process of using electronic media to communication is pleasant              | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| I find it fun to communicate through electronic media                           | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |

#### Part IV. Motivations for eWOM Communication

9. The following statements describe the motivation behind your eWOM communication. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement by checking one response on the following scales. 1 = Strongly Agree & 7 = Strongly Disagree

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| eWOM communication is my primary source of income   | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to earn extra income  | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to have non-financial benefits (e.g. free meal)                       | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to receive incentives (e.g. discount or voucher)                      | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to meet people  | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to make new friends   | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to maintain relationships with others                                 | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication is a way to build up my social network   | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to reflect upon myself  | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to find out who I am  | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to understand who I would like to be                                  | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to obtain new knowledge   | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to have new perspectives on my knowledge                              | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to better understand my perspectives on the world                     | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to clarify my thinking  | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication provides an opportunity to get feedback from others                              | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication allows me to express my personal standards of right and wrong                    | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication allows me to express the ideas I cherish   | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication allows me to express my values (e.g. altruism, freedom of speech, individualism) | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication allows me to express my own opinions   | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication reflects my values of good and evil (moral values)                               | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication allows me to build-up my personal image to others                                | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication provides me a chance to give advice to others                                    | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to help others  | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication helps me to be released from bad feelings  | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication helps me to be released from bad feelings  | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication helps me work through my own personal problems                                   | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to escape from my negative emotions                                   | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication makes me feel important  | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication increases my self-esteem   | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication makes me feel needed   | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| eWOM communication makes me feel better about myself  | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |



**Part V. Influences from Peer Group on eWOM Communication**

10. The following statements describe the influence of peer group (e.g. friends, colleagues, and relatives) on your participation to the eWOM communication. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement by checking one response on the following scales. 1 = Strongly Agree & 7 = Strongly Disagree

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| I participate eWOM because my peer group recommends me to do so                   | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| I participate eWOM because my peer group requests me to do so                     | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| I participate eWOM because my peer group influences me to feel obligated to do so | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| I participate eWOM because it is fashionable to do so in my peer group            | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| I participate eWOM because the majority of my peer group do the same              | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| I participate eWOM because it is a common behaviour in my peer group              | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |

**Part VI. Attitude towards eWOM communication**

*The following questions describe your attitude towards eWOM communication. Please kindly select a number on the scale to present your perceptions.*

11. My attitude towards eWOM communication is

|                   |                               |                |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Very Negative     | - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - | Very Positive  |
| Very Bad          | - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - | Very Good      |
| Very Unpleasant   | - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - | Very Pleasant  |
| Dislike very much | - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - | Like very much |

**Part VII. Future Behaviour of eWOM Communication**

12. The following statements describe your intention of eWOM communication in future. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement by checking one response on each of the following scales. 1 = Very Likely & 7 = Very Unlikely

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| I will use eWOM to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in the next 12 months                | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| I will spend more time on eWOM to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in the next 12 months | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |
| I will recommend others to communicate their travel and tourism related opinions via eWOM.              | 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 |

**Part IX. About You.**

13. Are you...

Female

Male

14. Your age is...

16-25

26-35

36-45

46-55

56-65

Over 65

15. The highest educational level you have attained

High School

College

University

Postgraduate

16. Your nationality

---

17. Your country of residence (the place you live currently)

---

Thank you for taking part in this survey. This is the end of this questionnaire. Please click "submit" below and the data will go to the system directly. To secure your anonymity, please be sure you do not reveal any personal details during the process. The data collected will be used for academic purposes only. If you have any further enquiry, please feel free to contact me via [silvia.liang@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:silvia.liang@brookes.ac.uk) anytime.

## Appendix II Questionnaire of the Main Study

### **The Electronic Word-of-Mouth Communication Survey**

Thank you for expressing an interest in this research project. I am a doctoral research student at Oxford Brookes University (UK) and this survey is a key element of my research project. The aim of this survey is to understand why travellers would like to express their opinions online.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) includes messages delivered via all opinion exchange website (e.g. TripAdvisor) and different social media, (e.g. Facebook, Blogs, YouTube, MSN Messenger, and Skype). Everyone who is **above 16 years old** and has **online communication experience** is more than welcome to participate in the survey.

The whole process will take you approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. All the information provided will be completely confidential. To secure your anonymity, please be sure you do not disclose any personal details during the process. The results will be analysed for academic purposes only. This study has been approved by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for reading the information and considering taking part in this research. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time via [silvia.liang@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:silvia.liang@brookes.ac.uk).

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## Part I. Key Terms & Screening Question

### Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM):

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Electronic media refers to different platforms or channels for eWOM; e.g. Facebook, Flickr, MSN Messenger Skype, YouTube, Twitter, etc.

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### eWOM about the travel and tourism experience:

eWOM communications in this study refer **ONLY** to travel and tourism related opinions

1. What type(s) of eWOM have you used for communicating with others about your travel and tourism related experiences? (Please tick as many as appropriate)
  - Answering other's enquiries / questions
  - Articles
  - Comments (e.g. on other's messages or photos)
  - Direct communication with a service provider (e.g. sending complaints to a hotel)
  - E-Mails
  - Participating in online surveys
  - Photos
  - Private conversations through real-time media (e.g. Skype)
  - Raising enquiries / questions
  - Reviews
  - Ratings
  - Ticking 'like' / 'dislike' (e.g. on Facebook)
  - Videos
  - None of the above (*Please go to Part IX on the last page directly*)
  - Other (please specify \_\_\_\_\_)

## Part II. eWOM Communication Behaviour

The following questions describe your eWOM communication behaviour. Please kindly tick the proper item(s) based on your experience.

2. Please identify the **real-time electronic media(s)** that you have used for communicating travel and tourism related opinions. (Please tick as many as appropriate)
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook Chat                | <input type="checkbox"/> MSN Messenger    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Google Talk                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Skype            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ICQ                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Yahoo! Messenger |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify _____) |   |
3. How often do you use the real-time electronic media(s) to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in a typical week?
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 3 hours per week | <input type="checkbox"/> 10-12 hours per week        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 hours per week         | <input type="checkbox"/> More than 12 hours per week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7-9 hours per week         |  |
4. Please identify the **non real-time electronic media(s)** that you have used for communicating travel and tourism related opinions (Please tick as many as appropriate)
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bebo                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> LinkedIn                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blog (e.g. WordPress)                | <input type="checkbox"/> MySpace                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Company forum (e.g. hotel guestbook) | <input type="checkbox"/> Plurk   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> E-mail                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Travel information website (e.g. TripAdvisor) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Twitter                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flickr                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Wikipedia                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Google+                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Youtube                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify _____)         |  |
5. How often do you use the **non real-time electronic media(s)** to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in a typical month?
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 3 times per month | <input type="checkbox"/> 10-12 times per month        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 times per month         | <input type="checkbox"/> More than 12 times per month |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7-9 times per month         |   |
6. Please be specific about your most frequently used electronic media for communicating travel and tourism related opinions. (Please tick one answer only)
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bebo                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> LinkedIn                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blog (e.g. WordPress)                | <input type="checkbox"/> MSN Messenger                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Company forum (e.g. hotel guestbook) | <input type="checkbox"/> MySpace                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> E-mail                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Plurk   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Skype   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facebook Chat                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Travel information website (e.g. TripAdvisor) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flickr                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Twitter                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Google+                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Wikipedia                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Google Talk                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Yahoo! Messenger                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ICQ                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Youtube                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify _____)         |  |

**Part III. Adoption of Electronic Media Communication Technology**

7. The following statements describe the user's experience of the electronic media for communication. Please indicate your level of agreement by *selecting* one response on each of the scales. **1 = Strongly Disagree & 7 = Strongly Agree**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Using electronic media improves my ability to communicate                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Using electronic media enables me to communicate more quickly                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Using electronic media enables my communication more effectively                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Using electronic media makes my communication with others easier                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Using electronic media to communicate is inexpensive                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Using electronic media to communicate is convenient                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Learning to use electronic media to communicate is easy                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I find that electronic media is easy to use for communication                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| It is easy for me to become proficient at using electronic media to communicate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| It is difficult for me to use electronic media without training                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Using electronic media to communicate is enjoyable                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| The process of using electronic media to communicate is pleasant                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I find it fun to communicate through electronic media                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

#### Part IV. Motivations for eWOM Communication

8. The following statements describe the motivation behind your eWOM communication. Please indicate your level of agreement by *selecting* one response on the following scales. **1 = Strongly Disagree & 7 = Strongly Agree**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| eWOM communication is my primary source of income   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to earn extra income  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to have non-financial benefits (e.g. free meal)                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to receive incentives (e.g. discount)                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to meet people  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to make new friends   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to stay connected with others   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication is a way to build up my social network   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to reflect upon myself  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to find out who I am  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to understand who I would like to be                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to obtain new knowledge   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to have new perspectives on my knowledge                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to better understand my perspectives on the world                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to clarify my thinking  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication provides an opportunity to get feedback from others                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication allows me to express my personal standards of right and wrong                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication allows me to express the ideas I cherish   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication allows me to express my values (e.g. altruism, freedom of speech, individualism) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication allows me to express my own opinions   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication reflects my values of good and evil (moral values)                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication allows me to build-up my personal image to others                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication provides me an opportunity to give advice to others                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to help others  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication helps me to be released from bad feelings  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication helps me work through my own personal problems                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enables me to escape from my negative emotions                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication makes me feel important  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication enhances my self-esteem  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication makes me feel needed   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| eWOM communication makes me feel better about myself  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

**Part V. Influences from Peer Group on eWOM Communication**

9. The following statements describe the influence of peer group (e.g. friends, colleagues, and relatives) on your participation to the eWOM communication. Please indicate your level of agreement by selecting one response on the following scales. **1 = Strongly Disagree & 7 = Strongly Agree**

|  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Most people who are important to me would support my participation in eWOM communication         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Most people who are important to me would approve of my participating in eWOM communication      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Most people who are important to me would expect that I should participate in eWOM communication | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Most people who are important to me would require me to participate in eWOM communication        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Most people who are important to me would think that I should participate in eWOM communication  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Most people who are important to me have participated in eWOM communication before               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Most people in my social network have participated in eWOM communication before                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Most people whose opinion I value have eWOM communication experience before                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |



**Part VI. Attitude towards eWOM communication**

The following pairs of adjectives describe your attitude towards eWOM communication. Please indicate your answers by selecting a number on each of the following scales.

10. My attitude towards eWOM communication is...

|                   |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |                |
|-------------------|----|----|----|---|----|----|----|----------------|
| Very Negative     | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | Very Positive  |
| Dislike very much | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | Like very much |

11. I think that eWOM communication is a \_\_\_\_\_ idea.

|                  |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |                |
|------------------|----|----|----|---|----|----|----|----------------|
| Very Worthless   | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | Very Valuable  |
| Very Undesirable | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | Very Desirable |
| Very Unpleasant  | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | Very Pleasant  |
| Very Useless     | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | Very Useful    |

**Part VII. Future Behaviour of eWOM Communication**

12. The following statements describe your intention of eWOM communication in future. Please indicate your level of agreement by selecting one response on each of the following scales. 1 = Very Unlikely & 7 = Very Likely

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I will use eWOM to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in the next 12 months                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I will spend more time on eWOM to communicate travel and tourism related opinions in the next 12 months | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I will recommend others to communicate their travel and tourism related opinions via eWOM               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

**Part VIII. About You**

13. You are...

- Female  Male

14. Your age group is...

- 16-25  26-35  36-45  
 46-55  56-65  Over 65

15. Your highest qualification is...

- High School  College Diploma  
 Bachelor's Degree  Master's Degree  
 Doctoral Degree  
 Other (please specify \_\_\_\_\_)

16. Your nationality is \_\_\_\_\_

17. Your country of residence (the place you live currently) is \_\_\_\_\_

**This is the end of the survey. Thank you.**

## Appendix III Skewness Index & Kurtosis Index

| Item | Mean  | SD    | SI     | KI     |
|------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| PU1  | 5.060 | 1.508 | -0.495 | -0.443 |
| PU2  | 5.917 | 1.109 | -1.048 | 0.809  |
| PU3  | 5.514 | 1.190 | -0.551 | -0.283 |
| PU4  | 5.842 | 1.077 | -0.653 | -0.351 |
| PU5  | 5.919 | 1.255 | -1.303 | 1.223  |
| PEU1 | 6.105 | 0.973 | -1.046 | 0.632  |
| PEU2 | 5.841 | 1.031 | -0.669 | -0.263 |
| PEU3 | 5.861 | 0.994 | -0.618 | -0.291 |
| PEU4 | 5.531 | 1.225 | -0.672 | 0.160  |
| PEU5 | 5.373 | 1.683 | -0.999 | -0.042 |
| PE1  | 5.413 | 1.140 | -0.338 | -0.429 |
| PE2  | 5.368 | 1.104 | -0.260 | -0.432 |
| PE3  | 5.338 | 1.180 | -0.410 | -0.182 |
| UF1  | 2.341 | 1.750 | 1.025  | -0.225 |
| UF2  | 2.645 | 1.735 | 0.839  | -0.382 |
| UF3  | 3.409 | 1.783 | 0.093  | -1.067 |
| UF4  | 3.859 | 1.795 | -0.216 | -0.999 |
| UF5  | 4.398 | 1.712 | -0.391 | -0.683 |
| UF6  | 4.478 | 1.681 | -0.371 | -0.676 |
| UF7  | 5.593 | 1.275 | -0.913 | 0.571  |
| UF8  | 4.921 | 1.565 | -0.835 | 0.244  |
| KF1  | 4.195 | 1.571 | -0.459 | -0.400 |
| KF2  | 3.520 | 1.626 | 0.066  | -0.744 |
| KF3  | 3.767 | 1.696 | -0.096 | -0.833 |
| KF4  | 5.268 | 1.320 | -0.932 | 1.099  |
| KF5  | 4.882 | 1.487 | -0.737 | 0.229  |
| KF6  | 4.505 | 1.530 | -0.512 | -0.219 |
| KF7  | 4.336 | 1.553 | -0.462 | -0.295 |
| KF8  | 5.336 | 1.188 | -0.740 | 0.857  |
| VEF1 | 4.625 | 1.485 | -0.479 | -0.011 |
| VEF2 | 5.019 | 1.473 | -0.777 | 0.437  |
| VEF3 | 4.914 | 1.437 | -0.631 | 0.122  |
| VEF4 | 5.418 | 1.274 | -0.799 | 0.679  |
| VEF5 | 4.356 | 1.551 | -0.299 | -0.368 |
| VEF6 | 4.662 | 1.500 | -0.578 | -0.001 |
| VEF7 | 5.205 | 1.327 | -0.864 | 0.759  |
| VEF8 | 5.058 | 1.381 | -0.676 | 0.280  |
| EDF1 | 4.169 | 1.662 | -0.260 | -0.622 |
| EDF2 | 3.991 | 1.718 | -0.142 | -0.789 |
| EDF3 | 4.069 | 1.641 | -0.189 | -0.637 |
| EDF4 | 4.064 | 1.594 | -0.284 | -0.498 |
| EDF5 | 4.124 | 1.556 | -0.294 | -0.372 |
| EDF5 | 4.077 | 1.699 | -0.195 | -0.716 |
| EDF7 | 4.199 | 1.613 | -0.366 | -0.416 |

|      |       |       |        |        |
|------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| IN1  | 4.886 | 1.442 | -0.490 | -0.078 |
| IN2  | 4.904 | 1.370 | -0.421 | -0.141 |
| IN3  | 4.417 | 1.597 | -0.417 | -0.443 |
| IN4  | 4.086 | 1.705 | -0.217 | -0.748 |
| IN5  | 4.398 | 1.568 | -0.418 | -0.432 |
| DN1  | 4.642 | 1.523 | -0.517 | -0.256 |
| DN2  | 4.959 | 1.456 | -0.622 | 0.104  |
| DN3  | 4.538 | 1.511 | -0.394 | -0.213 |
| ATT1 | 5.689 | 0.989 | -0.468 | -0.414 |
| ATT2 | 5.576 | 1.048 | -0.502 | -0.039 |
| ATT3 | 5.837 | 1.006 | -0.735 | 0.392  |
| ATT4 | 5.627 | 0.993 | -0.434 | -0.217 |
| ATT5 | 5.867 | 1.081 | -0.773 | -0.041 |
| ATT6 | 5.598 | 1.011 | -0.391 | -0.447 |
| BI1  | 5.362 | 1.557 | -0.950 | 0.449  |
| BI2  | 4.681 | 1.598 | -0.488 | -0.247 |
| BI3  | 4.820 | 1.542 | -0.567 | -0.037 |

Note: "SD" refers to standard deviation; SI, meaning skewness index and KI represents kurtosis index.

## Appendix IV Structural Model Analysis Based upon Hierarchical Confirmatory Factor Analysis

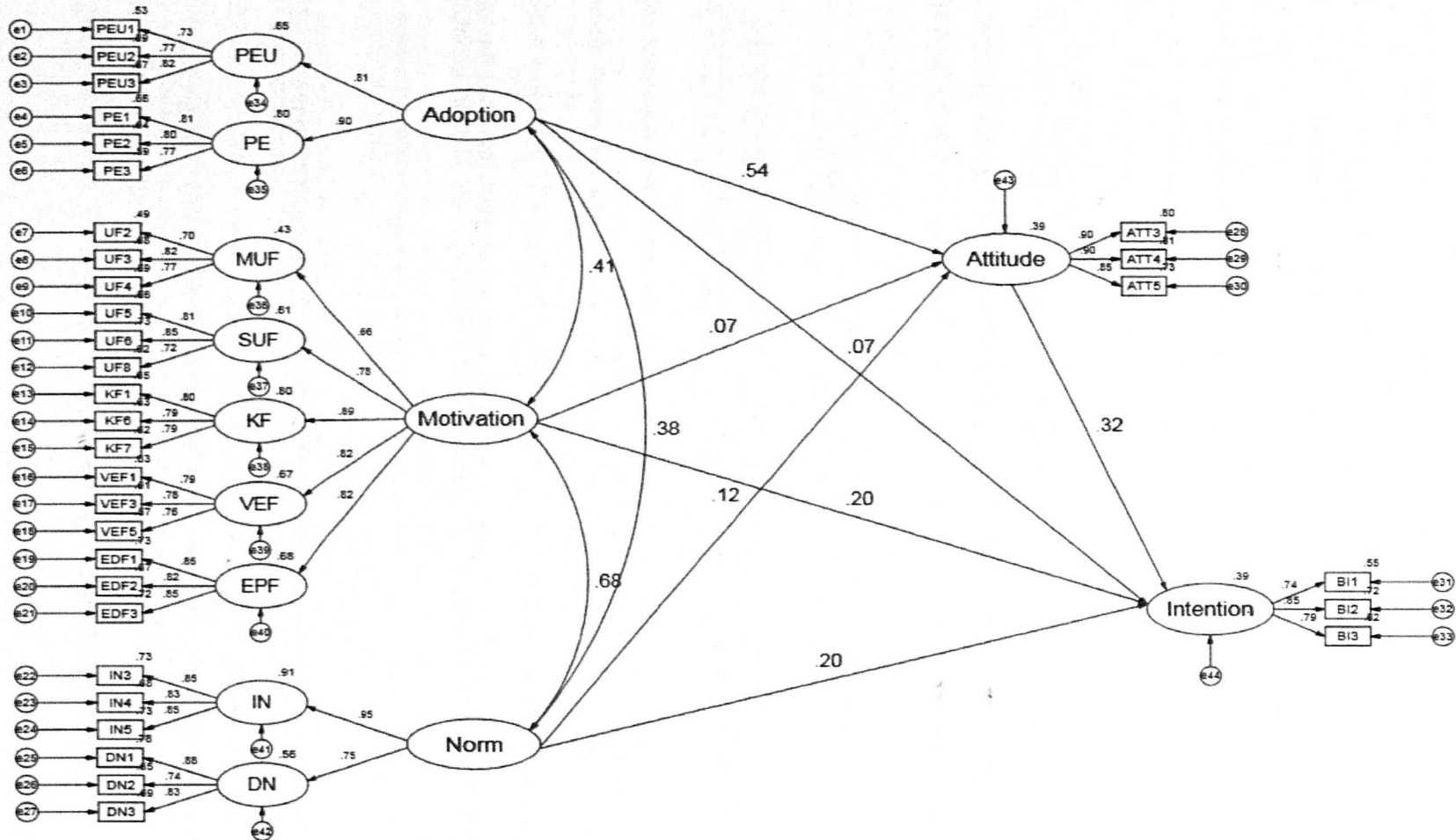
Nine dimensions represent three hierarchical constructs. Hierarchical confirmatory analysis (HCFA) was therefore conducted to re-assess the validity of the revised scale. The goodness-of-fit statistics for the HCFA produced a significant Chi-Square value ( $\chi^2_{(476)} = 1047.273$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ), together with other relevant indices at GFI = 0.88, NFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.047, and SRMS = 0.06. Such indices scores supported that the model was marginally fitted to the sample data. Thereafter, the structural model, based on the HCFA results, is further processed. Table A.1 lists the proposed hypotheses within the hierarchical research model. H1 – H3 discuss the direct influences from antecedents on the overall attitude and H4 proposes the direct hypothesis from the overall attitude and behavioural intention. H5a-c also addresses the indirect influences from antecedents on behavioural intention through the overall attitude as a mediator.

Table A.1 Hypothesis - Hierarchical Model

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| H1  | Adoptions of electronic communication technology will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication   |
| H2  | Motivations of eWOM communication will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  |
| H3  | Subjective norm will have a positive influence on overall attitude towards eWOM communication  |
| H4  | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication will have a positive influence on behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media  |
| H5a | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of adoption of electronic communication technology on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media |
| H5b | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of motivation of eWOM communication on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media                |
| H5c | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication mediates the influence of subjective norm on his/her intention to use eWOM communication media                                 |

Figure A.1 below presents results from the hierarchical structural model together with the standardised estimates of all paths as well as the squared multiple correlation values.

Figure A.1. Results of the Hierarchical Structural Model



The hierarchical structural model produced a significant chi-square value ( $\chi^2 = 845.22$ ,  $df = 440$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ). Other indices, GFI = 0.88, NFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.047, and SRMR = 0.06, provided reasonable support of the model fitness.

Given the adequate model fitness, three antecedents explained 42.1% variance of the overall attitude, and 39.9% variance of the behavioural intention respectively. The standardised estimates of hypothesised relationships and their significance are listed in Table A.2.

Table A.2 Results of the Hierarchical Model

| No.                          | Hypothesized Relationship                             | SPC    | t-value |
|------------------------------|---|--------|---------|
| H1                           | Adoption -> Overall Attitude                          | 0.54   | 8.99*** |
| H2                           | Motivation -> Overall Attitude                        | 0.07   | 0.99    |
| H3                           | Norm -> Overall Attitude                              | 0.12   | 1.81*   |
| H4                           | Overall Attitude -> Behavioural Intention             | 0.32   | 5.40*** |
| H5a                          | Adoption -> Behavioural Intention                     | 0.07   | 1.13    |
| H5b                          | Motivation -> Behavioural Intention                   | 0.20   | 2.84**  |
| H5c                          | Norm -> Behavioural Intention                         | 0.20   | 2.92**  |
| Model Fit Statistics         |   |        |         |
|                              | $\chi^2$  | 845.22 |         |
|                              | $df$  | 440    |         |
|                              | RMSEA   | 0.047  |         |
|                              | GFI   | 0.88   |         |
|                              | NFI   | 0.91   |         |
|                              | CFI   | 0.95   |         |
| Variance Explained ( $R^2$ ) |   |        |         |
|                              | Overall attitude towards eWOM communication           | 0.42   |         |
|                              | Behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media | 0.40   |         |

Note: SPC = Standardised Path Coefficient; \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

All hypotheses were shown as positive relationships, but not all are statistically significant. In terms of direct influences, adoption of electronic communication technology and subjective norm significantly produced positive influences on the overall attitude (SPC = 0.54,  $t = 8.99$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and SPC = 0.12,  $t = 1.81$ ,  $p < 0.05$  respectively). On the contrary, motivation for eWOM communication did not obtain a significant influence on the overall attitude (SPC = 0.07,  $t = 0.99$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The relationship from the overall attitude on the behavioural intention was significant and positive as proposed (SPC = 0.32,  $t = 5.40$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Regarding the indirect hypotheses, the paths from motivation of eWOM communication and subjective norm to the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media were both positive and significant (SPC = 0.20,  $t = 2.84$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and SPC = 0.20,  $t = 2.92$ ,  $p < 0.01$  respectively). The path from adoption of eWOM communication technology to behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media was, on the other hand, non-significant (SPC = 0.07,  $t = 1.13$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

Results from the hierarchical structural model implied that the adoption of electronic communication technology and subjective norm produced a positive influence on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication, then influencing the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. Referring to the mediation effect of the overall attitude towards eWOM communication, it fully mediates the adoption of eWOM communication technology and the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media. The influence from subjective norm on the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media is partially-mediated by the overall attitude towards eWOM communication. Given that the motivation for eWOM communication did not produce significant influences on the overall attitude towards eWOM communication, the motivation for eWOM communication produced a direct impact on the behavioural intention to use eWOM communication media only. In sum, seven out of nine hypotheses were confirmed.