

INFLUENCES ON E-WOM ADOPTION IN TWO FEMALE
ONLINE COMMUNITIES: THE CASES OF KUWAIT AND
SAUDI ARABIA

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

Online communities (OCs) are an important source of electronic-word-of-mouth (e-WOM), but few studies have examined such messages in a Middle Eastern context. This research develops a conceptual framework that can be used as an instrument to guide empirical work in the field of e-WOM in female OCs. Researchers in similar areas may find this work useful as exemplifying a novel approach to the study of e-WOM adoption in different OCs. This study, of e-WOM adoption in two female-only Arabic-language online forums in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, is grounded in three models: the Information Adoption Model, the Information Systems Continuance Model and the Knowledge Contribution Model, because no particular theory or set of theories currently dominates OC research. In particular, researchers are strongly recommended to start building their own theories of e-WOM phenomena, because this area is still young and has grown rapidly in recent years. The research design comprises two phases. The first is a content analysis, which was appropriately used to analyse the online textual conversations, since it offers a deep understanding of the phenomenon in its real context. The purpose of this phase was to identify the main determinants of e-WOM adoption in female OCs in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, from which a conceptual model could be developed. It investigated the characteristics of the messages influencing the adoption of e-WOM. It began with a pilot study, where 90 threads were analyzed, followed by the content analysis of the two cases. A total of 765 threads were analysed in the Kuwaiti case, comprising 6200 messages broken down into 17,832 units of analysis. In the Saudi case, 1168 threads were analyzed, containing 17,320 messages and 31731 units of analysis. In both cases there was a prevalence of emotional features in messages, coded as 'community bonding'. In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted, with the aim of illuminating the similarities and differences in terms of e-WOM determinants between Kuwaiti and Saudi culture by refining the research model codes and sub-codes. This phase was also intended to answer research questions on the current situation in terms of online role behaviours in female-only online beauty forums in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia; on how online behavioural roles influence females to adopt e-WOM; and on the role in e-WOM adoption of the following demographic variables: nationality, age, marital status, employment, education level, hours spent in the community and length of community membership. Fifty women, comprising 25 members of each of the two communities, were interviewed online to gain more knowledge of the factors that impede or facilitate the adoption of e-WOM. The

qualitative results show that argument quality, community bonding and information need fulfilment were all significant in affecting participants' tendency to adopt e-WOM. This study concludes with specific implications for relevant theories and useful findings at the individual, organizational and societal levels.

أهدي رسالتي هذه الى عائلتي الصغيرة المكونة من زوجي وأبنائي محمد وزياد والى

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Declaration

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List of abbreviations

AQ	Argument quality
CB	Community bonding
CITC	Communications and Internet Technology Commission
ECT	Expectation-Confirmation Theory
ELM	Elaboration Likelihood Model
e-WOM	Electronic word of mouth
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IAM	Information Adoption Model
ICT	Information and communication technology
INF	Information need fulfilment
IS	Information system
ISCM	Information System Continuance Model
IT	Information technology
IU	Information usefulness
KCM	Knowledge Contribution Model
KU	Kuwait
OA	Offline activities
OC	Online community
OCs	Online Communities
RI	Receiver involvement
SA	Saudi Arabia
SC	Source credibility
SCT	Social Capital Theory
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
UAE	United Arab Emirates
WOM	Word of mouth

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a general picture of the structure of the thesis and its four main research strands. It explains the background to the research, then sets out the research questions, followed by its aims and objectives. It outlines the methodology adopted and the contribution that the research is expected to make. It ends by outlining the structure of this thesis.

1.2. Background and Motivation

This research is multidimensional, being motivated by a number of strands and facets. This section sets out the four main research strands: the beauty context, online communities, gender and cultural context.

1.2.1. The beauty market in the Gulf

Researchers have documented the expansion of the beauty product trade in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, which are: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Bahrain and Qatar. The Saudi cosmetics market is the largest in the Middle East, estimated at over 60 billion Saudi riyals annually, with a forecast of 11 percent annual growth rate. With a population of 28.8 million and a growth rate of 1.9 percent, Saudi Arabia has the highest percentage, at 42 percent, of women in the GCC. In addition, there is growth for retailers and brands in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which were forecast to have GDP growth in 2011 of 4.7% and 6.1% respectively. Finally, according to Euromonitor (2015), beauty and personal care continued to witness robust growth in Saudi Arabia over the review period, with premium and mass beauty and personal care witnessing good value performance. Saudi female consumers prefer online shopping to search for the latest designer cosmetics and premium fragrances, which confirms the importance of online communities (OCs) for promoting beauty products and services. The next sub-section provides an overview of OCs in the GCC.

1.2.2. Online communities

Researchers have documented the expansion of OCs in the Middle East, where there has recently been rapid growth in the number of members joining them. Internet World Statistics (2011) ranked Kuwait sixth in the Middle East for internet usage as a percentage of the population, with a penetration of 42.4%. As to social media and online communities, there were 822,640 Facebook users in Kuwait in 2010 (Internet World Statistics, 2011). There were also 113,428 active users of Twitter, a 3.24% penetration, placing Kuwait in sixth rank among Arab countries after Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia (Arab Social Media Report, 2011). Few social media studies have been done in Kuwait, but Haqqa (2011) asserts that online social communities have empowered Kuwaiti society in many ways, including by spreading messages more widely, by encouraging social interaction between users, by providing entertainment and as a marketing tool. More than ten years ago, Wheeler (2003) reported that Kuwait females were active online and suggested that they saw the internet as a useful tool to express themselves freely. Hamade (2013) states that more than half (53%) of the respondents in social network communities in Kuwait were female.

As to Saudi Arabia, it has the largest internet user population in the Arab world (Simsim, 2011). According to Al-Saggaf (2004), social media have significantly affected the country's population. In his examination of the use of two online forum communities by Saudis, Samin (2008) concludes that women in Saudi Arabia tend to participate in their own bulletin boards and forums with participants of their own gender and that this explains why females were not welcomed to participate in two male-dominated online forum communities. Additionally, Simsim (2011) argues that internet bulletin boards and OCs are important tools in restrictive societies like Saudi Arabia, helping young people, tribal groups and minorities to exchange views. For Agarwal, Lim and Wigand (2012), OCs are agents of social, cultural and political diversity, offering new ways to meet old challenges. They conclude that more research needs to be done in non-English-speaking communities.

A number of important areas still require research attention. For example, while researchers have examined the expansion of beauty product markets in GCC countries, and how females use OCs to obtain information and socialise, there remains a paucity of studies of OCs from an Arab rather than a Western perspective (AlOmoush, Yaseen and Allam'aith, 2012). This research thus seeks to fill a gap in the understanding of the

adoption of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on beauty products in two female OCs in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. It provides significant evidence of the actual adoption of e-WOM within these OCs, thus adding to knowledge and understanding of all aspects of e-WOM adoption and online participation in these communities.

Traditionally, ‘word of mouth’ (WOM) refers to product information, whether positive or negative, transmitted among family members, friends and other individuals, which tends to affect consuming behaviour (Arndt, 1967). Today, many people rely on the sharing and exchanging of information through OCs, providing valuable opportunities both for members who publish market or product information and for businesses to capture information regarding brands, products or services. Such e-WOM can take the form of opinions, personal information and experiences, particularly amongst consumers (Pitta and Fowler, 2005). It is extensively transmitted through the internet and online platforms such as OCs, whose members have created new ways in which to socialise and interact, including the exchange of market-related information or e-WOM. Such material is shared from consumer to consumer in these OCs, as part of the social communication process (Fong and Burton, 2006; Sun et al., 2006; Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008). Many researchers have examined the informational aspect of these communities, especially the content exchanged through explicit text communications that occur within them by members of two kinds: those who are mainly information seekers, asking for information, and those who usually post information, contributing to the knowledge of the community, which other members may adopt.

The adoption of e-WOM tends to be one of the major activities in OCs. Kozinets (1999) argues that in terms of interaction within the virtual community, where two types of computer-mediated communication occur, consumers share e-WOM as an aspect of information for consumer purchase decisions. Bickart and Schindler (2001) provide some empirical evidence regarding the persuasive power of e-WOM from consumer to consumer. To illustrate, consumers who gathered e-WOM from online discussions reported greater interest in products than those who acquired such information from market websites. Fong and Burton (2006) found that users in China were more likely to request e-WOM from other members, thus increasing the likelihood of the influence of e-WOM and the spread of negative e-WOM, with regard to brands. Sun et al. (2006) also found that e-WOM played a significant role in the flow of consumer-to-consumer information in an

OC, while Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn (2008) found that information adoption activities had two dimensions of information quality (relevance and comprehensiveness) and that each had a considerable impact on the usefulness of information. Understanding e-WOM adoption and post-adoption behaviour is important in OCs (Cheung and Lee, 2007a; Cheung and Lee, 2012b). Other researchers have confirmed that e-WOM is especially important in the consumer decision-making process. In other words, the importance of e-WOM resides in the fact that it is likely to influence consumer choice (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Dellarocas, 2003; Henning-Thurau et al., 2004; Sun et al., 2006).

Growing use of OCs and the exchange of information among different types of consumers have encouraged researchers to study the adoption and continued use of e-WOM in various contexts and the ways in which different people in these contexts perceive information online. Since no particular theory or set of theories currently dominates research into OCs and the phenomenon of e-WOM, researchers are strongly advised to build their own theories for use in this area, which is still young and has grown rapidly in recent years (Preece and Maloney-Krichmar, 2005; Cheung and Thadani, 2010).

Thus, this thesis develops its own conceptual model that underpins the coding framework and analysis of the forum messages. It is guided in building this composite model by three existing theoretical models, each having value in understanding e-WOM adoption behaviour. These are the Information Adoption Model (IAM) (Sussman and Siegel, 2003), the Information System Continuance Model (ISCM) (Bhattacharjee, 2001) and the Knowledge Contribution Model (KCM) (Ma and Agarwal, 2007). The three models are discussed in turn in Chapter 3 .

The next section discusses the importance of studying gender effects, since this research investigates e-WOM adoption in two female-only OCs.

1.2.3. Gender effects

Focusing on the female cultural context should add to the existing understanding of senders and receivers where e-WOM is adopted, because the literature has shown that females present higher levels of purchasing intention. Although the number of consumers purchasing online in Saudi Arabia is low (AlMowalad and Putit, 2013), Saudi women are among the world's heaviest consumers of beauty products; therefore their self-expression through products and brands can reveal cues to their consumption activities (Alserhan et

al., 2015). Gender effects have been cited in relation to online participation and the uptake of e-WOM. It has been found that participation in online discussion boards was greater amongst Saudi and Kuwaiti women than in other GCC countries, although the research base is limited in this context (Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010). In a recent study, Rouibah (2014) found that female online shoppers in Kuwait were driven most strongly by perceived value, followed by service quality, which also positively affected perceived value. Earlier, Al-Maghrabi and Dennis (2010) investigated women's intention to continue e-shopping in three regions of Saudi Arabia, finding that the strongest predictor was enjoyment, which means that Saudi women view e-shopping as a form of enjoyment and leisure. Then, when Maghrabi, Dennis and Halliday (2011) examined 465 respondents, two-thirds of whom were women, they found that age tended to affect e-shopping continuance behaviour. For example, younger respondents tended to be more strongly influenced than older ones by trust and by subjective norms when shopping online. AlMowalad and Putit (2013) also investigated the factors influencing online shopping behaviour among female consumers in Saudi Arabia. They report that the two most influential factors were trust (lack of confidence in transactions not conducted face to face) and risk (feeling insecure).

In other cultural contexts, research has found significant gender differences in consumers' use of e-WOM (Fan and Miao, 2012). Lim, Ling and Yazdanifard (2014) report that females behaved differently from males when participating online. First, they tended to be more motivated by consumer reviews, because females are more sociable than males and more accepting of the suggestions of others. In addition, females were more likely than males to shop online because of their satisfaction. Finally, they preferred more strongly than males to purchase products of which they had experience, such as apparel, beauty products and home accessories. More specifically, Rahim and Rosly (2014) found that Malaysian women demonstrated a higher level of online purchase intention than males. In the same year, Lee et al. (2014) found that e-WOM had a significant influence on purchase intention among Taiwanese women. In the USA, Kim, Mattila and Baloglu (2011) found that women were more likely to read hotel reviews in the form of e-WOM for convenience, quality and risk reduction. Their analysis indicates that females were more likely to read e-WOM for the purpose of risk reduction, because females viewed online shopping as more risky than males did. Thus, they read e-WOM to reduce that risk and feel more comfortable. Bae and Lee (2011) report that more positive consumer reviews had a greater

effect on women, who were more likely to follow up with a purchase than males. Awad and Ragowsky (2008) found that women placed greater trust in e-WOM than males, owing to the sense of social support that they value, which is punctuated by explicit information, tailored solution interactivity and a quality of empathic listening (Hung and Li, 2007).

1.2.4. Cultural effects

Turning to the cultural context of the present study, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, being Arab countries, represent a cultural group that has not been adequately investigated by earlier studies of OCs. Previous researchers have studied the similarities and differences among groups of people worldwide and the importance of cultural context here resides in the fact that it has a potential influence on phenomena involving information systems (IS) and information technology (IT), including the provision of online services (Ali and Brooks, 2009). Cultural differences affect not only the adoption of IT, but also the ways in which individuals perceive online socialising and online networks (Veltri and Elgarah, 2009).

From a cultural perspective, few studies have investigated the effect of e-WOM within a Middle Eastern context, despite the prevalence of online forums among Arab internet users. However, some scholars report online shopping and purchase intention. Al-Mana and Mirza (2013) examined e-WOM use among Saudi internet users and found that respondents were heavily dependent on it in online forums when making purchasing decisions. Al-Maghrabi and Dennis (2010) investigated women's intention to continue e-shopping in three regions of Saudi Arabia. They argue that Saudi women view e-shopping as a form of enjoyment and leisure. Al-Maghrabi, Dennis and Halliday (2011) examined the e-shopping continuance intention of 465 respondents, two-thirds of whom were women. In common with the earlier study by Al-Maghrabi and Dennis (2010), enjoyment was identified as the strongest predictor of continuance intention.

AlRasheed and Mirza (2011) conducted a survey of the behaviour of Saudi consumers in searching the internet for travel information and shopping for travel deals. Three-quarters were found to have used and purchased e-travel services at least once. Mansour and Abdul-Mumin (2013) explored Saudi consumers' reasons for shopping online and identified a preference for it because of the poor availability of local products, a wider product variety online and lower online prices. A study by Sadi and Khalifah (2012) concluded that Saudi consumers were influenced by trust to shop online, while Al-Mousa and Brosdahl (2014)

found that Saudi consumers were more likely than their US counterparts to view online shopping as risky, because of the collective nature of Saudi culture, which places greater emphasis on risk perception. Saudi culture is also less ready to accept change, making people more likely to view online shopping as risky. Bahaddad, Houghton and Drew (2013) report that Saudi consumers were more likely to shop online according to the firm's size and brand name, which gave them the confidence to purchase online. Among the technical and environmental factors which also affected the decision to shop were website characteristics, delivery systems and safe payment methods. A later study by Bahaddad, AlGhamdi and Alkhalaf (2014) identified the main factors as education level, online trade awareness, safety of online payment systems and online shopping benefits. When AlGhamdi, Drew and AlFaraj (2011) investigated the factors affecting Saudi customers' online purchase intentions, all mentioned e-WOM as being instrumental in influencing them to buy online.

The present study seeks to verify whether knowledge derived from existing Western and East Asian studies can be applied to GCC countries by examining e-WOM adoption in one female OC in Kuwait and one in Saudi Arabia, the two GCC countries where females use online discussion boards most frequently (Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010). There are still unexplored areas, particularly in online environments where recommendation technologies are needed to understand the users' wishes and needs, due to the lack of human sales experts (Mandl et al., 2011). In other words, certain geographical factors may produce differences in behaviour regarding online information, although little research has been done regarding e-WOM in OCs, one exception being the study by Almana and Mirza (2013).

This section has explained the motivation for studying the adoption of e-WOM in two female-only online beauty forums in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Although beauty products are strongly desired and heavily used in GCC countries, few studies have examined the adoption of e-WOM in such forums there. Having established the need to understand the factors underlying this phenomenon, it is important to set out how the theoretical framework was developed.

Growing use of OCs and the exchange of information among different types of consumers have encouraged researchers to study the adoption of e-WOM in various contexts and the ways in which different people in these contexts perceive information online. Cheung and

Thadani (2010) have pointed out that no particular theory or set of theories currently dominates research into online communities and the phenomenon of e-WOM; to that end, researchers are advised to build their own theories (Preece and Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). This section begins by outlining the three models which contribute to the development of the conceptual model that underpins the coding framework and analysis of the forum messages: the Information Adoption Model, the Information System Continuance Model and the Knowledge Contribution Model. Thus, this thesis is guided by three existing theoretical models to build its own composite model. In brief, this study integrates three existing models, each having value in understanding e-WOM adoption behaviour. Researchers have emphasised the need to build new models in online contexts. Preece and Maloney-Krichmar (2005) suggest that researchers taking an OC perspective should build their own theories, while no particular theory or set of theories currently dominates research on online communities. In particular, researchers are strongly recommended to start building their own theories for e-WOM phenomena, because this area is still young and has grown rapidly in recent years (Cheung and Thadani, 2010).

The Information Adoption Model (IAM) (Sussman and Siegel, 2003) is drawn from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which will be discussed in turn. The ELM (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) identifies two relatively distinct routes to persuasion. Firstly, there is the central route, which is persuasion induced by a person's careful and thoughtful consideration of the true merits of the information presented in support of a particular concept or idea. This route was found to affect consumers within online communities, particularly with respect to argument quality. The second route, which does not necessitate scrutiny of the information presented and is mostly the result of a simple cue (e.g. source credibility), is referred to as the peripheral route.

The Information System Continuance Model (ISCM) (Bhattacharjee, 2001) predicts that the continued use of IS is sustained by individual users over the long term. The ISCM is adapted from Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) (Oliver, 1980), a behavioural theory that is used to predict consumer satisfaction and repurchase intention; ECT predicts that a consumer's intention to repurchase a product or to reuse a service is mainly determined by his or her level of satisfaction.

The Knowledge Contribution Model (KCM) (Ma and Agarwal, 2007) is a theoretical framework to investigate the contribution of knowledge within an online community. Its authors apply two factors that are relevant to this study: offline activities and information need fulfilment. They indicate that such offsite communication is an important aspect of any type of online community and strengthens the building of virtual relationships within such communities. KCM was adopted in this research for the following reasons: First, it deploys and promotes important characteristics of OCs, i.e. information need fulfilment and offline activities. For example, when individuals fulfil their information needs, they are more likely to give other information or knowledge. In addition, members who have been with a community for a long time and who have met other members offline are more likely to be engaged in the community and more likely to contribute to an online group. Second, many researchers have applied this model in the same context as this research, which is that of OCs (Chen and Hung, 2010; Tseng and Kuo, 2010; Kietzmann et al. , 2012; Kim, Zheng, Gupta, 2011; Chou, 2010; and Kusumasondjaja, Shnaka, and Marchgiani, 2012). The following sections set out the specific questions, aim and objectives designed to guide the research.

1.3. Research Questions

This research seeks to answer one main research question (RQ1) and three sub-questions (RQA, B & C), each related particularly to one of the four research strands (beauty, OCs, gender, culture):

RQ1: What are the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the beauty industry context in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia ? [Beauty]

RQA: What are the similarities and differences in terms of e-WOM determinants between Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian culture? [Culture]

RQB: What are the message characteristics that influence females to adopt e-WOM? [Gender]

RQC: What is the current classification in terms of online role behaviour in female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia? [OCs]

1.4. Aim and Objectives

The main **aim** of the present study is *to investigate factors affecting the adoption of e-WOM in female-only Arabic-speaking online communities.*

The research **objectives** are as follows:

- To critically analyse the literature on online communities and the adoption of e-WOM.
- To develop a framework to examine the factors affecting e-WOM adoption by members of female-only online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, particularly online beauty forums.
- To identify appropriate methods for collecting the data and to justify the choice of research methodology.
- To present an analysis of the main characteristics of e-WOM messages in two female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. In particular, to explore the patterns of e-WOM messages in members' textual conversations.
- To analyse and classify the roles of members of female online communities and their relation with e-WOM adoption.
- To explore possible differences in the adoption of e-WOM between members of female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.
- To identify the most important factors impeding and facilitating e-WOM adoption in female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.
- To provide recommendations to the managers of Kuwaiti and Saudi online communities for the design of future online communities and for promoting more effective e-WOM adoption in online communities.

1.5. Methodology

The research is designed to ensure that the data collected effectively address the research questions. The research strategy adopted here is the case study, which is a widespread approach to IS research in the real world. According to Yin (2009, 2013), case studies can be viewed as empirical inquiries that investigate a contemporary phenomenon within a

real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. He distinguishes between single and multiple case studies, arguing that when researchers focus on ‘why’ questions in depth, multiple case studies are preferred, suggesting that the chances of a good case study increase when two cases are examined. More importantly, the analytical benefits of studying two or more cases may be substantial. For these reasons, the present research adopts a multiple case study strategy, studying the cases of two OCs, in Kuwait and in Saudi Arabia.

This research employs qualitative methodologies to collect data in two distinct phases. The first phase uses content analysis of community members’ textual exchanges to achieve a deep analysis of their e-WOM behaviour. In the second phase, semi-structured interviews are used to explore people’s motivations for e-WOM adoption and their experience of this process. The following subsections justify the adoption of these methods, showing how each is appropriate to this research.

1.5.1. Content analysis

Content analysis can contribute to research by enhancing rigour and deepening the understanding of the phenomenon to be studied in its real-life context (Yin 2009, 2013). Hence, it was considered suitable here for investigating and evaluating e-WOM use in online platforms. In particular, content analysis is the preferred technique for making valid inferences from text; it is useful to identify the intention and other characteristics of the communicators, to describe their attitudinal and behavioural responses and trends, and to reflect patterns among groups who engage in textual conversation across time (Weber, 1990). Therefore, it would be appropriate for studying the adoption of e-WOM from actual conversations from real-life exchanges between females, in order to answer the research questions about the factors and message characteristics that motivate females to adopt e-WOM in online beauty forums. According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysis is “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p.18). Content analysis, which can be classified as either qualitative or quantitative, is a flexible research method that can be widely applied in information studies, either as a research method by itself or in conjunction with other methods (Marsh and White, 2006). Qualitative data analysis is associated with grounded theory, while the quantitative type is also known as classical content analysis. Bosh and Kahle (2005) state that the forums or bulletin boards of OCs are

considered suitable for content analysis, since bulletin boards are effectively records of written text. The first phase of the present study employs content analysis of community members' textual exchanges to provide a deep understanding of their e-WOM adoption.

1.5.2. Interviews

Interviews constitute one of the most vital sources of case study information (Yin 2009, 2013). Thomas (2011) categorises them as structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews are based on identical standardised questions for every participant. The semi-structured strategy is more open, allowing the interviewer and interviewee to communicate with each other. Finally, in an unstructured interview, communication is not limited in either direction and the flow of questions cannot be limited either. This study used semi-structured interviews. According to Myers and Newman (2007), the purpose of the research interview is to explore people's experience and motivation on specific matters. Being participant driven, it provides a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation from respondents' points of view. In addition, it is suitable for use with models (such as mirroring) in questions and answers. In particular, semi-structured interviews offer flexibility in listening to the interviewees to explore their views and beliefs. The researcher works from a minimal script and has to improvise most of the time, as well as taking notes. The present researcher chose this flexible method of exploring the motivation to adopt e-WOM in beauty forums from the members' perspective in the expectation of obtaining a deep understanding of the factors that would facilitate the adoption process. In addition, it was expected to help to understand participants' beliefs about their online behavioural roles.

1.6. Research Contribution

Little research has analysed e-WOM adoption in female-only OCs, especially in bulletin board or forum communities, and still less work has been done on preferences among females in GCC countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Yet many females in that region use such communities as part of their daily routines, relishing the experience of belonging to a likeminded group of the same gender, as one aspect of being separated from direct male-female contact (Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010). The present study thus contributes to the relevant body of knowledge in the following theoretical, contextual and practical ways.

Contribution to theory: This thesis brings together various strands of theory and combines them. It expands the IAM model by incorporating elements of two others, namely ISCM and KCM. It thus makes a theoretical contribution by combining three distinct models into one conceptual model. This research contributes further by providing empirical support for the combined model and thus for its three component models, using data gathered from female users of Arabic OCs, a sample that had not been considered by previous researchers in this domain. The thesis develops its own composite model within the context of single-gender OCs in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, by identifying the factors that promote and hinder members' adoption of e-WOM.

Contribution to context: This research validates the IAM, ISCM and KCM models in the context of online beauty forums in two countries, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, in a Middle Eastern context where previous research has shown that online forum communities are prevalent among females. It thus applies Western models of e-WOM adoption in OCs in the little-studied Middle Eastern context. It also contributes to knowledge by its focus on the contexts of gender and beauty.

Contribution to practice: The study provides guidelines and recommendations for IS researchers and practitioners, OC managers and marketers in the GCC countries, concerning the important effects of e-WOM adoption in OCs. Thus, it provides insights at the individual, organisational and societal levels for OC managers and developers, in terms of identifying the characteristics of such communities, the online behaviour of individuals and what motivates females to adopt e-WOM, so that they can understand the e-WOM adoption process in emerging communities.

1.7. Structure of the Thesis

Figure 1.1 shows the structure of the thesis, outlining the content of each of its nine chapters.

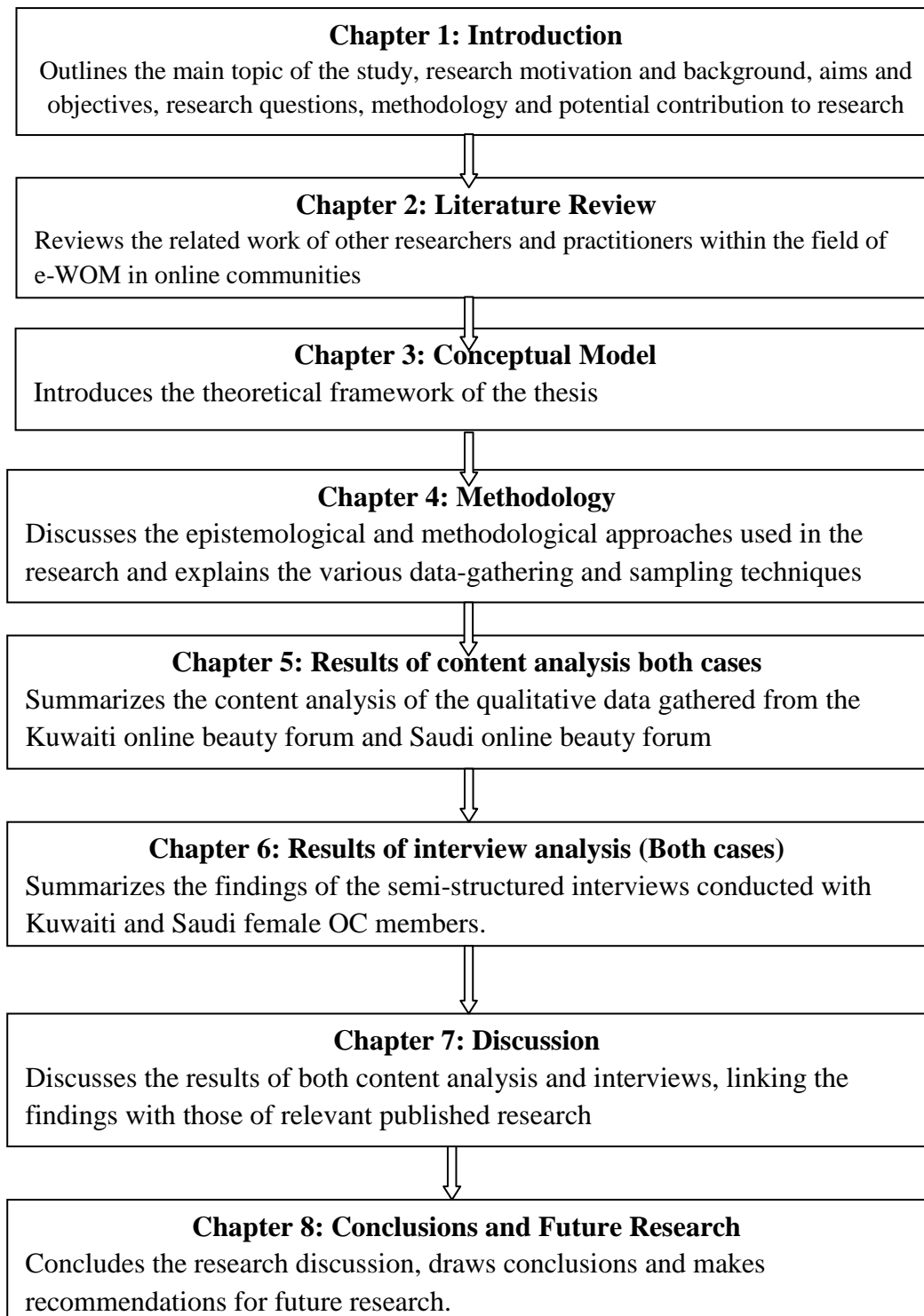


Figure 1.1: Thesis structure

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This research investigates the adoption of e-WOM in two online user groups, based in Kuwait and in Saudi Arabia, and examines the relationship of gender with e-WOM and information systems. This chapter begins by examining the beauty market in the Gulf region, before turning to online communities and the rationale for studying them, after which it reviews the literature on online behavioural roles. Next, it offers an explanation of the concept of e-WOM, its importance as a marketing tool and its place in OCs in general. It then considers the importance of e-WOM, especially in a Middle Eastern and Islamic context. It also addresses the role of gender in e-WOM use and the making of purchasing decisions. Finally, it identifies gaps in the literature that this study seeks to fill.

2.2. The Beauty Market in GCC Countries

It was noted in Chapter 1 that the beauty market is flourishing in the Gulf region and particularly in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Section 1.2.1 has given details of the dominant size and strong growth of the Saudi cosmetics market. Aside from internet shopping, the major cities in the Kingdom, such as Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam, have become virtual shopping havens with a large number of residents living in rural areas and tourists spending their weekends and vacations searching for the latest designer cosmetics and premium fragrances. The rapid growth in cosmetics sales and of the beauty market in the GCC countries has come to the attention of beauty and skin care companies throughout the world. For example, Paris Gallery, a major cosmetics retailer, is planning to open another 40 outlets within its existing base in the UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, as well as in Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman. Despite the growing consumption of beauty products in GCC countries, however, few studies have examined the behaviour of beauty or cosmetics consumers (Kharim, 2011).

One of the earliest such studies in Saudi Arabia was conducted by Al-Ashban and Burney (2001), who found that the age, income level, occupation, marital status, education and social status of Saudi Arabian women affected the extent to which they used beauty products. A notable and more recent study by Poranki and Perwej (2014) concluded that

Saudi consumers were particularly conscious of the quality, value for money and branding of cosmetic products. Another recent study was performed by Alserhan et al. (2015), who suggest that Saudi women are among the world's heaviest consumers of beauty products and that their self-expression through products and brands can therefore reveal clues to their consumption activities. The authors argue that the effect of brand image on WOM is mediated by "loving" the brand. The study concludes that females talk positively about brands, which emphasises the importance of WOM in beauty product consumption. Also relevant is a study by Kharim (2011) to investigate the influence of brand loyalty on cosmetics buying behaviour among female consumers in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The research results showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between the use of cosmetics and certain factors of brand loyalty: brand name, product quality, price, design, promotion, service quality and store environment.

According to Poranki and Perwej (2014), middle aged people in Saudi Arabia have more positive attitudes towards beauty and cosmetic products than young people do. All categories of people want to maintain their self-image in society regarding their physical appearance. Regarding occupation and marital status, housewives and married people have positive attitudes towards beauty and cosmetic products. Anon (2014), Madi a leading distributor of internationally renowned professional beauty brands in the Middle East, agrees that Saudi Arabia registered significant growth due to the strong purchasing power of the residents, and the availability of varied products that suit all budgets and tastes. Recent statistics suggest that sales of skincare products in Saudi Arabia were expected to reach \$502.9 million in 2015. According to Miles (2015), Saudi Arabia is the strongest player in the importation of \$1.8 billion worth of personal care and cosmetic products, accounting for \$342 million of these imports. Finally, Saudi female consumers prefer online shopping, using different online platforms to search for the latest designer cosmetics and premium fragrances, which indicates how important OCs are as channels to promote beauty products and services.

2.3. Online Communities

This section is in two parts. The first one establishes the basis for a study of OCs by first defining the term itself, then a number of related concepts, before listing various types of OC. The second subsection considers the different behavioural roles adopted by OC members.

2.3.1. Concepts and definitions

Since the beginning of widespread public access to the internet in the 1990s, users around the world have increasingly adopted new modes of social communication and interaction. Social communication technologies such as online bulletin boards, chat rooms and mail lists enable users to form virtual communities or networks through which to share interests, information, advice and opinions, while providers can use them to promote their products and services online. Scholars refer to such technologies as online or virtual communities. Hiltz (1983) introduced the former term in her book *Online Community: A Case Study of the Office of the Future*. She does not give a clear definition of OCs, but does predict that future offices will operate online, as a communication medium, through the use of computers. Another early attempt to define the idea of an OC was introduced by Rheingold (1993). Table 2.1 lists some relevant definitions of terms including ‘online community’ given in the literature.

Table 2.1: Definitions of OCs, from the literature

Source	Main term	Definition/description/characteristics
Hiltz (1983)	Online community	Prediction that future offices would operate online, as a communication medium, through the use of computers.
Rheingold (1993)	Virtual community	Social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relations in cyberspace.
Whittaker, Issca and O'Day (1997)	Community system	Characteristics: conversation (repeated interaction between members), identity and self-presentation, activity and object building, navigation, culture and policies (such as shared resources, reciprocity and norms).
Hagel and Armstrong (1997)	Online community	Shared interest group or community.
Figallo (1998)	Web community	Group of people who meet regularly to discuss a subject of interest to all members.
Preece (2000; 2001)	Online community	Characterised by sociability and usability. The sociability dimension consists of people, a shared purpose, policies and computer systems, in order to support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness. Thus, sociability is related to human-human interaction; the focus of usability is human-computer interface interaction.
Porter (2004)	Virtual community	Main elements: Purpose (content of interaction), Place (extent of technology, mediation of interaction), Platform (the technical design of interaction within virtual communities), Population and Pattern of interaction. The final main element is Profit model, which refers to whether communities have economic value or generate revenue for businesses or marketers.
Ridings and Gefen (2004)	Virtual community	Group of members who exchange information, social support, friendship, recreation and common interests online.
Butler et al. (2007)	Community of online groups	Online group members who share social control, encouragement, writing and reading messages, and technical infrastructure.
Ren, Kraut and Kiesler (2007)	Online community	Group of members who share identity, socialization, discussion, online roles and goals.
Gleave et al. (2009)	Online community	A combination of social psychological, social structural and behavioural attributes.

Table 2.2: A typology of online communities, in accordance with previous literature

Source	Type of community	Examples
Hagel and Armstrong (1996; 1997)	Community of interest	Where a group of people have a common passion for e.g. sport, entertainment, vocation, travel or hobbies.
	Community of relationship	Based on the capability of articulacy conveying people's collective personal experiences, in terms of the death of loved ones, fatal disease, addiction, divorce and medical matters.
	Community of fantasy	Where members engage in role-playing games such as MUDs.
	Community of transaction	Information between participants is traded in order to fulfil the economic value of the virtual community.
Preece and Ghozati (1998); Preece (2000)	Member or activity	Refers to education, health, commercial, religion, sport, pets, culture, science and empathic communities.
Porter (2005)	Organization sponsor	Consists of commercial, non-profit and government communities. Commercial communities include customer relationships, gaming, search and lifestyle communities (e.g. <i>women.com</i>).
Muniz and O'Guinn (2001)	Online brand community	Specialized, non geographically bound community based on structure set social relationships among admirers of brand. It has three main characteristics: 1) shared consciousness; 2) rituals and traditions; and 3) moral responsibility.
Sproull and Arriaga (2003)	Member interest or consumer community	Brand and fan communities, such as <i>audifans.com</i> and <i>lugnet.com</i> . These can be subdivided into: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational Community: concerned with hobbies or work expertise, such as <i>chessclub.com</i> and <i>tappedin.sri.com</i> • Place-Based: refers to a community of people who live in a particular geographical location (e.g. <i>web.mit.edu</i>) • Condition Community: where people share experience or interest in a common condition, such as demography, race, age, ethnic background, medical condition or organization (e.g. educational or military), such as <i>SeniorNet.org</i> and <i>systers.org</i> • Concern Community: members share a political, social or ideological concern (e.g. <i>moveon.org</i> and <i>419legal.org</i>) • Collaborative Work Community: relies heavily on its members to contribute to the content of an online platform (e.g. <i>Wikipedia.com</i>).
	Sponsor interest community	Can be subdivided into profit and non-profit communities. Profit Sponsored Communities: third party sponsors or organizations sponsor the community for profit (e.g. the ex: <i>ivillage.com</i> women's online community). Non-profit Sector: where service organizations sponsor communities, with the aim of achieving the wellbeing of the target population (e.g. <i>Seniornet.com</i>).

Other researchers have attempted to categorize the various types of OC in order to gain a better understanding of such communities. For example, Hagel and Armstrong (1996; 1997) categorize OCs into four types, namely 1) community of interest, where a group of

people have a common passion for e.g. sport, entertainment, vocation, travel or hobbies; 2) community of relationship, based on the capability of articulacy conveying people's collective personal experiences, in terms of the death of loved ones, fatal disease, addiction, divorce and medical matters; 3) Community of fantasy, where members engage in role-playing games such as MUDs; 4) Community of transaction, where information is traded between participants in order to fulfil the economic value of the virtual community.

Preece and Ghozati (1998) propose the terms 'member community' or 'activity community' to refer to those concerned with education, health, commerce, religion, sport, pets, culture, science and empathic relationships. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) suggest that a brand community is a specialized, non-geographically bound one based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of brands. It has three main characteristics: shared consciousness; rituals and traditions; and moral responsibility.

Sproull and Arriaga (2003) propose a dual categorisation of OCs. The first category is member interest or consumer communities such as brand and fan communities, examples being *audifans.com* and *lugnet.com*. These can be further subdivided into five types: 1) Vocational communities are concerned with hobbies or work expertise, such as *chessclub.com* and *tappedin.sri.com*; 2) Place-based communities consist of people who live in a particular geographical location (e.g. *web.mit.edu*); 3) Condition communities are those where people share experiences or interest in a common condition, such as demography, race, age, ethnic background, medical condition or organization (educational, military etc.) (e.g. *SeniorNet.org*, *systems.org*); 4) Concern communities have members who share a political, social or ideological concern (e.g. *moveon.org*, *419legal.org*); and 5) Collaborative work communities rely heavily on members to contribute to the content of an online platform (e.g. *Wikipedia.com*). The second category is sponsor interest communities, which can be subdivided into profit and non-profit communities. Profit sponsored communities are run by third party sponsors or organizations for profit (e.g. the former *ivillage.com* women's online community). Non-profit sponsor interest communities are sponsored by service organizations, with the aim of achieving the wellbeing of the target population (e.g. *seniornet.com*). Porter (2005) suggests the term "organization sponsor community" to cover commercial, non-profit and governmental communities. Commercial communities include customer relationships, gaming, search and lifestyle communities.

Other recent literature suggests that online brand communities are an important tool of brand marketing. This indicates that online brand communities are considered effective tools for customer relationship management because they foster interactions between a company and its customers and thus lead to more positive e-WOM and stronger purchase intentions (Munnukka, Karjaluoto, and Tikkanen, 2015; Reichelt, Sievert, and Jacob, 2014;), and help to achieve favourable brand outcomes (Relling et al., 2016). These brand outcomes in online brand communities are crucial for marketing researchers and managers (Habibi, Laroche, and Richard, 2014a; Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantonem 2015). In another study, Habibi, Laroche and Richard (2014b) confirmed that brand communities are important in strengthening customers' engagement online. Barreda et al. (2015) emphasized that online environments help heighten consumer brand awareness which, in turn, triggers WOM. In addition, Luo, Zhang, and Lui (2015) argued that consumers in brand communities have positive effects on the consumer-brand and consumer-other consumers' relationships, as well as community commitment and brand loyalty. Ublova (2015) confirmed that consumer engagement in brand communities is becoming very significant for companies striving to build their relationship with their consumers. Kaur, Dhir and Rajala (2016) emphasized that studying users' behaviour in an online brand community is important for devising strategies to ensure user retention and active participation online.

This study focuses on interest communities, where members share experience of and have an interest in a common condition, such as demography, race, age or ethnic background. One example of this type of online community is *women.com*, a female-only community whose members use their own online space to communicate with each other. Studying women's use of online communication will help to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of female members' participation in OCs. The next subsection therefore considers online behavioural roles.

2.3.2. Members' online behavioural roles

Members are the most important elements of any online community, since they make them either thrive or fail (Han, 2015). Researchers have argued that the importance of online participation resides in the fact that it plays a role in sustaining OCs in existence. For example, White and Le Cornu (2011) suggest that online members can be either visitors, who usually visit the OC, or residents, who see the web as a place to live. Brandtzaeg and

Heim (2011) divide the roles of members of online social websites into five main categories : a) sporadics, who visit social OCs from time to time but not frequently and have low involvement and participation; b) lurkers, who are quite low in participation and whose online activities are more related to recreation; c) socialisers, who are more likely to chat with other members; d) debaters, who are highly involved in discussions and in reading and writing contributions; e) actives, who are engaged in almost all kinds of participative activities within the community.

Kozinets, Hemetsberger and Schau (2008) categorise the members of online social communities into the following four main types: a) crowds, who create videos and other content online; b) hives, who contribute a relatively greater amount to the community; c) mobs, who are group experts; and d) swarms, who involve consumers individually and in aggregate, posting, commenting on or adding feedback to an already created online contribution such as a message thread, posting or blog. Rau, Gao and Ding (2008) argue that online members can be either lurkers or posters. Lurkers are those members whose informational needs can be satisfied without posting, whereas posters post and contribute to the OC by providing information and ideas.

Blanchard (2008) and Godara et al. (2009) use the terms ‘newbie’ and ‘newcomer’ respectively for new members, before they move on to become lurkers, whose main reason to join is their curiosity to observe others (Leitner et al., 2008). Another category proposed by Rood and Bruckman (2009) is ‘insiders’, meaning regular active participants who share knowledge, participate in group discussions and are committed to the community. They are ‘experienced users’ in the categorisation of Godara et al. (2009). Because of their contributions to the OC, they tend to be ‘contributors’ (Rood and Bruckman, 2009). After being a contributor, a member may become a ‘leader’; leaders are more committed to the OC, sustain membership through continuous participation and are the main information providers.

This section has explained the concepts relevant to OCs in general and the roles played by their members. The next turns to an examination of OCs in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in particular.

2.4. Online Communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia

2.4.1. OCs in Kuwait

Haqqa (2011) asserts that online social communities have empowered Kuwaiti society in many ways, including by spreading messages more widely, by encouraging social interaction between users, by providing entertainment and as a marketing tool. In addition, Al-Nashim et al. (2010) argue that the internet is a political tool that Kuwaitis have used widely to express their political views. Wheeler (2003) conducted a study based on in-depth interviews with Kuwaiti female students and found that internet use by youths was creating new forms of communication across gender lines. She reports that the internet did not have the same meaning for young Kuwaiti women as for their male counterparts. Women were not afforded the same freedoms to talk across gender lines in public, because of the need to preserve their reputations. Thus the internet was seen as a useful tool to express their voice freely and Kuwait females were internet active. However, many Kuwaitis adjusted their internet usage to be compatible with their upbringing and with the norms and values of their society. Chaudhry and Alansari (2013) found that half of investment professionals in Kuwait were regularly using social web communities such as Facebook and Twitter. In addition, Kuwaitis' first choice for seeking information was the internet, specifically search engines and external websites.

A recent study by Hamade (2013) investigates the perception and usage of social networking sites among a sample of undergraduate students in Kuwait, of whom 53% were female. Respondents reported using social networks many times a day, which means that they were frequent users. Moreover, the majority (71%) were using social OCs for social interaction, allowing them to maintain better relations with family and friends. Recent studies have argued that social network communities are now used as political tools in GCC countries (Al-Qassemi, 2011). For example, Twitter was used in Kuwait to organize protests against the prime minister, Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, which started in March 2011, and the increased political discussions on Twitter prove that Kuwaitis use social networking sites for political reasons (GetConnect, 2011). In addition, Twitter is increasingly being used as the most popular channel for political discussion among Kuwaiti citizens because of its wide audience reach, speed and the short message format (Haqqa, 2011). Hamade (2013) found that almost half of students responding to a survey in

Kuwait were using social network communities to help them to become involved in politics.

In her examination of internet use among young Kuwaiti adults, Wheeler (2003) highlights the impact of traditional offline culture in determining the long-term nature of their internet use, as pre-existing value systems help to shape long-term internet use. Many Kuwaitis adjust their internet usage to make it compatible with their upbringing and with the norms and values of their society. Wheeler adds that local cultural and religious values filter and buffer the meanings and implications of new relationships on the internet, while local cultural and social frameworks shape what is revolutionary about the use of new media tools, as well as influencing the pace of change. According to Ghobadi (2013), technology should reflect women's value systems and address their needs, and this does not happen automatically with the establishment of technological systems; it is important to consider the barriers to the use of such technology, be they economic, technological, cultural or psychological. These are discussed in Chapter 5.

2.4.2. OCs in Saudi Arabia

According to Al-Saggaf (2004), social media have significantly affected the population of Saudi Arabia. In his early study of an OC in Saudi Arabia, he states that female users reported that their online participation in online forum communities was growing rapidly. In addition, females have become more open minded and more aware of the wider characteristics of Saudi society. The results indicate that social web communities have encouraged Saudi users to participate and to challenge certain traditional norms.

In his examination of the use of two online forum communities by Saudis, Samin (2008) highlights the impact of internet bulletin board communities in meeting a pervasive need in the Middle East. However, while internet bulletin boards provide viable arenas for public discussion, these online forums have not been fully examined in a Middle Eastern context. The author concludes that as a group of users, women in Saudi Arabia tend to participate in their own bulletin boards and forums with participants of their own gender and that this explains why females were not welcomed to participate in two male-dominated online forum communities.

Askool (2013) examined the use of social networks in Saudi Arabia using an online survey to investigate the cultural restrictions on individual users' motivations, attitudes, intention

behaviour and actual use. The survey found that Saudi users were well aware of social network tools and were using them for social and leisure purposes more than business activities. Just under a fifth of respondents were using social communities to talk about shopping, while slightly more were discussing advertising and marketing issues. The results also indicate that the top three tools used were YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. For example, 92.3% of Saudis used YouTube for social purposes; Facebook was used for social, leisure and professional purposes too; and Twitter was also used widely (62%) for social purposes. Saudi users were thus employing the local online forums widely as social networking tools.

In a study of the effects of social media, Alsharkh (2012) found that young Saudis tended to accept the opinions of others online. It seems that the use of social media developed their ability to have a conversation and accept other users' opinions. In addition, young Saudis were more likely to make their own decisions than to follow their family leader. The study also highlights the role of females in using social communities. In particular, it found that Saudi females were more active in using social communities because of how females react to a male-controlled society, which gives them more opportunities than males to use social media to raise issues. The research suggests that these communities could empower women in many ways and the author concludes that further research is needed to study the impact of OCs on Saudi females.

Samin (2011) argues that internet bulletin boards and OCs are important tools in restrictive societies like Saudi Arabia, helping young people, tribal groups and minorities to exchange views. Saudis have the opportunity to discuss and debate issues in these communities, where gender segregation and other social norms are less strictly imposed. The author emphasizes that with the spread of social OCs comes the ability to discuss different topics freely, so Saudi users are adopting these online discussions, which in turn have many positive outcomes, such as making people more open to the opinions of others. Agarwal, Lim and Wigand (2012) attest that social OCs are being used increasingly by Saudi females to publish, debate and discuss issues affecting them. They argue that blogs and OCs are agents of social, cultural and political diversity, offering new ways to meet old challenges, and conclude that more research needs to be done in non-English-speaking communities.

2.5. Rationale for Studying Online Communities

2.5.1. The importance of OCs for their members

Researchers have investigated why OC members participate in such communities. Many have examined their informational aspects. For example, Hiltz (1984) studied online research communities that incorporated a computer-mediated communication system and found that the majority of respondents shared ideas, opinions and information corresponding to their perspectives. Reingold (1993) asserts that virtual communities act as “living encyclopaedias” and are useful in helping members to locate the information they require. Hagel and Armstrong (1997) add that virtual communities are significant for both customers and retailers. Consumers can capture the information they share, the exchange and accessibility of information being the most essential aspects of community networks.

Burnett (2000) argues that informational content can be exchanged through explicit text communications that occur within OCs. He then proposes a typology for such information exchange. For example, some members act only as readers of what other members have posted, gathering information without active participation, a practice known as ‘lurking’. Other members contribute to discussions, in order to influence the debate. Some only post welcome posts, while others may be interested in specific information, such as announcements, queries or requests for information, and expect to receive answers relevant to their needs. Burnett treats the virtual community as an informational environment, as do Rothaermet and Sugiyama (2001), who note that it offers unlimited information which interests members to varying degrees. Wasako and Faraj (2000) confirm that the benefits of information are an important aspect of the online community.

Other advantages of OCs noted in the literature are social interaction, emotional support and e-WOM. Thus, Wellman and Gollia (1998) argue that information resources are one of the many benefits of the virtual community, along with the provision of emotional and social interaction. Having undertaken a comprehensive study of a hundred OCs, Preece and Ghozati (1998) found that most involved some empathic communication. Unsurprisingly, empathy is more important in emotional support communities than in other types. In addition, posts exchanging factual information were noted in these communities. Similarly, Preece (2000) states that millions of OC members interact socially by sharing ideas and information. Balasubramanian and Mahajan (2001) agree that virtual communities are socially important, especially with the growth of IT.

Ridings and Gefen (2004) investigated the motives of participants in OCs, concluding that people are motivated not only by the exchange of information but also by the social need to find friends online. OCs are one of several social communication tools on the internet identified by Goldsmith (2006) as enabling members to share their ideas, opinions and experiences, and to offer and obtain emotional support and empathy in a place they trust. Li et al. (2008) and Stewart (2010) support the notion that members search for information, ask advice of experts and leaders within the community and seek friends with similar hobbies or interests.

Reviewing the literature, it is apparent that the majority of studies of OCs have so far been conducted in Western countries, while very few have been undertaken in the Arab world. One notable exception is the work of Al-Saggaf (2004), who sought to understand how OCs affected 'offline' or real-world communities. The author concluded that women in Saudi Arabia used OCs to defy the cultural norm of gender separation.

2.5.2. The importance of OCs for businesses

Business has long sought to take full advantage of the internet revolution. In early research in this area, Hagel and Armstrong (1997) found virtual communities to be significant for both members and vendors, while Jones (1999) emphasizes that the worldwide web is a market-driven social space. Kozinets (1999) introduced the term "online community of consumption" to refer to interactions within the virtual community, where two types of computer-mediated communication occur: consumers share e-WOM and information online, constituting an important market tool, in terms of consumer purchase decisions. Preece (2000; 2001) perceives the online community as having "stickiness" for any business, whereby online members use the virtual social space to come together and obtain and give information or support, in terms of learning or finding a company. Other researchers highlight the importance of online brand community in social context. Adje, Noble and Noble (2009) suggest that online brand communities play a vital role in providing consumers with pre-purchase e-WOM. Therefore, any business must pay attention to such communities. Jung-Min Han (2015) asserts that online brand communities are important for business because of their commercial characteristics. Marketers and businesses can use online brand communities to enhance consumer loyalty, brand loyalty, satisfaction, trust and commitment by engaging consumers. Similarly, Zhang, Shabir and

Pitsaphol (2015) agree that a brand community is an accessible tool for satisfying consumers' needs and enhancing brand loyalty.

The core benefits of OCs reside in the information embedded in them, according to Pitta and Fowler (2001). More importantly, they offer marketers the opportunity to observe consumers' perceptions and opinions directly, especially in consumer-to-consumer communication; and information sharing in OCs is mainly based on this type of communication. In a later study, Pitta and Fowler (2005) highlight the importance of consumer-to-consumer communication within OCs, especially in the form of WOM, whereby members can share information and ideas, discuss experience of products or services and solve problems. Similarly, Rafaeli and Raban (2005) argue that sharing consumer information in cyberspace is an important aspect of any business, while Huang, Hsiao and Chung (2009) state that any business should pay attention to the important role of the online community in implementing WOM marketing by monitoring the development of such OCs.

A review of the literature suggests that one way in which OCs can be classified is based on the perspectives of members and their participation and social interaction, or consumer-to-consumer social communication, in terms of market-related information; e-WOM and the exchange of information are important aspects of business and marketing in these communities. E-WOM particularly influences businesses' reputation, revenue and customer equity (Goldsmith, 2006; Cheng and Zhou, 2010) and plays an important role in the success of products and the marketing of services (Huang, Hsiao and Chuang, 2009).

The next section will discuss the characteristics of e-WOM and its importance as a major motive in the making of consumer decisions. Finally, it will examine the role of e-WOM in OCs.

2.6. Characteristics of e-WOM

Upon its recognition within the online format, Henning-Thurau et al. (2004) proposed the following working definition of e-WOM: "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" (p.39). Since then, there have been many contributions to a growing academic literature on the importance of e-WOM, especially since increasing numbers of people use the internet in their daily lives to

collaborate and socialise online. Thus, other researchers have proposed distinguishing characteristics of e-WOM to augment the above working definition.

For example, e-WOM has been characterised as having either negative or positive valence when applied to goods and services. Dolen, Dabholkar and Ruyter (2007) found that OC members were significantly influenced by positive e-WOM within the context of an online chat group. Gupta and Harris (2010) report that the more positive e-WOM they encounter, the more consumers are highly motivated to spend time shopping. Conversely, it has been found that negative e-WOM reduces the probability that a purchase will be made (East, Hammond and Lomax, 2008). Indeed, Zhang, Craciun and Shin (2010) argue that negative e-WOM is more persuasive than positive e-WOM. The term 'neutral e-WOM' also appears in the literature, when the recommendation is neither positive nor negative (Cheng and Zhou, 2010).

Since e-WOM comprises messages passing between consumers, other researchers have investigated the characteristics of its senders and receivers. For example, e-WOM often passes between people who have weak social ties (i.e. strangers) and can be anonymous (Dellarocas, 2003; Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006; Sen and Lerman, 2007). Anonymity enables consumers to share opinions without their identities being revealed (Gelb and Sundaram, 2002; Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008). E-WOM also enables the consumer to discover the views of others who have product expertise, information which previously may have been unavailable to the consumer (Sweeney, Soutar and Mazzarol, 2008).

Finally, another strand of research considers the use of various online platforms to share e-WOM, which according to the definition above occurs mainly on the internet. Computer-mediated communications, including e-WOM, have evolved on and are currently facilitated by a diverse range of online platforms, such as bulletin boards, forums, blogs, email, chat rooms, product reviews and other individual websites (Goldsmith, 2006). Recently, Cheng and Zhou (2010) have added to the scholarship by suggesting that e-WOM has extended and widened the range of networks, such as social network sites and OCs, where the internet has revolutionised the way in which we communicate. These forms of communication are facilitated by electronic message boards, such as chat rooms and web forums. Researchers have evaluated this concept mainly within the context of its value as a marketing tool.

Among research findings in this area are that e-WOM affects purchasing intention and decision-making, thus potentially improving or depressing sales. E-WOM is also said to be bidirectional, non-commercial, interactive and immediate. It occurs on many online platforms such as OCs, social networks, forums, blogs and chat rooms (often anonymously), between strangers or consumer-to-consumer, which means many-to-one. A third finding is that e-WOM is easy to measure and document because of the text-based nature of conversations within OCs, which are easily accessible to researchers via websites, usually without any requirement for authentication. Finally, e-WOM is increasingly recognised as an important aspect of the promotion of products and services (Sweeney, Soutar and Mazzarol, 2008).

E-WOM can occur in any online community that appears on the internet, so consumers post about products on various OC platforms. The next section discusses the importance of e-WOM in making decisions and places e-WOM within the context of OCs in general.

2.6.1. Importance of e-WOM in the decision-making process

The power of word of mouth as a form of interpersonal communication is well established in the consumer and marketing literature (Arndt, 1976; Richins, 1987; Bone, 1995; Okazaki, 2009). Its importance resides in the fact that consumer choice is often influenced by WOM. In other words, it influences consumption decisions. Before deciding whether or not to buy, consumers tend to follow five main steps, according to a model proposed by Engel, Kollat and Blackwell (1973). First, the consumer recognizes a problem or need, then she begins to search for information from multiple sources, such as family members, friends, a salesperson or store, or media such as magazines, radio and the internet. At the third stage, evaluation, the consumer tends to choose between the alternatives she has identified. The fourth stage is the purchase of the product and the last stage is when the consumer may feel that an alternative would have been preferable. The power of WOM to influence consumers during this decision-making process is well known to researchers and practitioners and has become ever more important in the age of the internet (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sun et al., 2006; Audrain-Pontevia and Balagué, 2008). Park and Kim (2009) assert that the importance of WOM communication lies in its effectiveness in providing the right type of information required by each consumer segment or purchasing demographic.

The experimental results obtained by Gupta and Harris (2010) among students show that participants with weaker motivation to process information were willing to make decisions based on e-WOM recommendations. Interestingly, they tended to decide to choose a single e-WOM recommendation as their suboptimal choice. On the other hand, stronger consumer involvement did not lead to suboptimal choices. Thus, e-WOM recommendations seem to serve to redirect the limited search and consideration efforts of consumers with lower motivation to process information.

Meanwhile, Meng, Wei and Zhu (2011) investigated the role of opinion leaders in influencing decision making. They found that their influence was strong in that their product recommendations helped consumers to come to a decision. Consumer behaviour changed dramatically because of the professional knowledge of the opinion leaders and the reliability of their recommendations; the pattern of e-WOM spread and purchasing decisions changed as well. At the same time, online sellers also pay attention to product recommendations by opinion leaders. Similarly, Laaksonen (2012) found that Facebook users tended to value the e-WOM of other regular users of Facebook in their group, which had an effect on their evaluation of products. Niu (2013) also found that when shopping online, consumers in Taiwan tended to be persuaded by peer recommendations, in addition to brand, price, value and high quality.

Other factors which have been observed to affect purchasing decisions include observational learning and receiver involvement. The findings of a study by Cheung, Xiao and Liu (2012) indicate that both e-WOM and observational learning have a strong impact on purchasing behaviour. In addition, consumer involvement has an important moderating influence on the effect of online social interactions on consumer purchase decisions. Involved consumers are likely to share their product-related experience more frequently and consequently have more opportunities to be influenced by others. Similarly, Hauschildt (2013) found that German consumers tended to be influenced by e-WOM when selecting a healthcare insurance provider. Another dimension that tended to impact on their decisions was quality of service.

Perfectionism and price are among the additional factors that have been investigated. Park and Gretzel (2010) found a significant relationship between consumers' online decision-making styles and comparison shopping proneness. Consumers who tended to be influenced by perfectionism needed to make comparisons in order to reach 'perfect'

choices. Similarly, consumers looking for good value for money were more likely to shop across websites to find suitable alternatives. Interestingly, while consumers who are confused by too much choice do not like comparison shopping, feeling that it would create information overload, they perceive comparison shopping tools as useful.

Related factors such as information and culture have also been investigated. Goa et al. (2012) assessed the effect of information quantity, information quality and thought mode on consumers' satisfaction with their decisions. The results show that unconscious thought moderates the relationship between information quality and consumers' satisfaction with their decision making when shopping online for films. Cultural differences were also investigated by Nayeem and Casidy (2013), who looked at the differences between two types of consumers in Australia, specifically in their decision-making styles. They report that collectivist consumers scored significantly higher than individualists on the 'confused by over-choice', 'rational buyer' and 'recreation-conscious' decision-making styles.

2.6.2. E-WOM and OCs

The nature of e-WOM communication can be seen to have been significantly modified by the increasing popularity of OCs. As members of OCs, consumers can share e-WOM in a way that was not possible before (Hsu et al., 2007). Most importantly, members can post, share and contribute any type of information or opinion corresponding to their interests. Preece (2009) estimates that millions of members of OCs interact socially by sharing ideas and information. Goldsmith (2006) states that the WOM concept was extended to computer-mediated communications, whereby social communication was transferred to an extensive and formal content online and in virtual communities. Interested persons could then exchange information among themselves, as part of online social interaction. In addition, there are a diverse range of online platforms, such as bulletin boards, forums, blogs, e-mail, chat, product reviews and other individual websites. E-WOM offers alternative channels to immediately bidirectional and interactive communications (Goldsmith, 2005). Schindler and Bickart (2005) identify seven sources of internet WOM, listed in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Sources of internet WOM

	Flow of information	Timing of interactions	Interacting with	Referability
Posted reviews	1-way			Constant
Mailbags	2-way	Delayed	Sellers	Constant
Discussion forums	2-way	Delayed	Consumers	Constant
Electronic mailing lists	2-way	Delayed	Consumers	Limited
Personal emails	2-way	Delayed	Consumers	Limited
Chat rooms	2-way	Immediate	Consumers	Limited
Instant messaging	2-way	Immediate	Consumers	Limited

Source: Schindler and Bickart (2005)

As members of OCs, consumers can share e-WOM in a way that was not possible prior to mainstream access to the internet (Hung and Lee, 2007), because neither receiver nor sender has to consider geographic distance (Steffes and Burgee, 2008). Most importantly, members can post, share and contribute any type of information or opinion corresponding to their interests to varying degrees (Rothaermet and Sugiyama, 2001; Brown, Broderick and Lee, 2007). Virtual communities act as “living encyclopaedias” and are useful in helping members to locate the information they require (Rheingold, 1993). In addition, Valck, Bruggen and Wierenge (2009) argue that virtual communities are significant for both customers and retailers. Consumers can capture and share information, the exchange and accessibility of information being the most essential aspects of community networks. In OCs, Pan and Zhange (2011) emphasize that informational content can be exchanged through explicit text communications.

The topic of this thesis is the exchange of information about products and services in female-only OCs. User posts are evaluated with a particular focus on the variables that encourage participants to adopt e-WOM in the forums. It is therefore important at this stage of the literature review to consider why e-WOM is such an effective form of communication and to review studies of the effectiveness of e-WOM communication in online discussion forums as part of consumer-to-consumer social communication. More than a decade ago, Kozinets (1999) observed that computer-mediated interaction within the virtual community included the use of e-WOM as a way of sharing information to facilitate consumer purchase decisions. In another early study, Bickart and Schindler (2001) then provided some empirical evidence regarding the power of e-WOM within OCs. Their findings, based on a class assignment of 61 students and a survey, were that online forums tended to have a more persuasive effect than marketing websites, due to the existence of

empathy among fellow consumers, especially females. They argue that discussion forums generate greater product interest because the content posted there tends to be more relevant and credible and is thus able to elicit greater empathy from readers, females in particular.

As this thesis is concerned with e-WOM in OCs, with particular reference to discussion forums, it is appropriate to consider some advantages of such communities. First, they are asynchronous in nature, so members can join forums, read posts and contribute at any time convenient to them. Discussion boards are also generally archived, so members can review posts at a later time, and they are open 24 hours a day. A fourth advantage is that the software platforms allow boards to display text, graphics, images, videos and website content. The anonymity and familiarity of the online forum format prompts openness by members to participate more freely, allowing them to get to the heart of the matter with rich responses very quickly and efficiently. Finally, unlike face-to-face communication, OC interactions are free of geographical limitations: members can share their ideas, comments, experiences, stories and e-WOM with others anywhere in the world.

The discussion of the literature now turns to the third research strand identified in Chapter 1, an exploration of gender, since this research investigates e-WOM use in female-only OCs. It begins by discussing how e-WOM may vary by gender, then examines the relationship between gender and decision making.

2.7. E-WOM and Gender

2.7.1. Gender differences in e-WOM use

A number of researchers have found that responses to e-WOM vary by gender, which has implications for its potential as a marketing tool. Therefore, research in this area is important in order to maximise the benefits of e-WOM, particularly in relation to products targeted mainly at females. As discussed in Chapter 1, there is a significant gender gap in consumers' use of the internet. This is significant in light of research into similarity on task-relevant dimensions such as product preferences, or personal characteristics such as age, gender and lifestyle. Communicators are most influential when they are similar to the consumer on some dimension that is relevant to the task, product or product category at hand. A variable that may influence the power of WOM communication is the similarity of the communicator to the recipient consumer (Kempf and Palan, 2006).

Since e-WOM is a form of information, it is also relevant to consider how males and females process information in general. Researchers have found clear gender differences, whereby women tend to process information in a more comprehensive, effortful manner than men. In other words, gender differences in online activity are related to findings that men and women process information in different ways. Men tend to focus on one or a few cues, rather than trying to process all the information available in the communication, whereas women consider total information and use more narratives in their communication (Walker, 1995; Herring, 1996). Men and women also perceive information differently (Geiger and Litwiller, 2005) and respond differently to information technology and information online (Andrews et al., 2006; Rosser, 2006; Rafi et al., 2008; Hoag, 2008; Chai, 2009; Broose and Grant, 2011).

Gefen and Ridings (2004) report that women generally go to virtual communities to give and receive social support. In addition, they found that women assess more favourably both the capability of others in the virtual community and the overall quality of the online conversation, in both single-gender and mixed-gender communities. Prior research has shown that perceived WOM quality in virtual bulletin board discussions differs across genders, partly because women's communication objectives are not based on sharing information they know, but on developing rapport through giving and receiving social support. Bush et al. (2005) affirm that in the United States young women rely heavily on buying products and services that will impress their friends. The results demonstrate that young women rely on their female friends and the media to communicate about products.

Notwithstanding some significant findings that females were persuaded by e-WOM, the interactive effects between communicators and consumers of the same gender are not clear from prior research. The literature states that women were found to seek more WOM product information than men, which indicates that females have a higher opinion of WOM as a source of information. It is also argued that females tend to be more receptive to WOM than men and that a crucial predictor of interpersonal influence is the degree of similarity between communicator and consumer. Kempf and Palan (2006) found that females tended to have more positive attitudes toward WOM communication and that they tended to prefer arguments having positive strength, which implies that females are more subjective, personal and idiosyncratic in their logic when processing WOM information.

Awad and Ragowsky (2008) studied the mediating effect of gender in judging the quality of e-WOM in electronic commerce contexts. They surveyed 1561 consumers, of whom 601 were female, and found that women placed greater trust in e-WOM than men, in terms of their contribution to *Amazon* online forums. The authors assert that women show greater reliance on networks of people and therefore place a greater emphasis on trusting an online retailer prior to purchase, which shows e-WOM to be of greater value to women in influencing purchasing decisions. They found that women valued the chance to interact with and receive feedback from others. One element of online WOM systems that may contribute to a greater sense of social support and social presence on a website is the responsive participation of others; posting is perceived as a dialogue and therefore as beneficial communication. Thus, women judge the value of online WOM by the response they get online.

Rong et al. (2011) found significant differences among females in different groups. For example, young females with a high education level were highly likely to be both browsers and sharers of e-WOM, whereas older females with a lower education level were highly unlikely to use travel websites or to share online their travel experiences or e-WOM. Motivation has also been found to vary by gender. Kim, Mattila and Baloglu (2011) found distinct differences between the sexes regarding their motivating factors, especially risk. Their analysis indicates that females were more likely to read e-WOM for the purpose of risk reduction, because females viewed online shopping as more risky than males did. Thus, they read e-WOM to reduce this risk and feel more comfortable. The authors conclude that females were influenced by convenience and risk reduction. Similarly, the results of a study by Fan and Miao (2012) show that gender differences had a significant effect on e-WOM credibility. Female consumers had more rapport on social networks and put a greater emphasis on the credibility of e-WOM than their male counterparts. In other words, females were more likely than males to use credible e-WOM to make purchasing decisions. In addition, females may perceive more risk than males when shopping online, making them more reluctant to make purchasing decisions.

Bae and Lee (2011) investigated whether gender differences exist in responding to online consumer reviews and suggest that women attempt to process information in a “more comprehensive and effortful manner” (p. 204) than men. The researchers found that there were significant gender differences in consumer perceptions of online consumer reviews and that the positive or negative nature of the review played a moderating role. Females

who read positive e-WOM tended to purchase more than males, while females who read negative e-WOM were less likely than males to purchase associated products.

The gender-related studies reviewed here generally support the contention that the e-WOM available in online consumer reviews has a stronger effect on females than on males and that females are more likely to rely on e-WOM, but certain questions remain unanswered. One variable that may influence the power of WOM communication is the similarity of the communicator to the recipient consumer (Kempf and Palan, 2006). Another aspect that has not been fully explored is why females adopt e-WOM from other females in OCs and continue using it, so the following section reviews work on females making consumer decisions.

2.7.2. Females and the decision-making process

A number of researchers have investigated the important role of females as consumers. In a Middle Eastern context, more specifically that of the UAE, Karim (2011) reports that females in Abu Dhabi tended to be influenced by brand name, product quality, price, promotion, service quality and store environment when deciding to buy cosmetics. In Iran, Heidarzadeh Hanzaee and Aghasibeig (2010) found that young female consumers were primarily concerned with perfectionism, price and value, while shopping enthusiasm, habitual brand, time and variety of seeking also affected their purchasing decisions. In an Islamic East Asian context, Mokhlis and Salleh (2009) discovered that Malaysian females tended to be influenced by several factors. First, lower price tended to persuade them to shop. Second, they were more likely to decide to shop if shopping tended to be recreational and fun for them. Finally, if they found shopping unpleasant, they tended to decide to shop quickly and buy the first product that appeared to be good enough for them.

The remainder of this section considers evidence from non-Islamic contexts. Bakewell and Mitchell (2006) found that in the UK, store loyalty, price/value consciousness and time conserving tended to affect the decisions of females more than males. Yang and Wu (2007) found that the decision making of Taiwanese female shoppers was dominated by how fashionable, exciting and attractive the goods were, while shopping in different stores and recreational shopping as fun tended to influence females to decide to shop online.

Juyal and Singh (2009) explored the positive role of females in making family purchasing decisions. Females tended to be persuaded by impressions when they decided to buy.

Moreover, demographic variables tended to affect decision making. As the age of females increased, so did their confidence and trust in their own purchasing decisions; the higher their education level, the more likely females were to purchase; professionals were found to be freer and more relaxed when taking purchasing decisions; finally, family income levels affected the way females perceived that other people felt about their purchase decisions. In other words, as their income level increased, these perceptions concerning their purchasing decisions became more positive.

In the United States, Granot, Greens and Brashear (2010) found that females tended to be persuaded by a product's emotional attributes (sexiness, fantasy, fun, celebrity and feeling), by the shopping experience (enjoyable, connected with loved ones) and by the retail environment (customer service and variety). In the same way, Pentecost and Andrews (2010) found that in the fashion area, females tended to be more engaged in making purchasing decisions.

2.8. Cultural Context

The discussion now turns to the cultural context of this research, whose focus is on factors contributing to the adoption and use of e-WOM within female OCs in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Although this focus is necessarily rather narrow, the topic cannot be explored adequately without some understanding of the broader social, cultural and tribal forces shaping life in these two countries. There is a need to examine the national context in each case, to obtain a clearer picture of how these cultural issues shape the roles, behaviours and attitudes of members of OCs in both countries. This section therefore profiles the geographical, historical, cultural and technological features of Kuwait, then of Saudi Arabia, concentrating on national cultural characteristics.

2.8.1. Profile of Kuwait

This subsection and the next provide a description of Kuwait in terms of its geography, religion, population, economy and culture. Kuwait is an Arab and Islamic country in southwest Asia (the Middle East), lying on the Arabian Gulf between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, as Figure 2.1 shows (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012). The total land area of Kuwait is 6,880 square miles.

Arabic is the official language of Kuwait, while English is its second language, being taught in elementary school, specifically from grade one. The official religion is Islam and over three-quarters of the population are Muslim, while Christians constitute a significant religious minority (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). The population in April 2011 was officially estimated at 3,065,850, of whom 1,089,969 were Kuwaiti citizens and 1,975,881 non-Kuwaitis, meaning that immigrants accounted for almost two-thirds of the total (Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau, 2013). The Kuwait government rarely grants citizenship to foreigners, to maintain the status quo, with the result that the population is a mixture of various nationalities.



Figure 2.1: Map of Kuwait (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014)

Kuwait is an oil-rich country (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012). Oil and gas contribute the largest amount to the total GDP at producers' prices in Kuwait (43.3%), followed by community, social and personal services (17.1%), then financial institutions (13.4%), whereas insurance, agriculture and mining each contribute less than 1% (Abotalaf, 2011).

2.8.2. Main elements of Kuwaiti culture and values

2.8.2.1. National culture

Culture shapes people's behaviour, ideas and attitudes from birth and determines how they are categorized within a society (Al-Sabah, 2001). Kuwait, which has historically been

ruled by the Al-Sabah family, is culturally conservative and strongly Islamic, in common with most other Arab nations. Kuwait is also a member of the GCC and shares many social and cultural characteristics with its neighbours Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE (Al-Kandari and Hasanen, 2012).

2.8.2.2. Tribal issues

In Arabic, *badawi* (plural *bedu*) means “dweller of the desert” or “nomad” (Al-Sabah, 2001:23). Historically, the Bedouin moved from one place to another in large groups, searching for green areas and water for themselves and for their animals. Modern Bedouin society has changed greatly, especially since the discovery of oil in the GCC countries (Al-Mughni, 2001); nonetheless, the characteristics of Bedouin culture continue to represent an essential element of Arab culture. Al-Mughni (2001) argues that the importance of Bedouin values such as loyalty, honesty and trust within their groups still shape Kuwaiti society today. A salient feature of Bedouin culture is that adult females are separated from their male counterparts and are allowed to interact only with close male relatives such as fathers, husbands and brothers (Al-Sabah, 2001).

2.8.2.3. Women’s role and status

During the economic and social development of Kuwait, women have played different roles (Al-Suwaihel, 2009). Before the discovery of oil, they were responsible for childcare and for the family when their husbands travelled for trade or work (AlSarraf, 2008). Since oil was discovered, Almughni (2001) and Ali (2009) state that women’s status and roles in Kuwaiti society have undergone significant development, especially because females have equal opportunity with males to enrol in the education system. Apart from education, Kuwaiti women have also enjoyed increasingly important participation in society, politics and employment. In 2013, 46.7% of Kuwaiti women were in work. Indeed, Kuwait has the highest percentage of working female citizens among the GCC countries, which indicates that Kuwaiti women’s participation in the labour force is much higher than the GCC average (Kuwait: Selected Issues and Statistical Appendix, 2012).

As noted above, women in Kuwaiti society traditionally looked after their families and took care of all family matters, while power was held primarily by fathers and other men, who supported the family financially (Tetreault, 2001). However, in modern Kuwaiti society, women have the opportunity to participate in public life by studying, working and

travelling abroad (Tetreault and Al-Mughni, 1994). The Kuwaiti government sent women to study in Egypt in 1960, before the Kuwait University was established. Since the founding of the University, the majority of its students (about 60%) have been women (O'Shea, 2000).

Recently, females have been empowered by their political role in Kuwaiti society. Women have had the right to vote and run for election since 2005, but the elections of May 2009 were the first at which they stood as parliamentary candidates and received the support they needed to effect a historical change in the political life of the country. Four Kuwaiti women made parliamentary history by being elected to a parliament which had been entirely male since the first parliamentary elections were held in 1963 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014).

2.8.3. Profile of Saudi Arabia

The preceding subsections have profiled Kuwait, its culture and values. This subsection and the next do the same for Saudi Arabia, beginning with an outline of its geography, religion, population and economy. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is located in southwest Asia, occupying four-fifths of the Arabian Peninsula with an area of 2,217,949 square kilometres. It is bounded on the east by the Persian Gulf, Qatar, the UAE and Oman, on the west by the Red Sea, on the north by Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait, and on the south by Yemen, as seen in Figure 2.2.



Figure 2.2: Map of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014)

As in Kuwait, Arabic is the official language of Saudi Arabia, while English is the second language, taught from grade one in elementary schools. The official religion is Islam and the monarchical system of government is based on Islamic principles prescribed by the Quran, the holy book of Islam. A census conducted in 2014 gave a total population figure of 27, 345,986, of which the majority were Muslim Saudi nationals. Of the Saudi national population, 50.4% were male and 45.6% were aged between 25 and 54 years (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). As to its economy, Saudi Arabia has the largest oil reserves in the world.

2.8.4. Main elements of Saudi culture and values

2.8.4.1. *National culture*

Saudi Arabia is culturally conservative and strongly Islamic, like other Arab nations. As already noted, it is a member of the GCC, sharing many social and cultural characteristics with the other members (Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010). According to Rice (2004), Saudi society operates on two main cultural dimensions: tribal tradition and religion.

2.8.4.2. *Tribal tradition*

Unlike Kuwait, Saudi Arabia is divided into 13 major regions, each of which has its own cultural peculiarities, but in common with Kuwait, the national culture is strongly influenced by the Bedouin tradition and its development since the discovery of oil (AlMughni, 2001).

2.8.4.3. *Religious issues*

The beliefs, principles and practices of Islam affect every aspect of Saudi daily life. The lives of both men and women are regulated by religious considerations. For example, females are equal to males in reward. Islam offers equality between men and women as part of the support for each other throughout life (Tetreault, 2001). Islam also allows female participation in various activities, but each woman is placed under the guardianship of a man (her husband, father or uncle) (Al-Mughni, 2001).

Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer – we will surely cause him to live a good life, and we will surely give them their reward in the hereafter according to the best of what they used to do (Quran-Al-Nahl-97).

Moreover, Islam declares that men and women are equal but different, that each of them is a facilitator for the work on this earth according to their creation and that they are complementary to each other:

It is he who created you from one soul and created from its mate that he might dwell in security with her and when he covers her allusion for copulation she carries a light burden ... (Quran-Al-Aaraf-189).

O mankind, indeed we have created you from male and female and made you people and tribes that you may know one another (Quran-Al-HuJurrat-13).

Islam illustrates women's roles and rights in the community and the family. For example, both the Quran and the Hadith encourage a women to be the leader and coordinator in her home. Women have the right to stay at home or to go out for justified needs such as learning, working to earn a livelihood for herself and her family, doing voluntary work, worshipping and other reasons. However, the woman is not responsible for bringing money

to the family and the expenditure is the husband's or the father's responsibility throughout a women's life, according to Islam.

There is a particularly strict imposition of gender segregation in Saudi Arabia, which is reflected in almost all aspects of life. For example, all Saudi government schools from primary school to university are segregated. In addition, many companies and ministries have separate sections for females, to avoid contact with males. In Kuwait, while complete educational segregation applies from primary school to high school, only classes are segregated at university level, with males and females enjoying the same university facilities outside the classroom. Al-Saggaf (2004) notes that gender segregation extends to the online context, where females and males have their own separate chat rooms. AlKandari and Sharif (2009) affirm that because of gender segregation, the development of female-only OCs and bulletin boards is strongly preferred by females, who like to share their interests online.

2.8.4.4. *Women's roles and status in Saudi Arabia*

In recent years, no sector of Saudi society has been subject to more debate and discussion than that of women and their role in the conservative society. Women's education, at all levels from elementary school to university, remained under the Department of Religious Guidance until 2002, to ensure that it did not deviate from the original purpose of female education, which was to make women good wives and mothers and to prepare them for jobs such as teaching and nursing, which were believed to suit their nature. In 2002, the General Presidency for Girls' Education was established (Hamdan, 2005). Women in Saudi Arabia, like those in other Gulf nations, do now enjoy educational opportunities. According to Kammer (2013), female enrolment in university education has grown as a share of the total from 47% in 1995/1996 to 54% in 2010/2011. In addition, the Saudi authorities are currently providing scholarships for over 100,000 students to study abroad, among whom females account for 70% of university degrees awarded.

Socially, the situation is like that in other GCC countries, where females traditionally care for their families and children. Women usually depend heavily on their husbands or other close male relatives. Politically, Saudi females have not yet been able to participate as their Kuwaiti counterparts have done. However, the late King Abdullah took a significant step by appointing Nora Fayez to the post of Deputy Minister of Education for Girls, which was

the first time that a woman had occupied a position in the government of Saudi Arabia (Arab News, 2009).

2.9. E-WOM in Different Cultural Contexts

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this thesis is motivated by its cultural context. The purpose of this section is to review e-WOM research either comparing Western with other cultural contexts or set in contexts relevant to the present study, i.e. the GCC, the Middle East and the Moslem world. Previous researchers have studied the similarities and differences among groups of people worldwide and the importance of the cultural context here resides in the fact that it has a potential influence on phenomena involving IS and IT, including the provision of online services (Ali and Brooks, 2009), online socialising and online networks (Veltre and Elgarah, 2009). Fong and Burton (2006) examined the impact of e-WOM in two virtual communities (both photography bulletin boards): one based in the United States (*eBay*) and the other in China (*EachNet*). Differences in content were found between the two boards: Chinese users were more likely to request e-WOM from other members and less likely to spread negative WOM. The authors conclude that marketers must take into consideration the growth of electronic bulletin boards as channels for the exchange of e-WOM. In another study, Tsang and Prendergast (2009) used content analysis to examine WOM in computer game magazines. They found that Chinese users exchanged less negative WOM and more non-product-related statements, while Chinese and American reviews had roughly equal amounts of positive WOM. On the other hand, Americans used more neutral WOM than Chinese readers. The authors suggest that other researchers should examine how readers in other countries perceive WOM, especially in OCs, given its importance to marketers. Since the present research was conducted in two Islamic GCC countries, within the Middle East, the remaining subsections review e-WOM studies set in those particular cultural contexts.

2.9.1. The GCC context

In Saudi Arabia, Ahmad (2012) used an online survey to investigate the influence of independent variables (namely aesthetics, convenience, accessibility, product variety, entertainment and service quality) on mall shoppers' satisfaction, loyalty and WOM. The author concludes that satisfaction is a key mediating factor in loyalty and positive WOM in Saudi shopping malls. Almana and Mirza (2013) examined e-WOM use among Saudi

internet users and found that respondents were heavily dependent on it in online forums when making purchasing decisions. More than 80% of participants indicated that they would read online reviews before making an online purchase. The study also found that higher ratings and characteristics of reviews were influential factors in making purchasing decisions. In particular, consistency and number of online reviews had important effects on purchasing decisions. Similarly, Sallam (2014) proposes a conceptual model of the role of e-WOM in making purchase decisions, using brand love as mediator, and urges other researchers to investigate e-WOM in similar contexts. In Kuwait, one notable study was conducted by Magahaes and Musallam (2014), who explored the motivational factors which drive consumers to write e-WOM on Twitter. The online survey findings demonstrate that the four primary factors that lead Kuwaiti consumers to provide e-WOM on Twitter are concern for other consumers, positive self-enhancement, venting negative feelings and helping the company.

2.9.2. The Middle Eastern context

In Jordan, Bataineh (2015a) examined the effect of three perceptual factors (the quality, quantity and credibility of e-WOM) on purchase intention, using an online survey. The findings show that all three factors significantly and positively affected purchase intention among members of online social communities in Jordan. Another online survey study by Bataineh (2015b) examined the role of customer satisfaction as mediator of e-WOM in social OCs in Jordanian banks. The findings were that electronic direct mail, perceived rewards and interpersonal communication all affected e-WOM, with a mediating role for customer satisfaction. Finally, Bataineh and Al-Smadi (2015) also used an online survey to explore the factors associated with customers' engagement with e-WOM in a Facebook community. They found that three independent variables (involvement, usefulness and trust) had a significant impact on the dependant variable, e-WOM engagement.

2.9.3. The Islamic context

In Iran, Fakharyan et al. (2012) studied the role of e-WOM in determining intention to travel. They found that e-WOM had a significant impact on this variable among Iranian tourists. A survey study by Yasvari, Ghassemi and Rahrovey (2012) analysed the factors influencing WOM about Iranian airlines. The findings suggest that quality of service, customer satisfaction, customer trust and loyalty all affected the production of WOM about

these companies. Another Iranian study, conducted by Zangeneh, Mohammad Kazemi and Rezvani (2014), examined the role of quality of e-WOM, quantity of e-WOM and review expertise in forming the intention to purchase digital products. The findings of their online survey were that each of these factors had a significant effect on purchase intention. In North Africa, Ltifi (2014) used an experimental approach to investigate the role of commitment and loyalty in spreading positive WOM about hotels in Tunisia. The author reports that commitment to the hotels had a positive influence on the tourists' tendency to generate positive WOM. In Malaysia, Shojaee and Azman (2013) assessed the impact of social communities and brand awareness by evaluating three factors: customer engagement, brand exposure and e-WOM. Their findings suggest that all three factors positively influenced brand awareness among Malaysian consumers. Finally, Yahya, Azizam and BinMazlan (2014) also conducted a study in Malaysia, to explore the impact of e-WOM in higher education, although their focus group participants were all from the Middle East. The group consisted of three male and three females students, representing Kuwait, Jordan, Iran, Palestine, the UAE and Yemen. The authors conclude that satisfaction, engaging in e-WOM and formation of e-WOM all influenced the positive credibility of higher education in Malaysia.

2.10. Gaps in the Literature

Before addressing gaps in the literature, it is worth considering the method I used to identify the most relevant articles in Google Scholar and the grey literature (e.g., government, academic centres, magazines, newspapers and working papers on the Internet), including the Arabic terms.

First, I used these terms:

الكلام الالكتروني في الكويت

(S1) E-WOM in Kuwait

الكلام الالكتروني في السعودية

(S2) E-WOM in Saudi Arabia

In the first search (S1), I checked the first hits; I found that the links were not relevant to e-WOM. For S2, I checked the first and similar hits; the results were also not applicable to e-WOM research. Most links provided a general idea and did not refer to e-WOM in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia.

Second, I conducted electronic searches of the index databases Academic Search Premier, ProQuest, Emerald, and Web of knowledge using the keywords “electronic word of mouth and Kuwait”, “electronic word of mouth and Saudi Arabia” and “electronic word of mouth in GCC”. In total only three articles were retrieved. I then expanded the search criteria to include e-WOM in Arabic and Muslim countries. Ten articles were retrieved; these articles discussed e-WOM in Arabic countries, such as Tunisia and Jordan, and e-WOM literature in the Muslim countries of Iran and Malaysia.

Thus, the rationale for this thesis was based on a lack of similar studies in the Arabic literature. In addition to filling this academic gap, the aim of this thesis was to add to the literature on female online communities who adopt e-WOM in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. There is still a lack of data that describe in detail the consumers’ online brand community (Sloan, Bodey and Gyrd-Jones, 2015). Branding through online media is an under-researched area that is slowly gaining attention in the literature.

Several important points arising from the above literature review must be addressed. First, the majority of the studies took e-WOM as an independent variable or mediator. As far as this researcher is aware, no prior research has explored the adoption of e-WOM in a Middle Eastern context. Thus, the present research examines factors related to e-WOM adoption which would help to address the main research question (RQ1): *What are the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the beauty industry context in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia?* According to Botainah (2015), more e-WOM research is needed because academics and practitioners do not yet see it as an exact concept. E-WOM is therefore a valuable area of research. Second, the lack of research into e-WOM messages in the GCC context persuaded the researcher to conduct this research in order to answer sub-question RQB: *What are the message characteristics that influence females to adopt e-WOM?* According to Lee and Lee (2009), the impact of e-WOM communication can be considered at two levels: that of the market and that of the individual. Researchers engaged in market-level analysis focus on market-level parameters (e.g. product sales), whereas those interested in individual-level analysis assume e-WOM to be a process of personal influence, in which communications between a sender and a receiver can alter the receiver’s perceptions and behaviour (Park & Lee, 2008; Cheung, Lee and Thadani, 2009). As a consequence, this research will focus on e-WOM at the individual level in a Middle Eastern context. Moreover, the majority of previous studies were conducted a Western

context, whereas few studies have been conducted in the Middle East. Comparing the cultural context of Kuwait with that of Saudi Arabia addresses sub-question RQA: *What are the similarities and differences in terms of e-WOM determinants between Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabia culture?* Finally, the only study of OC behavioural role patterns in a Middle Eastern context appears to be that by Al-Lozi (2011), who investigated the continuance behaviour of Facebook community members in Jordan. The findings indicate that the majority of Jordanians tend to act as lurkers. Thus, the present research seeks to fill a gap by investigating the relationship between behavioural roles and e-WOM in Middle Eastern OCs. This part of the investigation helps to answer sub-question RQC: *What is the current classification in terms of online role behaviour in female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia?* It can be concluded from the above discussion that e-WOM literature in a Middle Eastern context is rare. In particular, there is a need for more individual-level analysis of e-WOM adoption and the role of online behaviour in OCs. There has been little research of this kind in the Arab world and it is important to dispel any Western myths about the region through published research.

2.11. Summary

This chapter has sought to develop an understanding of the adoption of e-WOM within OCs. It began by considering the beauty market in the GCC countries, then reviewed definitions and typologies of OCs. It provided an overview of e-WOM, discussing its definition, unique characteristics and importance, then behaviourist role in OCs. Next, it addressed the question of gender, reviewing studies of ways in which males and females appear to respond differently to e-WOM when making purchasing decisions. After a thorough consideration of the importance of cultural context, the chapter ended by identifying the research gaps which this thesis seeks to fill. The next chapter discusses the relevant theories and models to develop a conceptual framework within which to investigate the adoption of e-WOM in OCs.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Model

3.1. Introduction

The current research seeks to cultivate an understanding of e-WOM adoption, by evaluating posts made by females on online beauty discussion forums based in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The research model developed here capitalises on a number of previous theoretical models, which will be discussed in detail in this chapter. From a number of variables derived from these models, such as argument quality, source credibility, information usefulness, receiver involvement, satisfaction, offline activities and information adoption, a framework is elaborated for use in the content analysis of posts on online discussion forums.

3.2. Research focus

As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.2), academia and business have shown an interest in studying the importance of online communities as facilitators of social interaction and the exchange of information, in both Western and Asian countries (Schrammel, Koffel and Tscheligi, 2009). However, there has been little research into OCs in the Arab world, particularly in the GCC countries of the Arabian Gulf region. In one of the few such studies, Sharif and Al-Kandari (2010) found that females in GCC countries used online bulletin boards particularly heavily: more than half (55%) of the females in GCC countries surveyed reported spending more than five hours a day on these sites, exchanging information online. Noting that females have their own OCs separate from their male counterparts, the authors conclude that there is a gender gap in internet use in the GCC region. Specifically, this study found that the largest percentage of respondents were females from Saudi Arabia, followed by Kuwaiti females, who used online discussion board communities more than those in other GCC countries. One of the main reasons that females tended to use these communities was reported to be their willingness to give input, encourage and help others. In other words, it was found that their main motivations were to persuade each other and to exchange ideas and information. Sharif and Al-Kandari (2010) conclude that more research is needed in this area.

Another notable study, by Almana and Abdulrahman (2013), found that the growth of e-WOM in online social network communities had greatly increased the potential impact of

e-WOM on consumer purchasing decisions, as respondents relied on online forums to provide the latest e-WOM. It is significant that the use of online forums is particularly popular among females in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, where women engage in similar activities and share interests in topics and issues (Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010).

The present study focuses on Arabic-language online discussion boards, specifically those which feature e-WOM. In particular, it seeks to expand current research into the area of women's participation in online discussion forums in two GCC countries: Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It therefore examines e-WOM use in one female OC in each of these countries. It highlights the role of e-WOM in women-only online forums by identifying the factors that facilitate or inhibit its adoption amongst the members of these communities. In doing so, it seeks to verify whether knowledge derived from existing Western and East Asian studies can be applied to GCC countries by examining female OCs in the two GCC countries where females use online discussion boards most frequently (Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010). In other words, certain geographical factors may produce differences in behaviour regarding online information, although little research has been done regarding e-WOM in Middle Eastern online communities, one exception being a study by Almana and Mirza (2013). The present study will investigate why members of female OCs in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia adopt e-WOM, as one aspect of OC activity which has not been adequately investigated by earlier researchers in GCC countries is product-related information.

In addition, as discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.2.2) and Chapter 2 (section 2.6), the gender-related studies reviewed here generally support the assumption that the e-WOM available in online consumer reviews has a stronger effect on females than on males and that females are more likely to rely on e-WOM, but certain questions remain unanswered. One variable that may influence the power of WOM communication is the similarity of the communicator to the recipient consumer (Kempf and Palan, 2006). Another aspect that has not been fully explored is why females adopt e-WOM from other females in OCs and continue using it, so the following sections address both adoption and post-adoption, introducing the concept of adoption, and then examining post-adoption models of continued use, before developing a framework to investigate the adoption of e-WOM.

3.3. Adoption Theories of Behaviour

Prior to a discussion of the proposed framework, it is important to gain an understanding of theories which aim to explain why users continue to use certain technologies. The main aim of the present study is to understand why users of online forums adopt of the e-WOM, The particular users concerned are females who take part in Arabic-language OCs based in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Hashim (2012) explains that there are two schools of theory regarding IS adoption: one concerned with the adoption phase, where researchers rely on the Technology Adoption Model as their underlying theoretical framework, and the other with the adoption and post-adoption or continuance intention behaviour phase, where adoption models such as TAM and its extension are integrated with post-adoption behaviour models such as ISCM. The discussion now turns to this scholarship, which is relevant to the conceptual model of e-WOM developed within this research, since it helps to understand the adoption of e-WOM, by borrowing concepts from both acceptance/adoption and post-adoption theories. The framework adopted is an amalgamation of the acceptance/adoption viewpoint (IAM) and one based on a post-adoption stance (ISCM).

Initial studies of IS continuance (i.e. continued use of information systems technology) viewed continuance as an extension of adoption and used the same theoretical basis to evaluate both adoption and continuance (Jin et al., 2009). An example of an adoption study that evaluates continued use within an e-WOM context is that of Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn (2008), who looked at the impact of e-WOM in online consumer communities, specifically *OpenRice*, an Asian online restaurant guide. Within the context of this current research, it is considered that adoption theories have a key value in the creation of a theoretical framework of e-WOM adoption.

The Information Adoption Model (Sussman and Siegal, 2003) is the most appropriate theory because it has been most widely used to explain individuals' adoption of information systems. In addition, this model is appropriate to study any type of online information, knowledge and ideas. It focuses not on technology but on information, which is the essence of consumer-to-consumer communication in online communities (Hua and Wang, 2014). Moreover, in existing IS literature, dual process theories such as IAM are widely used to explain how people are influenced in adopting ideas, information and knowledge (Sussman and Siegel, 2003; Bhattacharjee and Sanford, 2006; Cheung, Lee,

and Rabjohn, 2008). The IAM has also been used to examine the adoption of different types of information in the context of OCs (Hua and Wang, 2014; Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008; Zhang and Watts, 2008; Bhattacharjee and Sanford, 2006; Jin et al., 2009; Cheung et al., 2007; Fan et al., 2013; Zhang, Lee and Zhao, 2010; Shen, Cheung and Lee, 2013). The IAM, which is reviewed in detail in section 3.4, is particularly useful because it introduces factors that are crucial in understanding message characteristics such as argument quality and communicator characteristics such as source credibility, in addition to information usefulness.

3.4. Information Adoption Model

The IAM (Sussman and Siegel, 2003) is drawn from TAM and ELM, which will be discussed in turn. TAM was developed by Davis (1989), who suggests that system use is a response that can be explained or predicted by user motivation, which is directly influenced in turn by an external stimulus consisting of the actual features and capabilities of the technology system. Davis argues that users' motivation can be explained by three factors: perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and attitude towards using the system.

In their Elaboration Likelihood Model, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) identify two relatively distinct routes to persuasion: the central and peripheral routes. In the first of these, persuasion is induced by a person's careful and thoughtful consideration of the true merits of the information presented in support of a particular concept or idea. This route has been found to have an impact on consumers within online communities, particularly with respect to argument quality. Exploring the central route, Wang, Liu and Fan (2011) identify argument quality dimensions such as relevance, subjectivity, timeliness and completeness as contributing to knowledge adoption; Yan (2008) found that argument quality had a strong and positive influence on knowledge seekers' trust in and perception of information usefulness at the level of knowledge adoption; and Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn (2008) found that argument quality dimensions such as relevance and comprehensiveness significantly affected perceived information usefulness.

The peripheral route does not necessitate scrutiny of the information presented and is mostly the result of a simple cue, e.g. source credibility. In an online environment, source credibility refers to the recipient's perception of the message as coming from someone trustworthy, expert, knowledgeable and reliable. This route was found to be impactful

among consumers in different online communities. Cheung et al. (2009) found that source credibility led to e-WOM adoption in Chinese online forums and that it was an important factor in the cognitive processes of information receivers.

In contrast, Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn (2008) found that the source credibility (source expertise and source trustworthiness) of the message did not affect information usefulness in a Chinese OC and particularly in online forums. However, Wang, Liu and Fan (2011) report that source credibility dimensions such as past experience, expertise and trustworthiness did improve knowledge adoption in online communities. Another key factor, information usefulness, reflects how the information is beneficial, helpful and informative in that it mediates the relationships between argument quality and online advice adoption.

By integrating TAM and ELM in the IAM, Sussman and Siegal (2003) support the informational influence view of information adoption, as it relates to receiving advice in organizational settings. Moreover, they assert that the IAM can be applied in an online context such as discussion boards, to explain information adoption in these OCs. Sussman and Siegal (2003) propose that argument quality and source credibility are the main determinants of information usefulness (e.g. advice given via email), which lead to information adoption or acceptance. Figure 3.1 depicts graphically the relationships among the elements of the IAM.

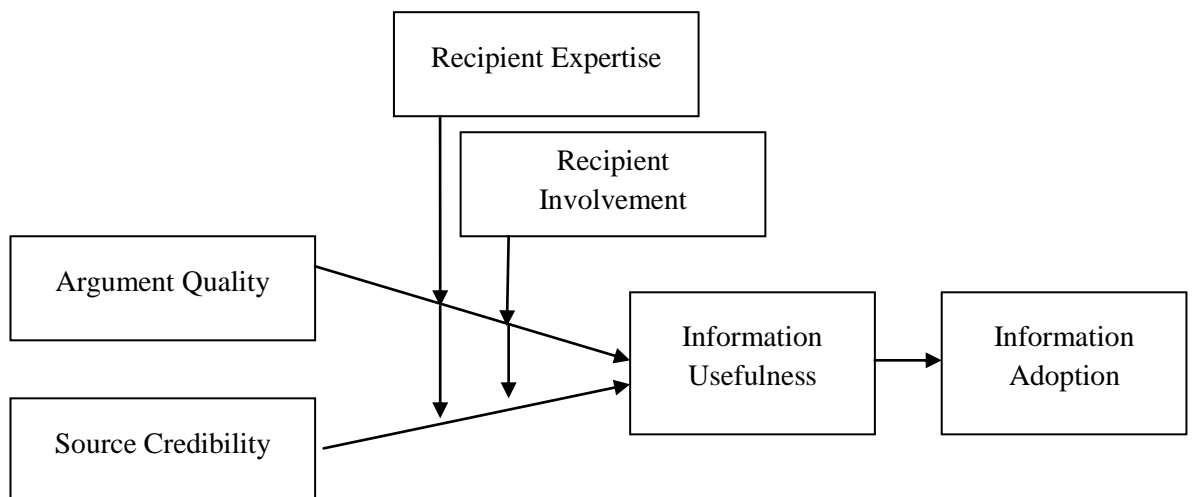


Figure 2.3: Information adoption model

The following subsections consider in turn argument quality, source credibility, information usefulness, receiver involvement and intention to use. These variables will be

used within the context of the theoretical framework developed for the purposes of this current research and it is therefore important to consider each in further detail here.

3.4.1. Argument Quality

Argument quality or information quality has proved to be an important element that people use to evaluate incoming messages (Cheung and Lee, 2007). It refers to “the persuasive strength of arguments embedded in informational messages” (Bhattacharjee, Perols and Sanford, 2006). Argument strength or argument quality concerns the quality of the information received (Cheung et al., 2009). Cheng and Zhou (2010) refer to argument quality as “quality of WOM”, which will directly affect the attitude of the receiver, particularly in online platforms (Sia et al., 2002). Many researchers have shown that argument quality directly affects the attitude of the message received, either offline (Cacioppo, Petit, and Morris, 1983) or online via e-mail (Sussman and Siegal, 2001), across genders (Awad and Ragowsky, 2008) and particularly in online forums (Jin et al., 2009). In addition, Gefen and Ridings (2005) argue that women perceive OC posts as helpful and relevant to a greater extent than men do.

3.4.2. Source Credibility

Source credibility refers to “a message recipient’s perception of the credibility of a message source, reflecting nothing about the message itself” (Chaiken, 1980). It is also defined as “the extent to which an information source is perceived to be believable, competent, and trustworthy by information recipients” (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In ELM, source credibility represents the peripheral cues which the receiver of a message uses to assess the credibility of its source (Bhattacharjee and Sanford, 2006).

In an online environment, source credibility is an important factor when considering using and adopting a message or e-WOM from other members. The role of source credibility in informational influence has been found to be significant in many studies. Cheung et al. (2009) found that source credibility led to e-WOM adoption in Chinese online forums, and it is an important factor in the information receivers’ cognitive process. In addition, Mazarol, Sweeney and Soutar (2007) claim that source credibility is an important factor in determining WOM effectiveness.

By contrast, Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn (2008) found that the source credibility of the message did not affect information usefulness in a Chinese OC. Determining the quality of online posts has become even more difficult, as marketers now attempt to influence e-WOM by paying consumers to review products (Chatterjee, 2001). As a result, consumers often look for a variety of cues when determining the quality of online information (Greer, 2003). Thus, researchers have begun to explore the specific platforms on which e-WOM is posted and how it influences consumer attitudes towards reviewed products. According to Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn (2008), source credibility is an important factor that tends to influence information recipients in online environments, where individuals have unlimited freedom to publish and exchange information without stating their real identity. Thus, it is up to users to determine the credibility, expertise and trustworthiness of information presented online.

3.4.3. Information Usefulness

According to Sussman and Siegal (2003), previous research related to ELM neglected the factor of information usefulness. This is the perception of an individual that using new technology will improve his/her performance (Davis, 1989). Sussman and Siegal (2003) found that information usefulness significantly mediated the relationships between argument quality and information adoption when new e-WOM appeared in a female online community. Therefore, if an OC member thinks that new e-WOM is useful, her intention to adopt the advice given in that e-WOM will increase.

3.4.4. Receiver Involvement

According to Sussman and Siegal (2003), receiver involvement measures how involved a person is in the topic of an email. They argue that recipients' perceptions of message usefulness directly determine information adoption, mediating the ELM-based informational influence processes. Message recipients' domain-based involvement serves as a moderator of the usefulness of credibility and argument quality. They suggest that the greater the recipient's involvement in the topic of the message, the more perceived message usefulness is affected by argument quality and the less by source credibility. Receiver involvement tends to motivate increased acceptance of a message. In addition, information usefulness tends to be a significant mediator of both argument quality and source credibility. Receiver involvement measures how involved a person is in the topic of

a message. Recipients' perceptions of message usefulness thus directly determine information adoption, mediating the ELM-based informational influence processes.

Other researchers have supported the importance of domain-based involvement as a moderator of credibility usefulness and argument quality usefulness. For example, Ha and Ahn (2010) found that e-WOM was more likely to influence individuals when they were in a high-involvement purchase situation, while Xue and Phelps (2004) suggest that individual reactions to consumer-generated product reviews on independent online forums are moderated by receiver characteristics such as product involvement.

3.4.5. Receiver expertise

Sussman and Siegal (2003) define receiver expertise as “the extent to which the receiver of the message is expert on the topic of the message” and suggest that it has an informational influence. They argue that the prior expertise of the message recipient alters the likelihood of the individual's ability to process information. To illustrate, a higher level of knowledge and comprehension of the message topic increases the quantity and depth of issue-relevant thoughts that occur to receivers and their ability to understand them, which in turn increases the likelihood of elaboration and reduces reliance on peripheral cues (source credibility). In line with the IAM, the conceptual model presented in this thesis does not include this particular factor, for two reasons. First, drawing on IAM, recipient expertise represents the ability to process information and this thesis is not interested in this ability. In addition, IAM predicts that in forming attitudes to advice received, experts and gurus will rely more strongly on the quality of argument, while source credibility would be more important to non-experts. Thus, this research assumes that among OC members, particularly in a beauty forum where questions are asked and answered, non-experts will rely on source credibility. The second reason for excluding recipient expertise here is that Sussman and Siegal (2003) found that it did not play a role as mediator, because it is difficult to measure expertise in an online context (Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008).

3.4.6. Information adoption

This study defines information adoption as “how intentions toward a message are formed” (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). It explains how different people can be influenced by the same message in different ways. Usage is often measured by behavioural intention (Mathieson, Peacock, and Chen, 2001). Thus, this research treats intention as a dependant

variable. Other researchers have applied IAM in their studies of communications in OCs (Hua and Wang, 2014). In addition, in existing IS literature, dual process theories such as IAM are widely used to explain how are people are influenced in adopting ideas, information and knowledge (Sussman and Siegel, 2003; Bhattacharjee and Sanford, 2006; Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008). Moreover, IAM has been implemented to examine different types of online information in an OC context (Hua and Wang, 2014; Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008; Zhang and Watts, 2008; Bhattacharjee and Sanford, 2006; Jin et al., 2009; Cheung et al., 2007; Fan et al., 2013; Zhang, Lee and Zhao, 2010; Shen, Cheung and Lee, 2013).

3.5. Information System Continuance Model

The ISCM has been integrated into this research for the following reasons. First, it has been successfully integrated with IAM in an OC context (Jin et al., 2009; Jin, Lee and Cheung, 2010). Second, researchers have viewed continuance as an extension of adoption (Jin et al. 2009; Jin, Lee and Cheung, 2010), which means that the determinants used to explain adoption can also be used to explain continued use; therefore, the same theoretical lens examines both adoption and continuance (Hashim, 2012). Third, the present research predicts that using factors related to continued IS use, such as satisfaction, will provide better explanatory power when examining the determinants of e-WOM adoption. Thus, this section will review the ISCM and its application. Bhattacharjee (2001) developed this model to predict IS continuance, which is the continued and sustained use of information systems by individuals. The importance of studying continuance is that “while initial acceptance ... is an important first step”, the long-term viability and eventual success of an IS will “depend on its continued use rather the first time use” (Bhattacharjee, 2001, pp.351-352).

The ISCM, illustrated in Figure 3.2, was adapted from Expectation-Confirmation Theory, a behavioural theory of consumer satisfaction and repurchase intention, which states that a consumer’s intention to repurchase a product or to reuse a service is mainly determined by his or her level of satisfaction (Oliver, 1980). It consists of four main constructs: expectations, performance, disconfirmation and satisfaction. ECT posits that expectations associated with perceived performance lead to post-purchase satisfaction. This effect is mediated through positive or negative disconfirmation between expectations and performance. If a product outperforms expectations (positive disconfirmation), then post-

purchase satisfaction will result, whereas if a product falls short of expectations (negative disconfirmation), the consumer is likely to be dissatisfied (Oliver, 1980; Spreng, Mackenzie and Olshavsky, 1996). Bhattacharjee (2001) developed the ISCM from ECT; however, while ECT predicts repurchase intention, ISCM predicts continuance intention and behaviour with respect to IS technology. The following subsections examine the ISCM's four constituents in turn.

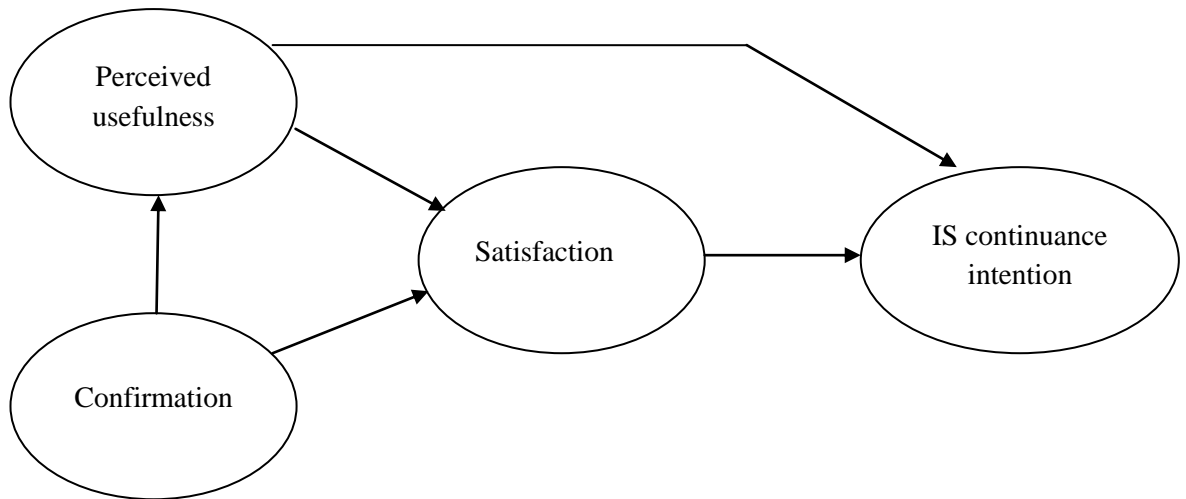


Figure 2.4: Information systems continuance model

3.5.1. Perceived usefulness

Bhattacharjee (2001) defines perceived usefulness as “user perception of the expected benefits of online banking systems”. ISCM predicts that users’ perceived usefulness is associated with their satisfaction with IS use. This variable is not included in the present conceptual framework because IAM includes the similar construct of information usefulness.

3.5.2. Confirmation

Bhattacharjee (2001) defines confirmation as “user perception of the congruence between expectation system use and its actual performance”. ISCM predicts that the extent of users’ confirmation is associated with their satisfaction with IS. Confirmation is inversely related to expectation and directly related to perceived usefulness. It is an additional determinant of satisfaction, so this research does not use this construct. It is concerned only with satisfaction in e-WOM adoption, with no intention to study its determinants.

3.5.3. Satisfaction

Bhattacharjee (2001:359) states that satisfaction refers to “users’ affect with (feelings about) prior technology or system use”. Satisfaction serves as an external variable that controls intention to use and usage behaviour. According to the literature, user satisfaction has been measured indirectly through argument quality, system quality and other variables (Wang and Liao, 2008). The IS literature suggests that user satisfaction can be applied to research concerning e-WOM (Cheung and Lee, 2009) and online communities (Tiwana and Bush, 2005; Jin, Lee and Cheung, 2010; Jin et al., 2010; Ruth, 2012; Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008; Hashim, 2012). This study treats satisfaction as a major construct.

3.5.4. IS continuance

IS use is often viewed as the means to the end of system use, according to Bhattacharjee (2001), who studied users’ intention to continue using an online banking system. However, Karahanna and Straub (1999) show that the behavioural intention of IT usage can be treated as a dependent variable in empirical studies of both adoption and continuance. More recently, Jin et al. (2010) found that intention to continue using IS and its actual continued use could be integrated together as the main factors in the context of online information. Hence, in the present research, continuance intention would be an appropriate predictor of members’ usage behaviour from adoption to the usage stage. Thus, it was decided to employ IS continuance behaviour as an outcome of behavioural intention, since the link between intention to use and usage is well established and either variable may be used (DeLone and McLean, 2003). Moreover, intention to use is a strong predictor of actual usage (Venkatesh et al., 2003), so in some contexts, where there are difficulties in interpreting aspects of use, DeLone and McLean (2003) suggest intention to use as an alternative measure.

Theories of continuance behaviour have also been used in conjunction with OCs in general and in the context of e-WOM in particular. While these latter studies are of particular relevance to the current study, a review of the former would also be of value in contributing to the understanding of its application to the current thesis. Only two such studies set in the context of the present study, the Middle East, are seen as directly relevant to the topic of this study: one on the continued use of online shopping and gender

differences in Saudi Arabia (Al-Maghrabi, Dennis and Halliday, 2011) and the other on continued participation in Facebook in Jordan (Al-Lozi, 2011).

In one of the few studies set in Saudi Arabia, Al-Maghrabi and Dennis (2010) investigated the continuance intention of women in e-shopping in Saudi Arabia. They found that the strongest predictor was enjoyment, followed by perceived usefulness and subjective norms, which varied among the three regions (western, eastern, central) of Saudi Arabia. They argue that enjoyment has the strongest direct effect on e-shopping continuance intention, which means that women in Saudi Arabia view e-shopping as a form of enjoyment and leisure. In addition, they found that site quality, trust and subjective norms had different levels of influence on continuance intention in the three regions.

The following year, Al-Maghrabi, Dennis and Halliday (2011) used an online survey to examine the intention to continue e-shopping of 465 respondents in Saudi Arabia, 68.8% of whom were women. They developed a conceptual framework based on TAM and ECT. As in the 2010 study, the results showed that enjoyment was the strongest predictor of e-shopping continuance intention, followed by perceived usefulness, then subjective norms. In addition, this study found that age tended to have an impact on e-shopping continuance behaviour. For example, younger respondents tended to be influenced by trust more than older respondents and they also tended to be influenced by subjective norms when shopping online.

Al-Lozi (2011) used an online survey to examine the intentions of 315 respondents in Jordan to participate in Facebook. She developed a conceptual framework based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), ECT and Hofstede's culture model. The results showed that perceived behavioural control (facilitating conditions, controllability), personal attitude (satisfaction, compatibility) and other factors (subjective norms, critical mass, compliance, informational influences) all significantly affected members' intentions to continue participating in the Facebook OC. The author concludes that content analysis or textual analysis of online conversations, comments and chat should be the methods of analysis in future research in other geographic contexts among certain social groups within OCs, to investigate in depth their continuance behaviour.

3.6. Post adoption and e-WOM

In general, previous studies have examined e-WOM adoption and acceptance in online communities (Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008; Fong and Burton, 2006). This section reviews the sparse literature on studies taking e-WOM as one of their main dependent variables.

Jin et al. (2010) investigated factors contributing to e-WOM continuance on online platforms in China. In particular, they examined the role of multiple commitments, using Bhattacharjee's IS continuance intention construct with a commitment theory construct and IAM determinants (argument quality and source credibility) to investigate continued usage of information in OCs. A total of 456 users participated in an online survey. The findings showed that affective and normative commitments contributed to e-WOM continuance intention. The authors conclude that future research into continuance behaviour should consider other factors.

Chen, Yen and Hwang (2012) conducted a study in Taiwan to examine the role of e-WOM as a factor determining continued participation in Web 2.0. A sample of 409 users of OCs took part in an online survey. The authors developed a framework based on ECT and various social factors (e-WOM, image, social norms and critical mass) taken from the literature. They identified a strong relationship between e-WOM and an individual's intention to continue using Web 2.0. In common with other studies, it was demonstrated that satisfaction had a significant influence on the continuance intention of Web 2.0 users. A major criticism of this work is that all of the data were collected in a single region, thus limiting the validity of any generalization of the findings. The authors recommend that further research should therefore be done in different regions.

Wang and Lin (2010) examined the intention to continue using an online discussion forum at a Taiwanese university. They identify a need to examine the role of continuance behaviour and e-WOM use as outcomes of satisfaction. They extend the ECT model by integrating it with multidimensional value constructs from earlier studies such as information quality value, system quality value, social value, perceived sacrifice and emotional value. Their results indicate that the more satisfied users are with an online forum community, the more they will spread positive WOM and continue using the forum. This study highlights the roles of positive e-WOM and continuance behaviour as outcomes of satisfaction.

3.7. The Knowledge Contribution Model

Ma and Agarwal (2007) developed a theoretical framework to investigate the contribution of knowledge within an OC, the Knowledge Contribution Model, as illustrated in Figure 3.3. Two of the factors contributing to the KCM are relevant to the present research and are incorporated into the model proposed in this thesis: offline activities and information need fulfillment. Before discussing these, it is worth considering those elements of the model which are not appropriate to the present study and the reasons for their exclusion from it.

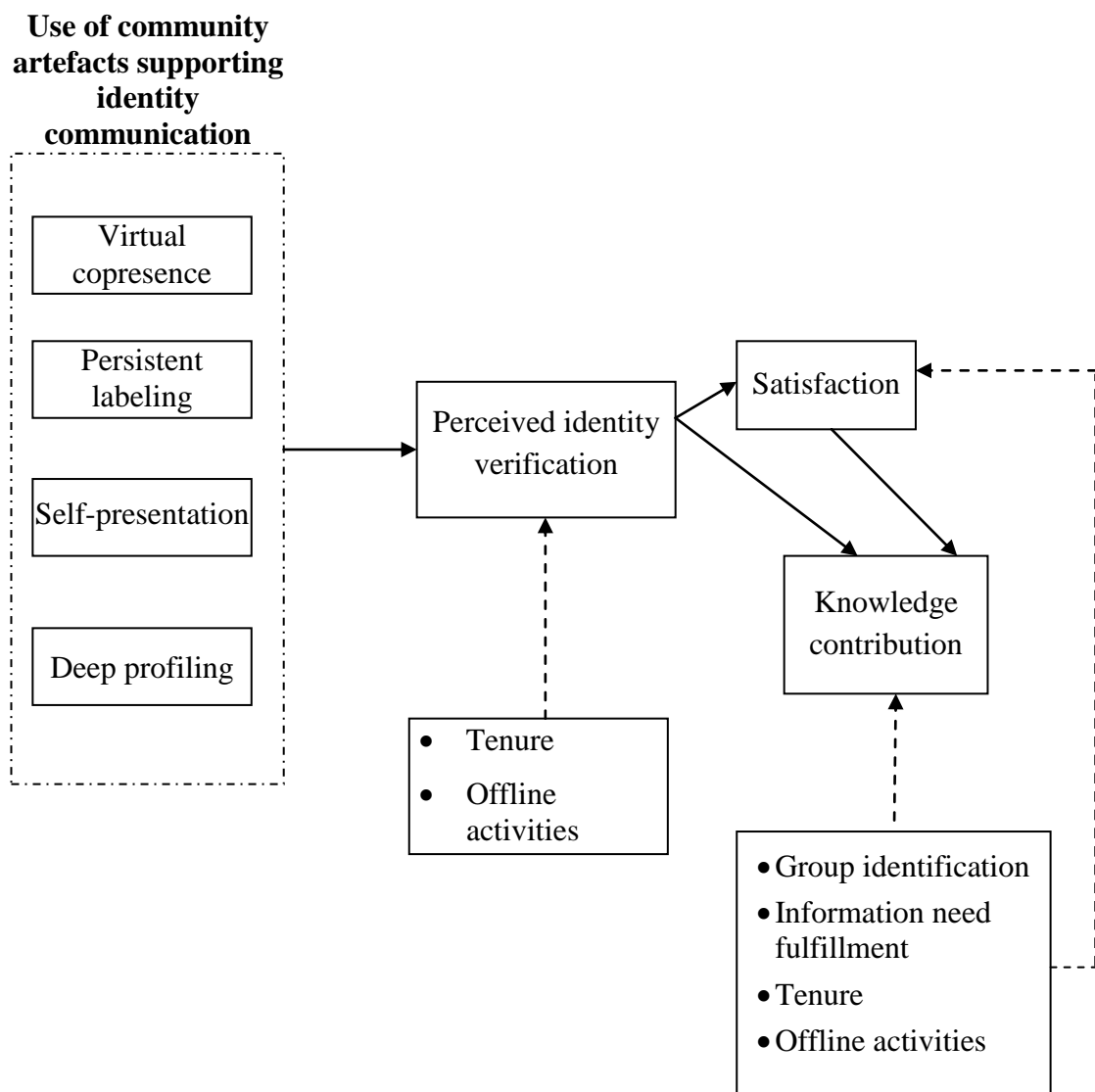


Figure 2.5: Knowledge contribution model

3.7.1. Identity Verification

According to Ma and Agarwal (2007), to identify oneself is to answer the question “Who am I?” It reflects the need to express and present one’s identity to others with the goal of

achieving a shared understanding. They predict that effective identity verification facilitates and promotes knowledge contribution. They define it as “perceived confirmation from other member of a focal person’s beliefs about his identities”. This construct was excluded from the conceptual framework because the motive of this research is to explore e-WOM adoption, without any indication of members’ identity verification.

3.7.2. Community IT Artefacts

The IT artefact construct comprises four elements: virtual copresence, persistent labelling, self-presentation and deep profiling. According to Ma and Agarwal (2007), virtual copresence “induces a subjective feeling of being together with others in a virtual community”. In an instant messaging chat room, it includes knowing who is online, who is doing what, and interactive tools such as real-time posting. Persistent labelling means “the use of a single label to present identity (e.g., user id)” (ibid). The third element, self-presentation, is “the means by which the focal person presents herself online (e.g., user name, signature, avatar or nickname, profile, personal page, and interactive tool)” (ibid). The last element is deep profiling, which can be defined as “the digital organization of social information with which community members can identify the focal person” (ibid). Examples are member directories, reputation or ranking that allows users to rate each other based on criteria such as trustworthiness, feedback, who-did-what features, interaction archives and searching tools. Ma and Agarwal (2007) propose that these features support identity and reduce attribution differences. This study excludes these IT variables because it is not concerned with the role of technology in e-WOM adoption.

3.7.3. Satisfaction

Satisfaction represents the second path in the study by Ma and Agarwal (2007), who define it as “whether a member is content with his access to the community resources”. They suggest that people tend to be more satisfied with a group with which they identify (favouring in-group over out-group members), which subsequently may influence knowledge contribution. This research excludes the KCM interpretation of satisfaction and adopts the variable as it appears in the ISCM, because KCM predicts that it may influence knowledge contribution, whereas in this research, we predict that satisfaction may influence e-WOM adoption in an OC.

3.7.4. Control variables

The KCM includes four main control variables: community tenure, offline activities, group identification and information need fulfilment. Community tenure is the length of time for which a person has been a member of the OC; group identification means how the member feels about criticism of the community and its success. The framework adopted in this research excludes group identification and community tenure because its main motive is to investigate factors affecting e-WOM adoption and online behavioural roles. Thus, it excludes these two factors but includes information need fulfilment and offline activities, each of which is now explained separately.

3.7.4.1. *Offline activities*

Ma and Agarwal (2007) define offline activities as contact outside the OC, such as phone calls or face-to-face meetings. They state that such activities may be positively related to perceived identity verification and to knowledge contribution in the OC. Thus, this research considers it crucial to examine the effect of this factor on e-WOM adoption. Balasubramanian and Sridhar (2001) found that personal relationships and one-to-one interaction, either by phone or face to face, existed outside the virtual community; respondents communicated with OC members by phone and in person, or by email outside the community. The authors assert that such offsite communication is an important aspect of any type of OC; it strengthens the relationship-building process within virtual communities and therefore influences the use of the OC by its membership. Relationships existing through offline communication may be broadened to appear also in online communication patterns, especially among females in conservative societies such as those of the GCC countries, who are separated from their male counterparts, even online, participating in female-only online bulletin boards (Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010).

Offline activities include contacting other members of the OC by phone, meeting them individually or participating in offline community meetings with other members (Koh, Kim and Kim, 2003). This variable is therefore considered within our current research model in order to assess whether and how members communicate outside the OC and how this contributes to the effectiveness of e-WOM within it in the GCC context, where the offline and online worlds may interact (Al-Saggaf, 2004; Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010).

3.7.4.2. Information need fulfilment

A second variable identified by Ma and Agarwal (2007) as possibly influencing the contribution of knowledge within OCs is known as ‘information need fulfilment’. They suggest that when “individuals fulfil their information needs, they are more likely to reciprocate others’ favour by contributing knowledge” (Ma and Agarwal, 2007, p. 52). Sharif and Al-Kandari (2010) conclude that the ways in which females fulfil needs should be explored, to explain the use of online bulletin board communities. Thus, this research includes this variable in order to understand needs in the OC context.

3.8. Rationale for selecting IAM, ISCM and KCM

Although many studies have been conducted to investigate the e-WOM phenomenon, there are still gaps in the literature which need to be filled. For example, few studies have investigated e-WOM adoption in the Middle Eastern context, as discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, studies conducted by previous researchers focused only on certain aspect of e-WOM adoption, and the variables used in those studies were segmented in nature. The model proposed in this study is an integrative one derived from three separate models found in literature related to OCs and e-WOM: Sussman and Siegal (2003) explored information adoption in an organizational OC; Bhattacharjee (2001) explored satisfaction and its relation to intention to use IS; and Ma and Agarwal (2007) examined the effect of variables such as offline activities and information need fulfilment on knowledge contribution in two OCs. One contribution of the present study is that it combines elements of these three separate models in one coherent conceptual framework.

In brief, this study integrates three existing models, each having value in understanding e-WOM behaviour. A combined model is proposed in order to draw upon variables from a number of research models and thus to facilitate the construction of a more comprehensive model which is illustrative of e-WOM behaviour within OCs. The two main component models, discussed in detail in sections 3.4 and 3.5, are IAM (Sussman and Siegal, 2003) and ISCM (Bhattacharjee, 2001), augmented by two elements of KCM (Ma and Agarwal, 2007) which were not included in previous OC models, i.e. offline activities and information need fulfilment. This section considers the reasons for choosing each of these models and for combining them.

The first factor in favour of using IAM is that it overcomes the weakness of other adoption models in examining the complex influence process. Adoption models such as TAM constitute a useful first step in understanding intention to adopt a technology, but such models were not designed to explain the influence process. Thus, the central strength of IAM is in integrating alternative models such as ELM with TAM to facilitate the investigation of important effects of this complex adoption process and to understand the process by which individuals are influenced by the messages that they receive, which is an important aspect of this research in identifying the critical elements of e-WOM adoption. Second, this framework offers a theoretically grounded approach to the complex problem facing IS researchers, which is information or advice adoption transfer. Lastly, it focuses on the adoption of information rather than of technology, making it suitable to help to understand e-WOM adoption in this research.

It introduces factors that are crucial in understanding message characteristics such as argument quality and communicator characteristics such as source credibility, in addition to information usefulness. This would help to answer the sub-question RQB: *What are the message characteristics that influence females to adopt e-WOM?* Involving the IAM factors, in particular argument quality, would illustrate the main elements of message characteristics that would affect e-WOM adoption. The other factors—source credibility, information usefulness and receiver involvement—would help to answer the main research question: *What are the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the beauty industry context in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia?*

ISCM is suitable for such integration, first because it explains continuance behaviour, which is a temporally and conceptually distinct—and possibly incongruent—phase of IS use, and because it explains the importance of the perceived usefulness of the IS. Moreover, perceived usefulness is an adequate expectation in the IS continuance context, because it is the only belief that has been demonstrated to influence user intention consistently across the temporal stages of IS use. Incorporating ISCM would thus help to explain why members return to the OC and continue to use e-WOM. Moreover, ISCM has been integrated in with IAM, more specifically satisfaction. It will provide better explanatory power when examining the determinants of e-WOM adoption. This factor in particular would help the researcher to determine if satisfaction plays a role in e-WOM adoption, which would again help to answer the main research question (RQ1) concerning

the key determinants of e-WOM adoption. The IS literature suggests that user satisfaction can be applied to research concerning e-WOM (Cheung and Lee, 2009). This study treats satisfaction as a major construct: “user satisfaction will lead to increased intention to use, and thus use” (DeLone and McLean, 2003:23).

The rationale for including two factors from a third model, KCM, i.e. offline activities and information need fulfilment, is that they have the following unique characteristics: they explain the relations between offline activities and the online world; they include the concept of information need fulfilment, which has the ability to predict knowledge contribution in an online community; and they allow the development of a theoretical model containing factors which are critical in explaining knowledge contribution in an OC. Offline activities were found to be positively related to knowledge contribution in two OCs, which is similar to sharing ideas and information (Ma and Agarwal, 2007). Thus, the framework of this research incorporates this factor to investigate its possible role in e-WOM adoption. Offline relationship-building is a process within a virtual community which influences the use of the OC by its members. Therefore, it will be considered within our current research model in order to help further in answering the main research question about the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the beauty industry context, where the offline and online worlds may interact (Al-Saggaf, 2004; Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010). The justification for including the second factor, information need fulfilment, is that females’ needs should be explored in particular, to explain the use of online bulletin board communities, according to Sharif and Al-Kandari (2010).

This research study therefore proposes a composite model designed to explain e-WOM adoption by examining information usefulness, which in turn is determined by either source credibility or e-WOM quality, with the mediating (moderating) role of receiver involvement. Since the aim of this research is to identify the determinants of e-WOM adoption in an online beauty context, the direct role of satisfaction and the moderating roles of offline activities and information needs will also be examined. This study thus aims to integrate three models to create a new framework offering a more comprehensive view of the most important factors that drive adoption of e-WOM among members of OCs. The proposed framework, shown in Figure 3.4, incorporates the elements from the existing models as indicated.

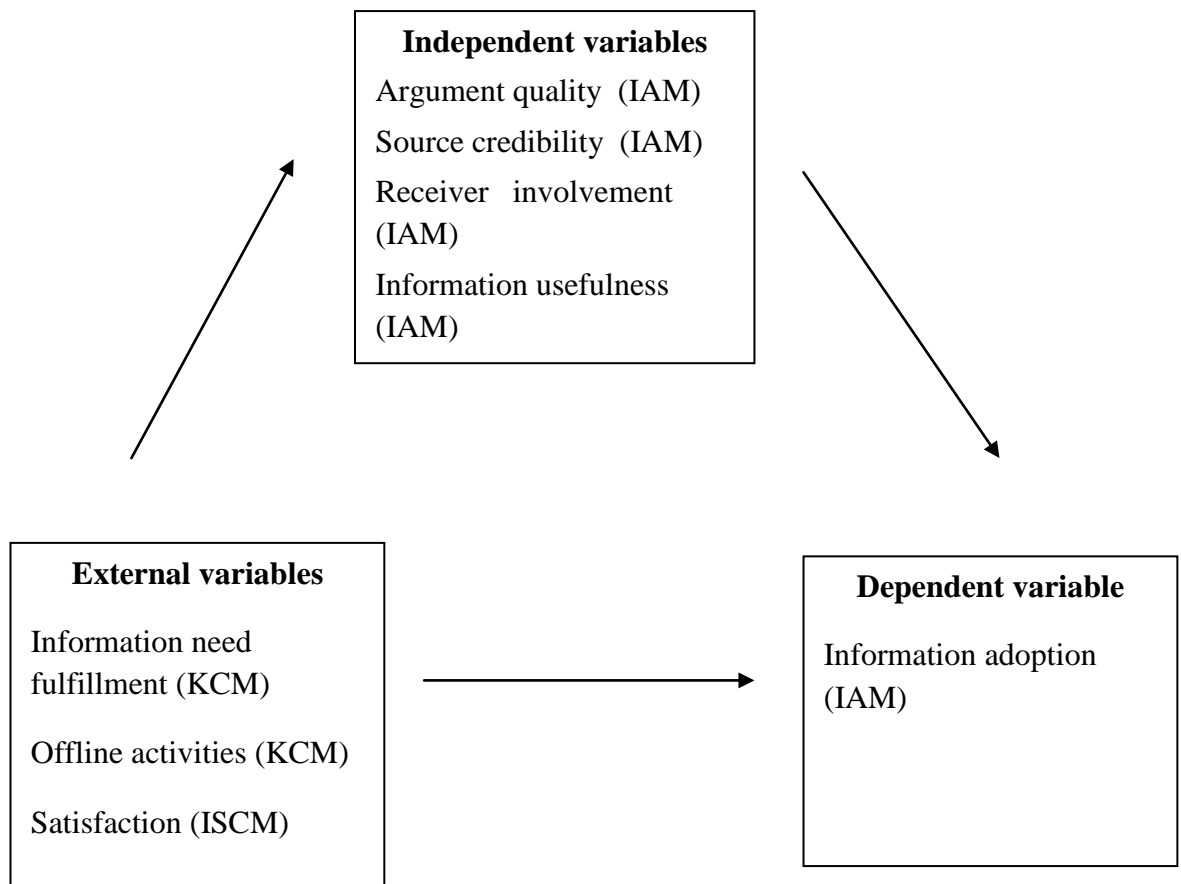


Figure 3.4: The proposed conceptual model

The model thus incorporates five factors from IAM: argument quality, source credibility, receiver involvement, information usefulness and information adoption. Sussman and Siegel (2003) define these as follows: argument quality is “the persuasive strength of arguments embedded in informational messages”; source credibility denotes “a message recipient’s perception of the credibility of a message source, reflecting nothing about the message itself”; receiver involvement means “how involved a person is in the topic”; information usefulness refers to “the perception of an individual that using new technology will improve his/her performance”; and information adoption signifies “a potential user’s adoption towards informational content of the message”. The first four factors are intended to answer the main research question about the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, while the argument quality factor will help to answer the sub-question about the message characteristics that influence females to adopt e-WOM.

In order to extend the current understanding of the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the framework takes from ISCM the construct of satisfaction, which Bhattacharjee (2001) defines as “users’ affect with (feelings about) prior technology

or system use”. This improves the ability of our framework to predict other variables likely to affect e-WOM adoption, especially as few studies have investigated the correlations among factors such as satisfaction and e-WOM adoption. This also facilitates the exploration of their relative antecedents in the context of OCs, where the ISCM has been tested empirically (Chen, Yen and Hwang, 2012).

Finally, the proposed conceptual model incorporates two constructs from the KCM: offline activities and information need fulfilment. According to Ma and Agarwal (2007), offline activities are “any activities that occur outside the online community, such as one-to-one interaction, either by phone or face-to-face”, while information need fulfilment refers to “any activities that deal with getting information, learning new things, solving problems and making decisions”. This helps the model to predict the determinants of e-WOM adoption in a female OC, especially since other researchers have emphasised the need to build new models in online contexts. Preece and Maloney-Krichmar (2005) suggest that researchers taking an OC perspective should build their own theories, while no particular theory or set of theories currently dominates OC research. In particular, researchers are strongly recommended to start building their own theories for e-WOM phenomena, because this area is young and has grown rapidly in recent years (Cheung and Thadani, 2010). This concludes the justification for this study to develop its own specific model to investigate e-WOM adoption behaviour in female OCs in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Such a model is thus suited to answering the first research sub-question (RQA) about the similarities and differences between Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian culture in terms of e-WOM determinants.

3.9. Summary

This chapter has explained how the conceptual framework of the present study was derived from the synthesis of two existing models and their associated constructs: the IAM (argument quality, source credibility, receiver involvement and usefulness) and the ISCM (satisfaction and IS usage continuance intention). Elements were then added from the KCM (offline activities and information need fulfilment). The next chapter discusses the research methodology and research design adopted to advance the understanding of what determines e-WOM adoption by members of the two OCs under investigation.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter explained how the conceptual model for this study was developed on the basis of previous models. The purpose of this chapter is fourfold: to describe the research methodology, to explain the selection of the sample, to describe the procedures used in designing the instruments and collecting the data, and to provide an explanation of the procedures used to analyse the data. It discusses what methods are the most appropriate, given the aims and nature of the research. It begins by addressing ontological and epistemological matters, then explains the research strategy. Next it considers the two phases of the research design, as both affect how the research questions are addressed. Different methods of data collection are discussed, focusing on the reasons for choosing particular methods over others. This is followed by a discussion of the practicalities of how the data collection was conducted and of the approaches taken to data analysis.

4.2. Philosophical Perspective: Interpretive Paradigm

Many researchers (e.g. Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991; Walsham, 1993; 1995; Myers and Avison, 2002) have discussed the positivist, interpretive and critical research paradigms in relation to the IS discipline. A research paradigm can be defined as the set of beliefs that guide the researcher's actions and activities (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Based on the work of Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) and of Guba and Lincoln (1994), three sets of underlying beliefs can be identified as important in defining a paradigm. This research adopts the interpretive research paradigm, but before addressing the rationale for this choice, it is worth summarising the main features of the other two paradigms as applied to IS research. Positivist research is concerned with the existence of a priori fixed relationships within phenomena. It serves primarily to test a theory, in an attempt to increase predictive understanding. The positivist researcher should take a value-free position and employ objective measurement to collect evidence (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991). *Methodologically*, positivists contend that a quantitative method such as the survey is a typical and appropriate way to test hypothetic-deductive theory. *Ontologically*, positivists believe that reality exists objectively and independently of human experience (Chen and Hirschheim, 2004). The second alternative is critical research, which aims to

critique the status quo through the exposure of what are believed to be deep-seated, structural contradictions within social systems (Myers and Avison, 2002).

According to Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), the researcher must consider the research question and the nature of the phenomenon when choosing between the interpretive and positivist paradigms; the choice of the interpretive paradigm for the present research was made in this way. In other words, this research has been influenced by rational considerations about the nature of the problem to be investigated and the answers being sought. The present study investigates the characteristics of beauty forum messages that influence the adoption of e-WOM; it seeks to identify the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the beauty context, to examine the current situation in terms of the classification of online role behaviours in beauty forums in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and to determine the effects of demographic variables. These questions cannot be answered without understanding the interactions among female OC members, which requires an interpretive understanding of the human and social interactions by which the subjective meaning of the reality is constructed (Walsham, 1995). Thus, interpretive research seems to be a suitable way of investigating how interactions take place in real social settings from the participants' perspective, making it appropriate for generating interpretive knowledge (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991).

For the purposes of the research reported in this thesis, the interpretive paradigm has therefore been selected as embodying the appropriate underlying assumptions. The detailed reasons for this choice are fourfold. First, interpretivism is well established and becoming more important in the IS field (Walsham, 2006). The second factor is the close involvement of the researcher with the phenomenon under investigation (Walsham, 1995), particularly her close contact with participants as a member of an online forum. The third is the desire to understand individuals' and groups' lived experience of their reality in the lifeworld (Smith and Osborn, 2003). Specifically, the researcher wished to identify the experience of e-WOM adoption, in particular the message characteristics in the textual conversations in a female-only online group. Finally, the interpretive researcher's role is to explore in detail how participants make sense of their personal and social worlds, meanings, particular experiences, languages and events (Sandberg, 2005).

The present researcher's role was to investigate in depth how participants adopt e-WOM in an online beauty forum, by using content analysis to interpret their language. The

interpretive paradigm is appropriate here because this research seeks an understanding of the meaning embedded in human and social interactions and embodied in this case in their textual conversations, by examining how these interactions take place among OC members. Having established the reasons for selecting the interpretive paradigm, the discussion turns to the broad (two-phase) research design adopted, in order to justify its relevance to this research.

4.3. Two-phase research design

Previous researchers whose work is reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 have mainly used the online survey method to investigate the adoption and post-adoption of e-WOM. Since the aim of this research is to investigate factors affecting e-WOM adoption in female Arabic-speaking online communities, this design would be unsuitable, because of the lack of the necessary literature on e-WOM adoption in the Middle East and more specifically in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, El-Said (2006) suggests that when researchers investigate unexplored cultures where little is known about web users' attitudes, such as in the Arab context, it may not be appropriate to begin with an online survey. In particular, an online survey design will tend to rely on a range of questions originally set for use in other contexts, which may therefore not be appropriate in the new context. A better appreciation of e-WOM adoption may be gained by other methods. This study adopts a two-phase design, whose advantage, according to Creswell et al. (2003), is that the findings of one method are used to elaborate on or expand those of the other method.

The study thus began with a pilot study of content analysis in order to gain more knowledge of the main factors determinants of e-WOM adoption in female OCs in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, from which a conceptual model could be developed. It investigated the characteristics of the messages influencing the adoption of e-WOM. In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were used to explore in greater depth the participants' experiences, opinion and feeling regarding the phenomenon under investigation, helping the researcher to gain a better understanding and explanation of behaviour from the participants' own words (Matthews and Ross, 2010). In particular, it would help to show the similarities and differences in terms of e-WOM determinants between Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabia culture by refining the research model codes and sub-codes. In addition, it would answer research questions on the current situation in terms of online role behaviours in female beauty online forums in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia; on how online behavioural

roles influence females to adopt e-WOM; and on the role in e-WOM adoption of the following demographic variables: nationality, age, marital status, employment, education level, hours spent in the community and length of community membership.

Table 4.1 outlines the two-phase research design, then section 4.4 justifies the research strategy and approach taken.

Table 4.1: Research design

Phase	Research Questions
Phase one: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot study - Content analysis of 90 threads • Content analysis of the two cases (discussed in detail in Chapter 5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the beauty industry context? • What are the message characteristics that influence the adoption of e-WOM?
Phase two: Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the similarities and differences in terms of e-WOM determinants between Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian culture? • What is the current classification of online role behaviour in female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia?

4.4. Research strategy and approach

4.4.1. Case study methodology

Cavaye (1996) argues that case study research can be conducted in very many different ways: the researcher can take a positivist or interpretive stance, can follow a deductive or inductive approach, can use qualitative and/or quantitative methods and can investigate one or multiple cases. In other words, a case study can be a highly structured, positivist, deductive investigation of multiple cases; alternatively, it can be an unstructured, interpretive, inductive investigation of a single case; or indeed, it can take any form between these two extremes, with almost any combination of features.

Interpretive case study research has been increasingly accepted as an important strategy in IS studies (Walsham 1993; Myers and Avison, 2002; Walsham, 2006; Bygstad and Munkvold, 2011). Klein and Myers (1999) list seven principles to guide the choice by IS researchers of an interpretive case study research strategy. It was decided that the present study would be an interpretive case study conducted by an outside researcher. This

decision was made for three main reasons. First, Walsham (1995) argues that the researcher in an interpretive case study can be an “outside observer”. Here, the informants were the primary data source, since it was through content analysis of the online forum that the researcher could best access the interpretations of the primary data, viz. the participants’ textual conversations which had taken or were taking place, and the views and aspirations of the informants and other participants. Similarly, Sproull and Arriaga (2007) affirm that researchers in OCs can adopt the outsider role if they want to extract records of online behaviour or attitudes for a study outside the community context. Finally, insider research usually takes the form of longitudinal and interpretive case studies (Bygstad and Munkvold, 2011), whereas this researcher was an outsider in an interpretive case study.

4.4.2. Multiple case studies

According to Benbasat, Goldstein and Mead (1987), a case study can be either single or multiple. A single case study is most useful at the outset of theory generation and late in theory testing; it is often used in the exploratory phase of a multiple-case study and it may also be used to test the boundaries of a well-formed theory. On the other hand, multiple-case designs are desirable when the intent of the research is description, theory building or theory testing. In addition, multiple cases yield more general research. A multi-case study asks what is most important for understanding the phenomenon. It may focus on the binding concept or idea that holds the cases together. It is a conceptual infrastructure for building the study.

The multi-case approach was adopted here because an important function of such studies is to examine how a phenomenon performs in different environments, by analysing multiple cases or opportunities to study it. Therefore, one of the most important tasks for the multi-case researcher is to show how the phenomenon appears in different contexts. The more qualitative the study is, the more emphasis will be placed on the experience of people with the phenomenon.

4.4.3. Qualitative research approach

Qualitative research is often associated with interpretivism (Goldhul, 2012). Indeed, Trauth (2000) argues that interpretivism is the paradigm most frequently adopted in qualitative research. There are three main reasons for selecting the qualitative approach for this research. First, it is suited to uncovering the unexpected and exploring new avenues

(Marshall and Rossman, 1999). This research can be categorised as doing this and as investigating a new phenomenon, since studies of online communities in GCC countries are scarce (Sharif and Alkandari, 2010). Secondly, qualitative research is a means of exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). This research seeks to investigate the impact of e-WOM adoption among groups of women in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which involves the exploration of such meanings. Finally, the strength of qualitative research lies in uncovering facts about people's experiences and norms, and in asking why things are the way they are. As it studies small groups, it can be less expensive than quantitative research, which may require large groups of participants or expensive measurement tools (Creswell, 2009). The present research does just this, exploring e-WOM in its natural setting of women's posts on an online bulletin board.

Bryman (2006) summarises the major features of qualitative research as follows: the role of theory is the inductive generation of theory and the epistemological orientation is interpretivism. In accordance with this analysis, the basic strategy of this research is qualitative and inductive, with the purpose of theory generation. The freedom of choice of methods is referred to by Creswell (2003:12) as a "pragmatic knowledge claim", by which researchers can choose methods, techniques and research procedures to suit their purposes. Thus, the following section discusses the mixed methods approach taken in this research.

For the reasons outlined above, this research adopts a qualitative approach, combining content analysis with semi-structured online interviews as data collection tools. The interview method was used during the second phase to fulfil five objectives: 1) to understand the current situation regarding online role behaviours in female-only online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, in order to evaluate online participation patterns and their influence on e-WOM adoption; 2) to understand how online behavioural roles influence females to adopt e-WOM; 3) to examine the effect on e-WOM adoption of demographic variables such as nationality, age, marital status, employment, education level, time spent in the forum and length of membership of the community; 4) to identify any barriers to e-WOM adoption; and 5) to refine the existing constructs and relationships of the research model developed during the first phase (content analysis) to fit this specific context.

Most prior research into online communities has used the survey method (e.g. Jin, Lee and Cheung, 2010; Shi et al., 2010; He and Wei, 2009; Wang and Lin, 2010; Chen, Yen and

Hwang, 2012; Jin et al., 2010; Kang et al., 2013; Chen, 2007; Zhao and Stylianou, 2012; Barnes, 2011; Hashim, Tan and Andrade, 2012; Cheung, Lee and Chen, 2009; Cheung and Zheng, 2009; Shi et al., 2010; Huang, Hsiao and Chuang, 2009; Ham et al., 2012; Sheng, Lin and Tsai, 2005). Other researchers have adopted various mixed methodologies: online survey and focus group (e.g. Al-Lozi, 2011), online survey and online experiment (e.g. Dolen, Dabholkar and Ruyter, 2007), or online survey and online observation (e.g. Tiwana and Bush, 2005). Finally, content analysis has been used, especially in e-WOM research (e.g. Fong and Burton, 2006; Fong and Burton, 2008). Most of these scholars used a survey as their main method of data collection, while some others used content analysis of online textual material. This research did not use an online survey for the following reason. El-Said (2006) suggests that when researchers investigate unexplored cultures where little is known about web users' attitudes, such as in the Arab world, it may not be appropriate to begin with an online survey. In particular, an online survey design will tend to rely on a range of questions originally set for use in other contexts, which may therefore not be appropriate in the new context. A better appreciation of e-WOM adoption may be gained by other methods. Second, surveys are typically used to explore issues broadly, whereas interviews go more deeply into a narrower scope (Hammond and Wellington, 2013). This research pursues a deep examination of e-WOM adoption in OCs. Thus, a more appropriate choice of methods was considered to be content analysis in the first phase and semi-structured interviews in the second.

The present research has therefore chosen to follow a qualitative approach, integrating content analysis and online interviews. The following sections explain this two-phase design in more detail, setting out the methods used in each phase of data collection and the rationale for choosing them.

4.5. Phase 1: Content analysis

4.5.1. Rationale for using content analysis

While previous e-WOM and OC studies have mainly used quantitative surveys to gather data, little insight is usually gained regarding the causes of the processes behind the phenomena being investigated or described (Oates, 2006). Therefore, an additional technique would be helpful in offering a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in its

real context. In the context of the present study, content analysis is an appropriate way of investigating and evaluating e-WOM use on online platforms.

Bosh and Kahle (2005) consider content analysis suitable for the study of OCs and online forums, since bulletin boards are records of written text. Content analysis is widely used in social science and consumer research. Its advantages are its unobtrusiveness, its possible application to unstructured materials, its sensitivity to context and its ability to process large volumes of data (Krippendorff, 2004; 2012). This research deals with a large volume of online conversation in online bulletin boards in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in order to understand the characteristics of e-WOM that influence females to adopt it. Content analysis can be viewed as a comprehensive approach to data analysis, which seems to be especially suitable for case study research (Kohlbacher, 2006; Krippendorff, 2004; 2012). Here, the material shared in online forums was subjected to content analysis to obtain richer data, to draw a more comprehensive picture and to explore in detail certain aspects of e-WOM adoption by exploring the main factors that impede and facilitate it, using a case study strategy.

Content analysis can certainly contribute by enhancing rigour and deepening the understanding of the phenomenon to be studied in its real-life context (Yin, 2009), which is why it was considered suitable for this study. In particular, content analysis is the preferred technique for making valid inferences from text; it is useful to identify the intention and other characteristics of the communicators, to describe their attitudinal and behavioural responses and trends, and to reflect patterns among the groups who engage in textual conversation across time (Weber, 1990).

Thus, it is rational to use content analysis to understand e-WOM adoption, for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in its context and of recorded human communications, through studying the textual communication on discussion websites, where members hold conversations in the form of posted messages. These messages can then be viewed at any future time, allowing content analysis to be used to examine interactions, discussion and adoption intention across the study period. This is the main type of data generated by case studies such as those reported in the literature on OCs (Fullwood, Sheehan and Nicholls, 2009; Pantelidis, 2010; Al-Nashmi et al., 2010) and more specifically on e-WOM (Cheng and Zhou, 2010; Fong and Burton, 2006a; Fong and Burton, 2008; Gheorghe and Liao, 2012).

Content analysis was used here in the form of textual analysis or textual document analysis, since ‘text’ and ‘document’ are taken to include electronic sources such as the archives of OCs. The raw material of content analysis includes all non-numeric data, such as words, images and sounds, found in interview tapes, researchers’ diaries and documents on websites and the internet more generally. It is the main type of data generated by case studies. It is also the main kind of data used and analyzed by interpretive researchers (Oates, 2009). Since the present research required a complementary technique of data collection to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under examination than could be captured by a quantitative survey, content analysis was selected as appropriate, for the reasons outlined above. Actual conversations from real-life exchanges between females, interspersed by their own accounts of products and services, were therefore subjected to content analysis in order to identify the factors affecting e-WOM adoption.

4.5.2. Pilot study context

The content analysis phase began with a pilot study. The context selected for this was a female beauty bulletin board, which was chosen to meet the criteria for an OC: members have common purpose to talk about e-WOM and have ongoing and continuous interactions that facilitate the sharing of e-WOM. In addition to these characteristics, this type of online discussion board is less biased than those run by sellers, where only the seller can upload positive e-WOM and where no interaction appears between members, only between online sellers. The name of the OC is not given in this thesis, to maintain the privacy of the members and in accordance with the request of the administration of the OC for anonymity.

4.5.3. Coding and analysis procedure

The content analysis followed the process proposed by Neuendorf (2002) and Weber (1990), illustrated in Figure 4.1.

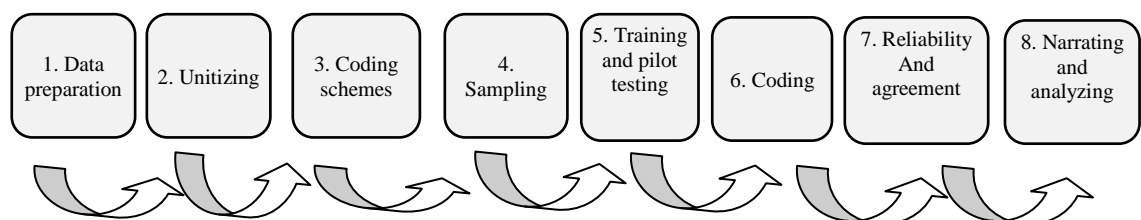


Figure 4.1: Content analysis steps

Several stages of qualitative data analysis were thus followed. The following subsections describe these successive stages.

Step 1: Preparing the data

First, all of the data obtained by sampling the discussions in the online forums were transcribed and translated into English, before being uploaded into the NVivo software, which cannot accept Arabic text. The original Arabic transcripts were kept, along with the translations, in case the coders needed to refer to them. The translation was done by the researcher and a bilingual translator, who both took care not to depart from the main context and to preserve the original meaning. However, it was found in the pilot study that some of the language stretching and the detailed meaning were lost in translation, so a decision was made to change the software to MAXQDA for the full data analysis, as explained in Step 6.

Step 2: Unitizing

The process of distinguishing the segments of the texts, images and videos that are of interest to the analysis is called unitizing (Krippendorff, 2012). According to Weber (1990), defining the coding unit is one of the most fundamental decisions the researcher must make. In this study, the units of analysis included both individual words and sentences within a message. Each sentence that represented a unit of textual analysis was taken as a text unit and coded, as was each sentence within each message. Images and emoticons were treated as sentences, except where two emoticons were found following one sentence, when the two were coded as a single text unit, because the two together would be taken by other members as having a special meaning, distinct from that of a single emoticon. These fixed units, such as single words or entire sentences, are called 'syntactical units' and were chosen to be easily recognized, so that the two coders could readily identify them.

Step 3: Coding scheme

Categories and coding schemes can be derived from two sources: either the raw data or the empirical and theoretical literature (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). The coding scheme developed for this study was based on the published work of Sussman and Siegal (2003), Bhattacharjee (2001) and Ma and Agarwal (2007). This adoption of the constructs of previous studies is an example of the deductive approach. It has the advantage of

supporting the accumulation and comparison of research findings across multiple studies.

Table 4.2 shows the main coding scheme that was thus adopted from previous models.

Table 4.2: Main coding scheme adopted from previous literature

Variable	Item	Reference
Argument quality	The message in this online community is complete	Sussman and Siegal (2003)
	The message in this online community is consistent	
	The message in this online community is accurate	
Source credibility	The member who writes the message is knowledgeable	
	The member who writes the message is expert on the message topic	
	The member who writes the message is trustworthy	
	The member who writes the message is reliable	
Information usefulness	The message in this online community is valuable	
	The message in this online community is informative	
	The message in this online community is helpful	
Receiver involvement	I am involved in the message in this online community	
	The issue discussed in this message has been in my mind lately	
Information adoption	The member closely follows the suggestion of the message writer	Sussman and Siegal (2003)
	The member reading the message is motivated to take action	
	The member agrees with the message	
Information need fulfilment	This online community helps me to find the information I need	Ma and Agarwal (2007)
	This online community helps me to solve problems	
	This online community helps me to learn new things	
	This online community helps me to make decisions	
Offline activities	I contact other members of this online community by phone to discuss e-WOM	
	I meet other members of this online community in informal offline meetings such as exhibitions	
Satisfaction	I am satisfied with using the system in this online community	Bhattacharjee (2001)
	I am happy/pleased with using the system in this online community	

Any modification or new categories emerging within the coding procedure can be called inductive (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Zhang and Wildemuth, 2007). Schreier (2012) suggests that qualitative content analysis rarely uses a coding frame that is purely concept driven or purely data driven, but that researchers most often use a third strategy, a combination of the concept-driven (deductive) and data-driven (inductive) strategies. According to Neuendorf (2002), an important point to consider when conducting content analysis is to adopt such a combined or abductive strategy, which is what was done in the present case.

Step 4: Sampling

The population of interest to this study was that of female members of online bulletin board communities. As random sampling from all OCs was impossible, a convenience sample was employed, as has been done by other researchers (Ridings, Gefen and Arinze, 2002; and Pfeil and Zaphiris, 2007).

The sample of data selected comprised a total of 1008 messages posted by 373 members of an online beauty discussion board between 1 August and 7 August 2011, during the month of Ramadan, in the week of before the Eid festival. This time of year was chosen because the festival of Eid al-Fitr, at the end of Ramadan, is an important religious holiday for people in all Muslim countries, bringing diverse communities, families and friends together. People dress in their finest clothes and want to be in beautiful shape to celebrate Eid al-Fitr. Thus it was considered likely that users of online beauty forums would be particularly likely to ask questions about beauty and more willing to adopt e-WOM at this time, in order to be as beautiful as possible during the Eid festival. Table 4.3 shows the number of comments posted on the discussion board during Ramadan in three successive years: 2010, 2011 and 2012.

Table 4.3: Number of messages posted each year during Ramadan

2010	2011	2012
4500	5040	4975

In fact, the chosen period yielded a number of messages large enough for a meaningful analysis. The number of messages per day was generally fairly stable over the sampling period. The sample is considered practically comprehensive and closely representative of the population of interest, while still being of a manageable size. Each consecutive sentence within the message was taken as one text unit and coded with a single code. This ensured that the coding captured the necessary detail, while the data was still seen in its context.

Step 5: Coder selection / training and pilot study

The second coder was recruited according to three criteria: gender, language and education. Since the online forum was dedicated to females only, a female coder was selected. The discussions sampled, which involved the topic of beauty, were in Arabic and were translated into English, so the coder also had to have Arabic as her native language, as well as being familiar with English. Finally, she had to meet the criterion of having an adequate general level of education. The person chosen was a PhD student of linguistics who, like the researcher, was fluent in both Arabic and English. She expressed her willingness to work in pilot study coding and was trained to familiarize her with the coding framework as part of the trial coding stage of the pilot study. She looked at similar online

forums in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to familiarise herself with their content and with the nature of the textual conversation typical of such forums.

The pilot study was important to identify any shortcomings of the coding framework at an early stage, while also allowing the coder working with the researcher to familiarize herself with the coding framework. The pilot study phase consisted of three stages. First, the coding framework was applied to part of the text, proceeding exactly as the researcher intended to do during the main study. After the coder had familiarized herself with the categories of the research framework, each coder worked separately and independently, coding blind of each other and making their decisions on the main transcript of the discussions.

The two coders were given the same pilot study transcripts of the discussions in order to verify that they would code the discussions (messages) in substantially the same manner. Then the researcher and the second coder made a note of any category that later emerged from the raw data or any sentence that would not fit into the previous coding schemes (Schreier, 2012).

The second stage was to check the consistency of the two coders, who worked together to agree or disagree on the main categories and to resolve issues arising during the coding process, such as any categories that emerged from the discussions or messages. They compared the two samples of discussions for consistency of the main categories, as discussed below under step 7 (reliability). The last stage was to make adjustments to the framework. Here, the two coders modified the categories and labelled those which emerged; in other words, they followed an inductive approach. Based on the content analysis, the coding framework was further modified to resolve any inconsistencies and other categories that emerged. The coders discussed their differences to see whether coding errors had occurred or whether they could reach consensus on a basis for judgment of the emergent categories. Most of the coding categories were unchanged, except that some modifications were made to some sub-categories, as presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Final coding scheme

Coding category	Sub-categories	Sources
Argument quality (IAM)	E-WOM is accurate	IAM (Sussman and Siegal, 2003)
	Neutral	Inductive: Emerged from pilot study
	1 (General advice on using products or services)	
	2 (Price)	
	3 (Location)	
	4 (How to use products)	
	5 (Contact information)	
	6 (Description of products or services)	
	Positive	
	1 (Product or service is amazing)	
2 (Product or service is very amazing)		
3 (Product or service is very very very amazing)		
4 (Product or service is amaziiiiing)		
5 (Product or service is amaziiiiing)		
Negative	Inductive: Emerged from pilot study	
1 (Product or service is bad)		
2 (Product or service is very bad)		
3 (Product or service is very very very bad)		
4 (Product or service is baaaaad)		
5 (Product or service is very baaaaaad)		
Complete		IAM (Sussman and Siegal, 2003)
Not accurate		Inductive: Emerged from pilot study
Quotes		
Source credibility (IAM)		Member as knowledgeable
	Not knowledgeable	Emerged from pilot study
	Member as expert	Deductive: IAM (Sussman and Siegal, 2003)
	Members as trustworthy	
	Not trustworthy	Inductive: Emerged from pilot study
Member as reliable	IAM (Sussman and Siegal (2003)	
E-WOM usefulness (IAM)	Valuable	IAM (Sussman and Siegal, 2003)
	Informative	
	Beneficial (helpful)	
E-WOM adoption (IAM)	The member closely follows the e-WOM of the posts	IAM (Sussman and Siegal, 2003)
	The member who read the message agrees with the e-WOM	
	The member who read thee-WOM is motivated to take action	
Receiver involvement (IAM)	Involvement in issue	Sussman and Siegal (2003)
	Pushing up the topic to the top of the thread	Emerged from pilot study
	Issue in mind lately	Sussman and Siegal (2003)
Information need fulfilment (KCM)	Find e-WOM	Ma and Agarwal (2007)
	Learn new things	
	Solve problems	
	Make decisions	
Offline activities (KCM)	Contact by phone	Ma and Agarwal (2007)
	Contact at exhibitions	
Community bonding	Links	Inductive: Emerged from pilot study
	Emoticons	
	Photos	
	Greetings	
	Thanks	
	Luck	
	Jokes	
	Emotional feelings	
	Online activities	
	Religious expressions	
Satisfaction		Deductive: ISCM (Bhattacharjee, 2001)

A new category named ‘community bonding’ emerged from content analysis, by the following process. All textual postings that did not fit into the main category codes were gathered and revised by the two coders, who then discussed the development of a new main category and its applicability to these textual postings. They identified 10 sub-codes under the community bonding category, as listed in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: The ‘community bonding’ category emerging from pilot content analysis

Community bonding	Any activities within the community that show how members are supportive of each other
Greetings	Any text units that indicate greeting and welcoming the members of the community
Emoticons	Any text units that indicate face or text emoticons
Religion	Any text units that indicate religious blessing or prayers
Thanks	Any text units that indicate gratitude to another member for help or giving e-WOM, support and understanding.
Luck	Any text units that indicate casual blessing and wishes for other community members
Links	Any text units that indicate internal or external e-WOM links, i.e. within or outside the community
Photos	Any text units that indicate a photo or image related to e-WOM
Jokes	Any text units that indicate or contain jokes or convey a sense of humour
Online activities	Any text units that indicate any online communication channel such as private messages between the members of the OC
Emotional feelings	Any text units that indicate an emotional experience while providing or asking for e-WOM

Step 6: Coding procedure

After producing the final draft of the coding framework, the researcher entered the coding data into NVivo in order to assess the validity and reliability of the two coders. The most important reason for using computer software in this study was its ability to process large volumes of data at high speed (Krippendorff, 2004; 2012). However, as noted above, a disadvantage of the NVivo software is that it cannot be used for Arabic text, which therefore had to be translated into English before coding, risking a loss of meaning from the original text. When the coding was done, it was thus necessary to take steps to preserve the main meaning and to ensure that the originality of the conversation was not lost in translating the textual conversations from Arabic. Nevertheless, although the two coders were careful to refer to the Arabic transcript and not to ignore its value or meaning, it was found in the pilot study that much of the meaning of the original Arabic was lost in translation.

This issue was resolved by using the MAXQDA text analysis software at this stage, as it can read Arabic. This technique was followed by Cushion et al. (2008) and Antaki et al. (2006), who collected conversations and stored them in the MAXQDA software in their original language; only selected text fragments were translated into English for analysis purposes. Using translation raises particular problems in research where two languages are

involved (Twinn, 1997). One of the distinguishing characteristics of MAXQDA is the ability to access and work with codes and memos (Kuş, 2011).

Step 7: Determining the validity and reliability of the coding framework

Once the coding framework was finalized, a measurement was made of inter-rater reliability for the complete framework: messages were coded by two independent coders and Cohen's kappa was calculated to be above 0.88, which according to Krippendorff (2004; 2012), is considered strongly acceptable for drawing conclusions. Indeed, the values of kappa ranged from 0.88 to 1, which can be considered excellent, indicating that any differences in judgment were small. Cohen's kappa is the standard and most widely used method to rate the extent to which two coders agree (Schreier, 2012; Weber 1990).

4.5.4. Sampling and Population

A major concern in the design of any research is the sampling technique used to obtain a representative subset of the population under study. Choosing the right technique depends on the nature of research method. Robson (2011) identifies two broad approaches, probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling includes random sampling, systematic sampling, cluster sampling, multi-stage sampling and stratified sampling. This research adopted two specific types of non-probability sampling: convenience and purposive, as shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Types of non-probability sampling

Dimension of construct	Characteristics
Type	Convenience sampling Involves choosing the nearest and most convenient persons to act as respondents. The process is continued until the required sample size has been reached.
	Purposive sampling Researcher's judgment as to typicality or interest. A sample is built up which enables the researcher to satisfy the specific needs of a project.
Overall purpose of sampling	Qualitative sampling Designed to generate a sample that will address research questions
Issue of generalizability	Sometimes seeks a form of generalizability (transferability)
Rationale for selecting case and unit	To address specific purposes related to research questions The researcher selects cases he or she can learn the most from.
Sample size	Typically small
Depth/breadth of information per case	Focus on depth of information generated by the cases
When sample is selected	Before the study begins, during the study, or both
How selection is made	Utilizes expert judgment
Sampling frame	Informal sampling frame somewhat larger than sample
Form of data generated	Focus on narrative data Numerical data can be also generated

In the convenience sample, the online forum discussion board was chosen in preference to other online forums because members of the population should be chosen for their relative ease of access. In the OCs in question, no membership was required and the data were accessible to both members and non-members.

The particular threads to be analysed were chosen by purposive sampling, based on an assessment of their popularity and usefulness, because of the high volume of interactions or postings. Thus, purposive sampling was adopted to ensure that threads rich in descriptive content were chosen (Hung and Li, 2007). This strategy enabled the researcher to gather useful data on e-WOM adoption in online beauty forums.

4.6 Phase 2: Interviews

The second phase of data-gathering consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews. The purpose was to gain insights into the participants' e-WOM experiences and thus to develop a deeper understanding of the e-WOM adoption process in the OCs. In addition, it would deepen the investigation of the e-WOM phenomenon by collecting data on users' personal opinions. This research method was chosen because it would help to confirm, illuminate

and explain the similarities and differences in terms of e-WOM determinants between the Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian cases and thus their respective cultures. For example, the first phase served to identify the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the two cases, while the results of the second phase were intended to confirm the existence of higher level key factors or determinants and to cast light on any differences between the two cases in terms of the sub-codes and sub-categories of these key factors. Finally, the interviews were expected to help to confirm or modify the classification of role behaviours in female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia which emerged from the content analysis phase and to provide a deeper understanding of these roles.

Interviews provide one of the most vital sources of case study information (Yin, 2009, 2013). As outlined in Chapter 1 (section 1.5.2), Thomas (2011) categorizes interviews as structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews are based on standardised and identical questions for every participant; semi-structured ones follow a more open strategy which allows the interviewer and interviewee to communicate with each other; and in unstructured interviews, communication is not limited, nor is the flow of questions.

There are three main reasons for using semi-structured one-to-one interviews as the method of data collection in this phase of the study. First, the researcher is able to narrow down the areas or topics to be addressed (Rabionet, 2011), while remaining flexible, which is essential in an area that is under-researched and with which the researcher is not closely familiar (Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010). Secondly, this method allows the researcher “to explore the perspectives and perceptions of various stakeholders” (Daymon and Holloway, 2002, p.166); thus, it helped here to identify the similarities and differences in terms of e-WOM determinants between Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian culture. The third reason is that useful ideas that have not originally been considered can emerge and views can be explored in greater depth (Daymon and Holloway, 2002), which in this case would help to improve understanding of role behaviour in female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Lastly, semi-structured individual interviews may elicit views that the interviewees would not otherwise express in a focus group (Brayman and Bell, 2015), especially in a business or group discussion (Wright and Crimp, 2000), which made these interviews particularly suitable for female OC members in the context of this research.

Details of the administration of the interviews are given in Chapter 6, section 6.2.

4.7 Summary

This chapter has discussed the methodology of the study in detail. It began by considering the ontological, epistemological and theoretical foundations of the interpretive paradigm, which forms the basis of this research, and the justification for its selection. A mixed-method approach was adopted as appropriate to the research context. The data analysis techniques used in the two phases were also explained and justified, as was the choice of multiple case studies and of the specific cases. Focusing on a social phenomenon that involves the continued use of e-WOM in two OCs, multiple perspectives had to be taken into account. The use in the two phases of the research of data-gathering instruments from both quantitative and qualitative strands was justified; these were respectively a questionnaire and the content analysis of online forum messages. Thus, the first phase of data collection was a qualitative content analysis of online textual conversations to identify the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the beauty industry context in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. In the second phase, online interviews were used to collect more data from respondents, to give a deeper understanding of the phenomena under study.

The next two chapters give a comprehensive account of the two case studies. Chapter 5 begins with the findings of the first phase, i.e. the content analysis of the forum threads, in the Kuwaiti case. The second part of the chapter does the same for the Saudi case. Chapter 6 then analyses the interview data from both cases.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Qualitative Data from Kuwaiti and Saudi Online Community Threads

5.1. Introduction

This chapter is the first of two reporting the first phase of data collection methods, which is content analysis, as described in Chapter 4. Its main purpose is to offer a content analysis of the forum threads collected in the case study of the Kuwaiti and the Saudi online beauty forums. It then turns to a detailed analysis of qualitative data gathered in phase one of the study from the two OCs.

5.2. Kuwait case: Content analysis of forum threads

The context selected was the same as that for the pilot study: a female-only Kuwaiti online beauty bulletin board. At the request of its administration, the OC is kept anonymous, to maintain the privacy of its members. The comments were available to view by non-subscribers in an online forum that was open to everyone.

All comments posted and replied to from January 2013 to June 2013 were taken into account for content analysis. The data in question was mainly in Arabic. MAXQDA text analysis software was used at this stage, because in the pilot study, where the NVivo software was used and the coding was done in English, much of the meaning of the original Arabic was lost in translation, although the two coders were careful to look at the original Arabic transcript and not to ignore its value or meaning. MAXQDA can read Arabic, so the textual conversations were downloaded as PDFs and were entered in the software to keep the value and the meaning of the original discussions. This technique is recommended by Antaki et al. (2006) and Cushion et al. (2008), who collected full conversations and stored them in the MAXQDA software in their original language; only selected text fragments were translated into English for analysis purposes. In addition, using translation raises particular problems in research where two languages are involved (Twinn, 1997).

The comments in each thread were split into sentences in order to code them according to the scheme discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.5.3). Figure 5.1 shows a conversation from

the Kuwaiti beauty forum to illustrate how the textual conversations were transcribed to be coded.

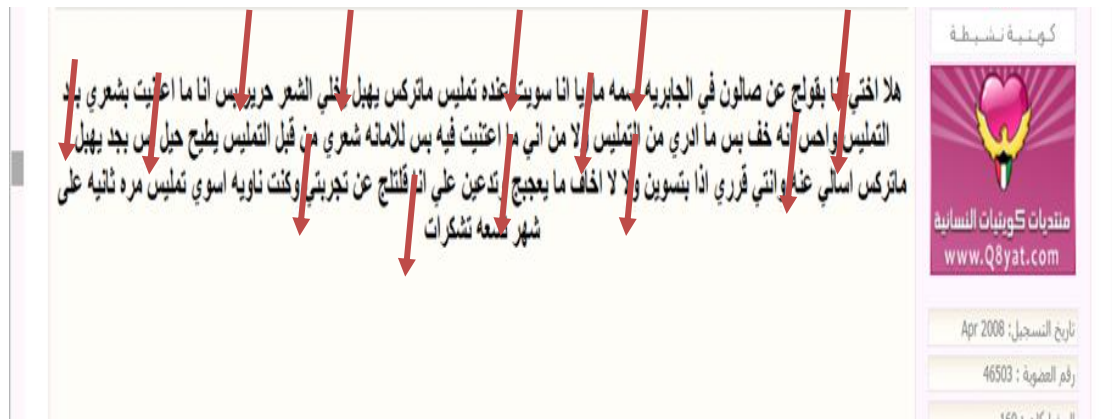


Figure 5.1: Example of a Kuwaiti thread

The comments were broken down into sentences as indicated by the arrows in Figure 5.1, which shows an example of an Arabic thread. The second step was to code them into the categories listed in Table 4.4. A total of 8239 messages in the original Arabic were collected over six months from January to June 2013. This dataset comprised 1120 threads. All 355 threads containing only one message or multiple messages by the same member, without interaction, were removed. The remaining 765 threads were then converted to PDFs and uploaded to MAXQDA via its Arabic language interface, thus avoiding the translation issues mentioned above (Antaki et al., 2006).

The following analysis of these 765 threads distinguishes three groups: threads which indicated that respondents had adopted e-WOM, those that did not include any indication of adoption or non-adoption, and those where participants clearly stated that they were not adopting e-WOM. In total, this comprised 6,200 messages, which were coded into 18,169 unit of analysis. Table 5.1 shows the total number of threads, total number of participants and total number of units of analysis for each of the three groups, before qualitative analysis. It is followed by an explanation of the patterns that were found in these threads. A total of 1500 members participated in these online conversations.

Table 5.1: Main characteristics of Kuwaiti threads

Members who adopted e-WOM	Total number of threads: 218
	Total number of females who adopted e-WOM: 333
	Total of number of messages: 1820
	Total number of units of analysis: 7039
Members who did not report an opinion	Total number of threads: 218
	Total number of females who did not reveal anything
	Total of number of messages: 4339
	Total number of unit of analysis: 10,385
Members who did not adopt e-WOM	Total number of threads: 534
	Total number of females who did not adopt e-WOM: 13
	Total of number of messages: 60
	Total of number of unit of analysis: 80

The coding scheme was adopted from the IAM (Sussman and Siegel, 2003), ISCM (Bhattacharjee, 2001) and KCM (Ma and Agarwal, 2007) in addition to the categories and subcategories that emerged from content analysis pilot study, as discussed in Chapter 4.

5.3. Key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the beauty industry context in the Kuwaiti case

This section tries to answer the research question about the key determinants of e-WOM adoption. It also discusses the characteristics of neutral, positive and negative messages. In particular, it presents the findings of the content analysis in order of their importance from highest to lowest, in order to answer the following interim research question: *What are the main factors that impede and facilitate e-WOM adoption in the Kuwaiti online community?* The analysis suggests that argument quality and community bonding were the two most important factors.

5.3.1. Argument Quality

The dominant category was argument quality (AQ), which occurred 6646 times in all groups. The valences of the messages varied between neutral, positive and negative, the majority of comments being neutral. Neutral messages ranged between neutral 1, where contributors tended only to recommend the use of a certain product or service without any indication other than its name, neutral 2 (price), neutral 3 (location), neutral 4 (giving advice on how to use the product), neutral 5 (contact information) and neutral 6 (description), which was the least frequent type. A total of 333 females adopted e-WOM

threads. Table 5.1, shows the pattern of neutral e-WOM in these threads: general recommendation (1) = 450, price (2) = 245, location (3) = 262, how to use (4) = 160, contact information (5) = 140 and description of products or services (6) = 18. Thus, general advice, use, location and prices were mentioned by more contributors than other elements of advice. In other words, the more comprehensive the message in terms of product details, the more other users were willing to adopt the e-WOM. Additionally, these patterns were found in seekers or interested members, who tended to be influenced by these patterns.

Table 5.2: Neutral e-WOM in Kuwaiti forum

Members who adopted e-WOM Total threads: 218 Total number of units of analysis: 6702			Members who did not express any opinion Total threads: 534 Total number of unit of analysis: 10385			Members who did not adopt e-WOM Total threads: 13 Total number of unit of analysis: 745		
Category	Description	Frequency /percentage	Category	Description	Frequency / percentage	Category	Description	Frequency / percentage
Argument quality		2504 (37.4%)	Argument quality		3593 (52.8%)	Argument quality		273 (36.64%)
Neutral		1275 (55.09%)	Neutral		1980 (55.11%)	Neutral		166 (60.81%)
Neutral 1	General recommendation including product name	450	Neutral 1	General recommendation including product name	980	Neutral 1	General recommendation including product name	66
Neutral 2	Price	245	Neutral 2	Price	300	Neutral 2	Price	30
Neutral 3	Location	262	Neutral 3	Location	225	Neutral 3	Location	25
Neutral 4	How to use	160	Neutral 4	How to use	240	Neutral 4	How to use	24
Neutral 5	Contact information	140	Neutral 5	Contact information	200	Neutral 5	Contact information	18
Neutral 6	Description of a product	18	Neutral 6	Description of a product	35	Neutral 6	Description of a product	3

As well as neutral e-WOM, positive e-WOM also tended to influence seekers, especially if written in certain forms. Table 5.3 lists five types of positive e-WOM: Positive 1, when the product is described as “amazing”; Positive 2, when it is “really amazing”; Positive 3, where the product is “really really really amazing”; Positive 4, when it is “amaziiiiiiing”; and Positive 5, when the product is described as “amaziiiiiiiiiiing”

Table 5.3: Positive e-WOM in Kuwaiti forum

Members who adopted e-WOM Total threads: 218 Total number of units of analysis: 6702			Members who did not express any opinion Total threads: 534 Total number of units of analysis: 10385			Members who did not adopt e-WOM Total threads: 13 Total number of units of analysis: 745		
Category	Description	Frequency /percentage	Category	Description	Frequency / percentage	Category	Description	Frequency / percentage
Argument quality		2507 (35.62%)	Argument quality		3593 (34.59%)	Argument quality		273 (36.64%)
Positive		720(28. 8%)	Positive		1073(29.86%)	Positive		78(21.25%)
Positive 1	Product is amazing	100	Positive 1	Product is amazing	450	Positive 1	Product is amazing	70
Positive 2	Product is really amazing	50	Positive 2	Product is really amazing	321	Positive 2	Product is really amazing	8
Positive 3	really really really amazing	88	Positive 3	really really really amazing	319	Positive 3	really really really amazing	0
Positive 4	Product is amaziiiiiiing	180	Positive 4	Product is amaziiiiiiing	130	Positive 4	Product is amaziiiiiiing	0
Positive 5	The product is amaziiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing	210	Positive 5	The product is amaziiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing	143	Positive 5	The product is amaziiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing	0

Seekers tended to be influenced by extremely positive e-WOM, where contributors used many positive adjectives and where they confirmed the positive recommendations of others, as in the following example. This thread was chosen to represent the use of positive e-WOM, especially positive 5, when the adjectives were lengthened to represent how useful the product was (e.g. “amaziiaiiiiiiiiing”). Here, members 6 and 7 used this device to express their strength of feeling that a particular cream was a marvellous product.

Thread K1

Member 1 (main inquirer)

12/2/2013

“Peace be upon you girls” (Greeting / CB)

“How are you today?” (Greeting / CB)

“I need your recommendation girls” (Find e-WOM / INF [INF])

“I need to solve the dryness in my hair” (Solve problem / INF)

“Girls I trust your recommendation” (Trustworthy / SC)

“I love you girls” (Love / emotional feeling / CB)

Member 2 (Interested)

12/2/2013

“I am involved in thread topic” (involved in the issue / RI)

“Pushing up the topic to the top of thread” (Pushing the topic - RI)

Member 3 (contributor)

12/2/2013

“Girls, use Banteen cream for hair” (neutral 1 – AQ)

“The colour of it is blue” (neutral 6 – AQ)

“You can find it in Lulu supermarkets” (neutral – AQ)

Member 4 (interested)

12/2/2013

“This discussion thread about cream for hair was in my head in the previous days.” (Discussion in mind lately – RI)

“Pushing up the topic to the top of the thread” (Pushing the thread / RI)

Member 5 (contributor)

“Use the Great Shaheen cream” (neutral (1) / AQ)


Member 6 (contributor)

13/2/2013

“Use the marvellouuuuuuuuuuus cream” (positive 5 / AQ)

I recommend everyone to use it because it is really really amazing (positive e-WOM 2 – AQ)

“This is the photo of the product” (photo / CB)



Member 7 (contributor)

13/2/2013

“It is marvellouuuuuuuuuuuuus cream” (neutral 5 – AQ)

Member 1 (main inquirer)

“Thank you members 6 and 7 ” (Thanks / CB)

“I am taking your advice” (EA)

“God bless you” (religious expression / CB)

In the above examples, members were influenced by a message or recommendation that contained both extremely positive material and other neutral elements such as price, location, advice on how to use or contact information, rather than a single message that advises users to use a certain product without any indication of further information to follow. In other words, the combination of positive and neutral may influence members to adopt the advice in a certain message. The more comprehensive the message, the more others tended to adopt the e-WOM.

Furthermore, participants who did not indicate any textual conversation and did not include any indication of adoption or non-adoption did not come back to reveal that they were using or would continue using e-WOM. In those threads, the women would post according to the same pattern as those who tended to adopt e-WOM. For example, argument quality

was roughly similar in all groups and in all the threads where patterns tended to appear in all neutral sub-codes. To illustrate, women tended to post general advice, location, price, advice on use and a description of products or services.

Secondly, positive e-WOM tended to be different where females were inclined to adopt e-WOM. Seekers were persuaded by extremely positive e-WOM in addition to neutral e-WOM. They were persuaded by stretching or lengthening words in the positive e-WOM (Table 5.3). This shows that the combination of neutral and extremely positive replies played an important role in influencing users to adopt e-WOM. In addition, although there was some indication of the appearance of extremely positive e-WOM where females did not express any opinion, there was no indication of e-WOM adoption. One possible explanation is that seekers or interested readers were not willing to come back to the same threads and reveal that they had been influenced by the e-WOM, simply because they were reluctant to come back to those threads at all.

The third element was negative e-WOM, where users described products or services negatively to other members. (Table 5.4). In the first group, the sub-codes of negative e-WOM appeared to be most common among those who adopted e-WOM and those who did not express any opinion. Negative 1 was where sentences tended to be normal and negative, while negative 2, a code allotted to only three sentences, represented very negative word of mouth. The same pattern was displayed, where females did not express any opinion and did not reveal whether they were adopting or not adopting e-WOM. However, in the third group, extremely negative views were expressed and in some cases readers were persuaded not to adopt the e-WOM, as in the following example:

Thread K2

Member 1 (main inquirer)

2/2/2013

"I need to find your recommendation girls regarding Proof product" (find e-WOM -INF),
"because I want to solve my skin problem" (solve problem - INF)

"Thank you girls" (thanks - CB)

Member 2 (contributor)

2/2/2013

"Use it" (neutral 1- AQ)

"It is a good product" (positive 1 / AQ)

Member 3 (contributor)

2/2/2013

"It is really bad bad bad product" (extreme negative 3 – AQ)

Member 1 (main inquirer)

2/2/2013

"Oh girls you make me confused" (confusion / emotional feeling/CB)

Table 5.4: Negative e-WOM in Kuwaiti forum

Members who adopted e-WOM Total threads: 218 Total number of units of analysis: 6702			Members who had neutral view Total threads: 534 Total number of units of analysis: 10385			Members who did not adopt e-WOM Total threads: 13 Total number of units of analysis: 745		
Category	Description	Frequency /percentage	Category	Description	Frequency / percentage	Category	Description	Frequency / percentage
Argument quality		2507 (35.62%)	Argument quality		3593 (34.59%)	Argument quality		273 (36.64%)
Negative		261 (10.41)	Negative		361(10.05%)	Negative		20 (7.33%)
Negative 1	product is bad	230	Negative 1	product is bad	298	Negative 1	product is bad	1
Negative 2	product is very bad	31	Negative 2	product is very bad	63	Negative 2	product is very bad	1
Negative 3	product is very very bad	0	Negative 3	product is very very very bad	0	Negative 3	product is very very very bad	0
Negative 4	Product is baaaaad	0	Negative 4	Product is baaaaad	0	Negative 4	Product is baaaaad	6
Negative 5	Product is baaaaaaaaad	0	Negative 5	Product is baaaaaaaaad	0	Negative 5	Product is baaaaaaaaad	12

The following elements were also used between females in the argument quality category. The term ‘quotes’ was used to refer to other members’ posts, usually to thank them for their postings. Two other sub-codes, ‘accurate’ and ‘complete’, indicate that participants explicitly revealed how they perceived comments as accurate or complete, although there were slightly more posts where members did not express any opinion. On the other hand, inaccuracy tended to be expressed very rarely. In the same manner, completeness was an element mentioned very rarely, as shown in Table 1 in Appendix A.

5.3.2. Community Bonding

Community bonding was the second most common category, with 5293 units of analysis. Females in all three groups shared e-WOM messages with this feature. This included not only interpersonal relationships defined between OC members, but also any indication of these sub-codes in the content analysis: emoticons, followed by thanks, then greetings, religious expressions, links, emotional feelings, luck, photos, jokes and online activities, as shown in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Community bonding sub-codes in Kuwait forum

Members who adopted e-WOM Total threads: 218 Total number of units of analysis: 6702				Members who did not express any opinion Total threads: 534 Total number of units of analysis: 10385			Members who clearly stated the intention not to adopt Total threads: 13 Total number of units of analysis: 745				
No	Construct	Frequency	Percentage		Construct	Frequency	Percentage		Construct	Frequency	Percentage
	Community bonding	2073	29.45%		Community bonding	3004	28.92%		Community bonding	216	29%
1	Emoticons	637	30.73%	1	Emoticons	802	26.70%	1	Emoticons	56	25.93%
2	Emotional feeling	246	11.87%	2	Emotional feeling	393	13.08%	2	Emotional feeling	38	17.59%
3	Thanks	302	14.57%	3	Thanks	422	14.05%	3	Thanks	14	6.48%
4	Religious expression	306	14.76%	4	Religious expression	367	12.22%	4	Religious expression	32	14.81%
5	Greetings	247	11.92%	5	Greetings	453	15.08%	5	Greetings	17	7.87%
6	Photo	158	7.62%	6	Photo	283	9.42%	6	Photo	35	16.20%
7	Links	47	2.27%	7	Links	102	3.40%	7	Links	15	6.94%
8	Luck	59	2.85%	8	Luck	78	2.60%	8	Luck	8	3.70%
9	Jokes	46	2.22%	9	Jokes	72	2.40%	9	Jokes	1	0.46%
10	Online activities	25	1.21%	10	Online activities	32	1.07%	10	Online activities	0	0.00

The discussion now turns to the main sub-codes in the community bonding category.

Emoticons were the most common elements of messages in all groups. These were categorised as animated or text emoticons and sub-categorised as basic smiley, sadness, crying, surprise and calling emoticons (Appendix, A Table 2). Members posted more animated than text emoticons, the most common being positive animated ones: smiley, cheerful and blissful emoticons. In all groups, the positive emoticons were dominant in e-WOM messages, which were mainly posted to represent the positive experience of using products or services. Sometimes seekers posted positive emoticons such as kisses and blissful emoticons to represent their love and thankfulness to other OC members. In the first comment of a thread, seekers also tended to post negative emoticons to express a need for e-WOM. Some seekers posted a crying face after stating their need for information. Other negative emoticons, as well as hearts, kisses and smileys with flowers, were used to express their need for information via e-WOM at the beginning of inquiries, as in the following quotes. Overall, it was contributors who usually posted positive emoticons, while other emoticons were mainly posted by seekers and contributors.

If contributors were posting positive e-WOM, they tended to post positive emoticons to represent their positive experiences. On the other hand, if they posted negative experiences, they also posted negative emoticons, as in the following examples:

Thread K3

<p>Member 1 (main inquirer)</p> <p>5/5/2013</p> <p><i>"Hi girls"</i> (greetings – CB)</p> <p><i>"I want to know your experiences regarding a hair product"</i> (Find e-WOM – INF)</p> <p><i>"Because I want to solve my hair loss problem"</i> (solve problem – INF) 😞</p> <p>Member 2 (contributor)</p> <p>5/5/2013</p> <p><i>"Use MARA products"</i> (neutral 1 – AQ)</p> <p><i>"It's goood for hair"</i> (positive 4 – AQ)</p> <p><i>"You will see amaziing results"</i> 😊 (positive 4 – argument quality [AQ])</p> <p>Member 3 (contributor)</p> <p>5/5/2013</p> <p><i>"It was bad in my case"</i> 😞 (Negative 1 - AQ)</p>

Seekers would also sometimes post negative emoticons at the beginning of the threads, then positive emoticons later if they intended to adopt e-WOM, as in the following examples.

Thread K4

Member 1 (main inquirer)
1/2/2013

"Hello girls" (greeting – community bonding [CB])

"In need your experience in a skin product" (find e-WOM – INF)

"I need to solve the acne on my face" (solve problem – INF) 😞

"Girls I need to benefit from your experience" (beneficial – IU)

Member 2 (contributor)
1/2/2013

"Use Fafafoom cream" (neutral 1 – AQ)

"It's amaziining" (extremely positive 4 – AQ)

"I cannot tell you how marvelouuuuuuus this cream is" (positive 5 – AQ)

"You can find it Fafafoom avenues" (neutral 3 – AQ)

Member 3 (contributor)
1/2/2013

"Use Lancaster cream" (neutral 1 – AQ)

Member 4 (contributor)
1/2/2013

"The discussion about skin product was in mind lately" (discussion in mind lately –[RI])

"I want to find girls experiences too" (find e-WOM – INF)

Member 5 (contributor)
2/2/2013

"Use Paparazzi cream" (neutral 1 – AG)

Member 1 (main inquirer)
10/2/2013

"Thank you member 2" 😊

"I am following your advice" (adoption of e-WOM- EA)

"You provided me with useful information" (beneficial – IUs) 😊

Thus, sad emoticons appeared in all threads where seekers and interested users wished to represent their need for recommendations, using sadness to represent their need to find e-WOM.

The second sub-code in community bonding was ‘emotional feelings’. Users tended to share their emotional feelings widely in forum conversations. Emotional content concerning products or services ranged from anxiety, boredom, confusion and surprise to love for other OC members. The expression of emotional feelings, as shown in Table 5.5, tended to be much more common in posts where members adopted e-WOM. From Table 2.3 in Appendix A, it is also clear that emotional feelings were slightly higher where females did not adopt e-WOM. On the other hand, the only negative emotional feelings appeared where users did not adopt e-WOM and were dissatisfied. For example, some patterns of emotional feelings which were expressed when users did not adopt e-WOM were: dislike, hate, doubt, embarrassment, confusion and fear. The following quotes illustrate this.

Thread K5

<p>Member 1 (main inquirer)</p> <p><i>“Hi girls”</i> (greeting – CB)</p> <p><i>“Peace be upon you”</i> (greeting – CB)</p> <p><i>“I want your recommendation about my bikini line problem”</i> (solve problem – INF)</p> <p><i>“Thank you girls in advance”</i> (Thanks – CB)</p> <p>Member 2 (contributor)</p> <p><i>“Hello”</i> (greeting / community bonding)</p> <p><i>“Go to a dermatologist”</i> (neutral 1 – AQ)</p> <p>Member 3 (contributor)</p> <p><i>“Personally I recommend you to go to Dr Shicka, the dermatologist”</i>. (neutral 1 –AQ)</p> <p><i>“Her contact no is 000000000”</i> (neutral 4 – AQ)</p> <p>Member 4 (contributor)</p> <p><i>“They are right”</i> (accurate – AQ) <i>“You should go to a dermatologist”</i> (neutral 1 – AQ)</p> <p>Member 5 (main inquirer)</p> <p><i>“I am embarrassed, I can’t do it”</i> (emotional feeling – CB)</p>
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On the other hand, emotional feelings such as affection towards a product were rarely expressed as a pattern in group three. While seekers, contributors and interested members all occasionally displayed affection or love towards the products, such messages were mainly posted by contributors. In addition, seekers would often post three sentences to express their love for online community members in their inquiries about products or services. Overall, the pattern of emotional expression tended to differ among seekers and contributors, as in the list of emoticons in Table 2, Appendix A.

The third sub-code was 'thanks'. A total of 738 instances were found in the three thread groups. Members clearly stated their feelings of thankfulness or appreciation in the conclusion of an inquiry about e-WOM, for others' provision of e-WOM, for pushing up the topic or providing community bonding activities. This was most common where seekers decided to adopt e-WOM (302=14.57%), followed by those who offered no opinion (422=14.05%) and last by those who decided not to adopt e-WOM (14=6.48%). One explanation is that a high number of inquirers and interested members were users who adopted e-WOM but did not express any opinion, only conveying their thanks, as there were more contributors to these threads than to ones where members did not adopt e-WOM.

The following sub-code was 'religious expression'. A total of 705 religious expressions were found in all groups, slightly more often in groups three and two. They were often used by someone seeking e-WOM, or posting her personal experience, usually showing her support in a religious way or asking for prayers or blessings from the inquirer. Their frequency of appearance was as follows: members who did not adopt e-WOM (32=14.81%), followed by those who adopted e-WOM (306=14.76%) and those who did not express an opinion (367=12.22%). This behaviour was interchangeable between participants in online conversations. Most religious expressions were positive, but a few seemed to be warnings, where members warned others about products or services, as in the following thread quotes:

Thread K6

<p>Member 1 (main inquirer)</p> <p>2/2/2013</p> <p><i>"I need your recommendation girls about salon services"</i> (find e-WOM/ information needs fulfilment-INF) <i>"because I want to solve my skin problem by threading my eyebrows"</i> (solve problem / INF)</p> <p>Member 2 (contributor)</p> <p>2/2/2013</p> <p><i>"It is forbidden in our religion and by our prophet"</i> (religious expression – CB).</p>
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Religious messages were also posted by those who did not adopt e-WOM to prevent other members from following certain e-WOM advice, especially if it was against Islam.

The fifth subcategory of community bonding was 'greetings.' A total of 717 instances were found in all threads. The most common expressions were posted by seekers requesting e-WOM, starting with 'Peace upon you', 'Hello', 'Good morning', 'Goodnight' or 'How are you girls?' In many cases, the contributors would return the greeting. Greetings appeared in all three groups, although slightly more often in threads where users did not adopt e-WOM (17=17.87%), followed by members who did not express any opinion (453=15.08%) and lastly by those who adopted e-WOM (247=11.92%).

The sixth sub-code was 'photos.' OC members shared photos and images of products as part of e-WOM messages. A total of 501 images were included in the content analysis as follows: 35 by members who did not adopt e-WOM (16.20%), 283 by those who did not express an opinion (9.42%) and 158 by those who adopted e-WOM (7.62%). Thus, the highest percentage was among those who did not adopt e-WOM, 35 of whose 80 messages contained images.

The following sub-code was 'links.' Members also shared 167 links in their messages, 120 being hyperlinks to relevant e-WOM messages in the same forum. In other words, women

strongly preferred to use links within the OC. The others were hyperlinks to other online communities such as Instagram, YouTube or other female OCs, as members tended to use other social networks as part of their e-WOM messages. The highest proportion was among those who did not adopt e-WOM (15=6.94%), followed by those who did not express any opinion (102=3.40%), then those who adopted e-WOM (47=2.27%).

The eighth sub-code was 'wishing luck', representing 145 instances of wishing someone success. This appeared in all three groups, the highest percentage being of members who did not adopt e-WOM (8=3.70%), followed by 59 who adopted e-WOM (2.85%), then 78 members who did not express any opinion (2.60%). As explained before, those who stated that they would not adopt e-WOM posted 80 messages. Within these, eight members wished luck to 13 seekers who initiated the threads, which explains why the percentage was slightly higher than among those who did not express any opinion.

The ninth sub-code was 'joke.' Members sometimes phrased their beauty problems humorously, as 133 jokes were included in the content analysis. A joke or sense of humour facilitates self-presentation and common understanding of the problems faced by members. Jokes were most common among those who did not adopt e-WOM (15=6.94%), followed by 46 of those who adopted e-WOM (2.22%), then 72 who did not express any opinion (2.20%). Members who did not adopt e-WOM posted a total of 745 units of analysis containing 15 sentences representing a sense of humour.

The last sub-code was 'online activities', including any indication that members intended to share further e-WOM or message privately by using online messages or email. There were 25 instances among those who adopted e-WOM (1.21%), followed by those who did not indicate anything (32=1.07%). Thus, there was a slightly higher percentage among those who intended to adopt e-WOM.

5.3.3. Receiver Involvement

Receiver involvement was the third most common category that appeared in the threads, representing 3295 units of analysis. The first element was usually posted by the main

inquirer and the interested members, who tended to show a similar interest in the discussion. If the receiver or the inquirer showed a great interest in the topic, it was coded in this category. In addition, the contributor sometimes stated explicitly that she was using the same product or was in the same situation as the sender, by writing “*I was involved in the same issue before.*” Such exchanges were placed in the ‘receiver involvement’ category, as were those where members expressed their involvement in discussions. Those who had no involvement in the issue but who contributed e-WOM mentioned third-party involvement by family members, relatives or friends. In general, the text units revealed that if a member was involved in the subject of the e-WOM, she would express this by relating either her own experience or that of others. Hence, in all groups, receiver involvement was a dominant element. The second element, ‘pushing up the topic to the top of threads’, was mainly posted by interested members so that others could post their comments or recommendations. Last, the ‘discussion in mind’ element was one of the main characteristics of interested members, which appeared roughly equally across members of all three groups (Table 4, Appendix A).

5.3.4. Information Need Fulfilment

Comments ranged widely, from those seeking e-WOM to resolve skin, face, hair and other beauty problems. These users tended to express the intention to use e-WOM as part of their information needs process. The dominant elements in information need fulfilment were finding e-WOM in the OC, solving problems, learning new ideas and decision development. Within this category, the most dominant sub-codes were the need to find e-WOM and to solve problems in all three groups: members who adopted e-WOM, those who expressed no opinion and those who did not adopt e-WOM. A total of 1908 sentences showed how females wanted to seek e-WOM. They expressed their need to solve beauty problems explicitly. The third reason was to learn new ideas. Members, especially those who did not adopt e-WOM, would ask how to learn new ideas or enquire about the latest trends in beauty. The fourth reason was seeking help to make decisions. Some people explicitly articulated that they needed such help before or after using a service or product; hence their desire for e-WOM, which was found to be strongest among those who did not

express an opinion. This need was mainly expressed by seekers (thread initiators) and interested members (Table 5, Appendix A).

5.3.5. Information Usefulness

E-WOM usefulness is any indication that participants perceived the e-WOM as beneficial, informative and valuable. A total of 642 sentences represented this category. Seekers usually posted explicitly in the threads that they felt that the e-WOM would be useful and helpful. In other instances, interested members also explicitly indicated that the e-WOM would be useful and helpful. Table 6 in Appendix A shows that most participants believed that e-WOM would be beneficial. This category was dominant and the pattern was similar among all groups, although the percentage was slightly higher among those who did not adopt e-WOM. They mentioned usefulness at the beginning of their inquiries or comments. None of those who intended not to adopt e-WOM described it as ‘valuable’, which is unsurprising, because the lowest number of members are represented by these 13 threads and because they would not be expected to find e-WOM valuable if they did not adopt it.

5.3.6. Source Credibility

Source credibility is an indication of the believability of other OC members, as perceived by the recipient of the message. A total of 505 sentences appeared in this category. The four elements most commonly identified are: knowledge, expertise, trustworthiness and reliability of the source. However, other elements were included, such as ‘not knowledgeable’ and ‘not trustworthy’. Usually, these elements were mentioned by seekers or initiators and interested members, who expressed them in their inquiries about e-WOM. For this reason, the dominant element was ‘not knowledgeable’, which was posted mainly by interested members, and they explicitly stated that they were coming to these threads because they wanted the same thread discussion as the initiators. Thus, it was dominant among participants in all threads, as shown in Table 7 (Appendix A), especially those who did not indicate any intention regarding e-WOM adoption. The second element was ‘knowledgeable’. Seekers and interested members tended to believe that other members were first knowledgeable, then expert, a trend which was slightly stronger among those

who intended to adopt e-WOM. The next most frequent elements were ‘trustworthy’ and ‘reliable’, with the reliability sub-code having the highest percentage score among those who did not adopt e-WOM, followed by those expressing no opinion. Lastly, five sentences indicated a lack of trust, especially of online sellers and especially among users who did not express any opinion of e-WOM.

5.3.7. Offline Activities

The Offline Activities code indicates how members shared their mobile or personal contact numbers, in order to share product information offline. Only five sentences within the analysis indicated that females were meeting in offline activities such as exhibitions to discuss e-WOM. Four participants who did not indicate whether they intended to adopt e-WOM shared their personal details (99.7%) and one who did intend to adopt it (0.3%) indicated that she contacted other females via exhibitions. This suggests that the majority did not have the intention to share posts or comments offline. In other words, they preferred their connections to remain within the OC.

5.3.8. Satisfaction

Satisfaction rarely had any obvious textual manifestation in the online beauty forum. Only four units of analysis (100%) showed that users were satisfied and these were all among those who intended to adopt e-WOM. One possible explanation is that satisfaction is a hidden psychological attitude that cannot be easily interpreted online.

5.4. Online behavioural roles in Kuwait

This section seeks to partly answer the following research sub-question: *What is the current classification in terms of online role behaviour in female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia?* As discussed in Chapter 2, the online members can be inquirers, contributors or those interested in other members’ postings. In the threads, evidence was found to confirm these online behavioural role activities. A total of 600 inquirers were found in the Kuwait beauty threads. Those inquirers or seekers are the women who usually inquired about e-WOM and initiated the threads. Their main role was to log in to the

beauty forum to read, but many were initially hesitant to post, because they were inexperienced. When they did actively post, it was usually to ask for information about products or services, such as what names of brands to offer, what brands were available, or how to use the products or services. Second, a total of 480 contributors were found in the threads. Their main activities were to help readers to understand and learn various aspects of the requested e-WOM or to post recommendations or e-WOM. They valued their e-WOM or recommendations and stated clearly that they were struggling with similar situations or beauty problems. Finally, 400 interested members were found. Their main role was to show the same interest or involvement in products or services. They were expressing their genuine interest in someone's products or services. They were clearly stating that they were interested in the e-WOM comments that were written in the thread posts. They acknowledged other members explicitly by stating their interest; for example: "I am interested in that beauty product too."

5.5. Saudi Arabia case: Content analysis of forum threads

This section explains how the qualitative data gathered from the second case study, of the Saudi online community, was analysed and interpreted. It thus mirrors section 5.2, applying content analysis to the conversations among forum members, to investigate their adoption of e-WOM in the Saudi online community.

The context selected was the same as that for the pilot study: the female beauty bulletin board. At the request of its administration, the online community is kept anonymous, to maintain the privacy of the members. The comments were available to view by non-subscribers in an online forum that was open to everyone. As with the Kuwait forum, phase one of the study comprised a content analysis of all comments and threads posted and replied to from January 2013 to June 2013. The data was again mainly in Arabic; and as with the Kuwait forum, the MAXQDA text analysis software was used, as explained in section 5.2, and for the reasons given there.

A total of 17,320 messages in the original Arabic were collected over six months from January to June 2013. All threads that contained fewer than three comments posted or

other types of interaction were removed. Some of the threads containing three or four comments were also excluded because they were all inquirer posts, and all threads labelled 'old threads' were removed. All those which were not initiated between January 2013 and June 2013 were also excluded, because all the comments were transformed from the Islamic year 1434 to AD 2013. A total of 10,100 messages were included in the analysis, comprising 2199 threads. All 502 threads containing only one message or multiple messages by the same member only, with no interaction, were removed. The remaining 1168 threads were then converted to PDFs and uploaded to MAXQDA.

The following sections present the analysis of 1168 threads, divided into three groups: 310 threads containing evidence of the adoption of e-WOM, 803 threads which gave no indication of adoption or non-adoption and 55 threads clearly stating that the participants were not adopting e-WOM. In total, this comprised 6809 messages, which were coded into 31,730 unit of analysis. Table 5.6 shows the total number of threads, participants and units of analysis. It is followed by explanations of the patterns that were found in these threads.

Table 5.6: Main characteristics of Saudi Arabia threads

Members who adopted e-WOM	Total threads: 310
	Total number of females who adopted e-WOM: 318
	Total of number of messages: 2200
	Total number of units of analysis: 5725
Members who did not express any opinion	Total number of threads: 803
	Total number of females who did not reveal anything: 803
	Total of number of messages: 4339
	Total number of units of analysis: 25045
Members who did not adopt e-WOM	Total number of threads: 55
	Total number of females who did not adopt e-WOM: 55
	Total of number of messages: 270
	Total number of units of analysis: 961

The coding scheme was adapted from the IAM (Sussman and Siegel, 2003), ISCM (Bhattacharjee, 2001) and KCM (Ma and Agarwal, 2007), complemented by categories that emerged from the pilot study (Chapter 4).

5.6. Key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the Saudi beauty industry context

5.6.1. Argument Quality

The dominant category in this online community was argument quality, represented by 10,831 units of analysis. The valences of the messages varied between neutral, positive and negative. Table 5.7 shows that the majority of comments were neutral 1, neutral 2, i.e. containing comments about price, neutral 3 (location) or neutral 4 (how to use the products), which were more frequent in all groups than neutral 6, containing contact information, because the administration process tended to remove contact information in order to avoid advertising. The following example shows how neutral 1 comments were expressed in a thread.

Thread SA1

<p>Member 1 (main inquirer) 1/5/2013 <i>"Hi girls"</i> (Greeting / CB) <i>"I need your recommendation girls"</i> (Find e-WOM / INF [INF]) <i>"I need your recommendation for a body cream "</i> (Solve problem / INF)</p> <p>Member 2 (contributor) 1/5/2013 <i>"Use Hamalya body cream"</i> (neutral 1 – AQ)</p> <p>Member 3 (contributor) <i>"Use Hamalya body cream "</i> (neutral 1 – AQ)</p> <p>Member 4 (contributor) <i>"Use Bond cream"</i> (neutral 1 – AQ)</p>

The second element was positive e-WOM, occurring in all groups. This was predominantly positive 1 and positive 2, as seen in Table 5.8, while positive 3 was rarely used and only in group one; positive 4 and positive 5 were not used at all. The third element in all groups was quotes. Members of the Saudi OC tended to post more quotes in their comments, because the number of contributors was higher. The following example illustrates how positive 1 comments were commonly made in the Saudi OC.

Thread SA2

<p>Member 1 (main inquirer) 20/2/2013 <i>"Peace be upon you girls"</i> (Greeting / CB) <i>"I need your recommendation girls"</i> (Find e-WOM / INF [INF]) <i>"I need to solve the redness on my face"</i> (Solve problem / INF)</p> <p>Member 2 (contributor) 20/2/2013 <i>"Use QR cream"</i> (neutral 1 – AQ) <i>"It is marvellous"</i> (positive 1 – AQ)</p> <p>Member 1 (main inquirer) <i>"Thank you"</i> (Thanks – CB) <i>"I will use it "</i> (IA)</p>

Next, negative e-WOM was shared within all groups. However, it was most common among those who did not adopt e-WOM, representing 9.26% of these, followed by users who did adopt e-WOM (5.74%) and those who did not express any opinion (4.15%). The most frequent types were negative 1 and negative 2, while types 3, 4 and 5 were rare (Table 5.9) The following example illustrates how negative 1 was expressed in the threads.

Thread SA3

Member 1 (main inquirer)

1/3/2013

“ I need your recommendations girls ” (Need e-WOM / INF)

“ I want to solve the dryness of my hands ” (solve problem, INF)

“God bless you” (religious expression / CB)

Member 2 (contributor)

“ Use QV cream” (neutral 1- AQ)

Member 3 (contributor)

“ It is not that good “ (neutral 1-AQ)

Member 4 (contributor)

“ It not that good” (neutral 1-AQ)

Member 1 (main inquirer)

“ I get scared (emotional feeling - CB)

“I will not use it” (IA)

Table 5.7: Neutral e-WOM in Saudi forum

Members who adopted e-WOM Total threads: 310 Total number of units of analysis: 5725			Members who did not express any opinion Total threads: 803 Total number of units of analysis: 25045			Members who did not adopt e-WOM Total threads: 55 Total number of units of analysis: 961		
Category	Description	Frequency /percentage	Category	Description	Frequency /percentage	Category	Description	Frequency /percentage
Argument quality		2327 (40.6%)	Argument quality		8137 (32.48%)	Argument quality		367 (38.18%)
Neutral		1193 (51.2%)	Neutral		4302 (42.87%)	Neutral		226 (61.58%)
Neutral 1	General advice on using the product	302	Neutral 1	General advice on using the product	1420	Neutral 1	General advice on using the product	70
Neutral 2	Price	240	Neutral 2	Price	560	Neutral 2	Price	45
Neutral 3	Location	247	Neutral 3	Location	700	Neutral 3	Location	60
Neutral 4	How to use	124	Neutral 4	How to use	817	Neutral 4	How to use	31
Neutral5	Contact information	3	Neutral 5	Contact information	5	Neutral 5	Contact information	0
Neutral6	Description of a product	277	Neutral 6	Description of a product	800	Neutral 6	Description of a product	20

Table 5.8: Positive e-WOM in Saudi forum

Members who adopted e-WOM Total threads: 310 Total number of units of analysis: 5725			Members who did not express any opinion Total threads 803 Total number of units of analysis 25045			Members who did not adopt e-WOM Total threads: 55 Total number of units of analysis: 961		
Category	Description	Frequency /percentage	Category	Description	Frequency /percentage	Category	Description	Frequency /percentage
Argument quality		2327 (40.9%)	Argument quality	32.48%	8137 (32.48%)	Argument quality		367 (38.18%)
Positive		628 (26.9%)	Positive		2628 (32.30%)	Positive		78 (21.25%)
Positive 1	Product is amazing	521	Positive 1	Product is amazing	2320	Positive 1	Product is amazing	78
Positive 2	Product is really amazing	100	Positive 2	Product is really amazing	308	Positive 2	Product is really amazing	0
Positive 3	really really really amazing	7	Positive 3	really really really amazing	0	Positive 3	really really really amazing	0
Positive 4	Product is amaziiaiiiiing	0	Positive 4	Product is amaziiaiiiiing	0	Positive 4	Product is amaziiaiiiiing	0
Positive 5	The product is amaziiaiiiiiiiiiiiiing	0	Positive 5	The product is amaziiaiiiiiiiiiiiiing	0	Positive 5	The product is amaziiaiiiiiiiiiiiiing	0

Table 5.9: Negative e-WOM in Saudi forum

Members who adopted e-WOM Total threads: 310 Total number of units of analysis: 5725			Members who did not express any opinion Total threads: 803 Total number of units of analysis: 25045			Members who did not adopt e-WOM Total threads: 55 Total number of units of analysis: 961		
Category	Description	Frequency /percentage	Category	Description	Frequency /percentage	Category	Description	Frequency /percentage
Argument quality		2327 (40.6%)	Argument quality	32.48%	8137 (32.48%)	Argument quality		367 (38.18%)
Negative		126 (5.4%)	Negative		338 (4.15%)	Negative		34 (9.26%)
Negative 1	Product is bad	100	Negative 1	Product is bad	330	Negative 1	Product is bad	15
Negative 2	Product is very bad	26	Negative 2	Product is very bad	8	Negative 2	Product is very bad	19
Negative 3	Product is very very bad	0	Negative 3	Product is very very bad	0	Negative 3	Product is very very bad	0
Negative 4	Product is baaaaad	0	Negative 4	Product is baaaaad	0	Negative 4	Product is baaaaad	0
Negative 5	Product is baaaaaaaaad	0	Negative 5	Product is baaaaaaaaad	0	Negative 5	Product is baaaaaaaaad	0

The next sub-code was ‘complete’, indicating that seekers explicitly stated that they perceived comments as complete, which tended to occur only where they did adopt e-WOM. Then came a sub-code denoting the accuracy of the comments, where seekers or interested participants stated that a comment was accurate, which appeared occasionally in all groups. The last element was ‘not accurate’, where members sometimes contradicted what others had posted. For example, member 2 wrote, in thread number 700 on 2/4/2013, “I think you’re wrong, it’s actually in Riyadh”. These codes are listed in Table 8 in Appendix A.

5.6.2. Community Bonding

Community bonding was the second category that Saudi forum participants shared online as part of e-WOM messages. There were a total of 10,067 units of analysis in this category. This included not only interpersonal relationships defined between OC members, but also any indication of these sub-codes in the content analysis: religious expression, greetings, emoticons, thanks, emotional feelings, luck, photos, online activities and jokes, as represented in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10: Community bonding in Saudi Arabia forum

Members who adopted e-WOM Total threads: 310 Total number of units of analysis: 5725				Members who did not express any opinion Total threads: 803 Total number of units of analysis: 25045			Members who did not adopt e-WOM Total threads: 55 Total number of units of analysis: 961				
No	Construct	Frequency	Percentage	Construct	Frequency	Percentage	Construct	Frequency	Percentage		
	Community bonding	1745	30.4%		Community bonding	8080	32.26%		Community bonding	242	25.18%
1	Religion	503	28.8%	1	Religion	2072	25.64%	1	Religion	69	28.51%
2	Thanks	248	14.2%	2	Thanks	1442	17.85%	2	Thanks	49	20.25%
3	Emoticons	245	13.9%	3	Emoticons	1147	14.20%	3	Emoticons	24	9.92%
4	Greeting	244	13.9%	4	Greeting	1015	12.56%	4	Greeting	33	13.64%
5	Emotional expression	244	13.9%	5	Emotional expression	993	12.29%	5	Emotional expression	34	14.05%
6	Luck	115	6.59%	6	Luck	521	6.45%	6	Luck	12	4.96%
7	Links	52	2.97%	7	Links	384	4.75%	7	Links	8	3.31%
8	Photos	51	2.92%	8	Photos	341	4.22%	8	Photos	6	2.48%
9	Online activities	33	1.89%	9	Online activities	100	1.24%	9	Online activities	5	2.05%
10	Jokes	10	0.57%	10	Jokes	65	0.80%	10	Jokes	2	0.83%

Religious expressions were dominant in the SA forum: a total of 2644 were found in the messages. They were often used by someone seeking e-WOM, posting her personal experience, showing her support in a religious way or asking for prayers or blessings. Among those who adopted e-WOM, religious expressions tended to be a more frequent sub-code (503; 28.8%), followed by females who did not express any opinion (2072; 25.64%) and last, those who did not adopt e-WOM (69; 28.51%). In some instances, females clearly stated that religion was their main reason not to adopt e-WOM, as in the following example.

Thread SA4




<p>Member 1 (main inquirer)</p> <p><i>“Girls, I need your recommendation about Zara brand for skin care”</i> (find e-WOM / INF)</p> <p><i>“I need to solve my skin problem”</i> (solve problem / INF)</p> <p><i>“God bless you”</i> (religious expression – CB)</p> <p>Member 2 (poster)</p> <p><i>“Use All Zara brand”</i> (neutral 1 / argument quality)</p> <p><i>“God help you”</i> (religious expression / CB)</p>

The second most dominant category was ‘greetings’, of which 1731 instances were found in all threads. In the Saudi forum, females who did not adopt e-WOM tended to share greetings most often (49; 22.25%), followed by those who did not express any opinion (1442; 17.85%), then those who adopted e-WOM (244; 13.9%).

The third sub-code was ‘emoticons’, totalling 1416 in all three groups. These were sub-categorised as animated or text emoticons and included variations on the basic smiley, such as sadness and crying. An “other” category was created for those emoticons having either an unclear or no apparent purpose, or which were neutral in nature (Table 9, Appendix A). In all threads, the smiley emoticons were dominant in e-WOM messages, which were mainly posted to represent the positive experience of using products or services. Sometimes, seekers would post positive emoticons such as kisses or ‘blissful’, to represent


their love and thankfulness towards other OC members. Frequency was highest where females did not express any opinion (1442; 14.20%), followed by females who adopted the e-WOM (245; 14 %) and threads where users did not adopt e-WOM (24; 9.92%) (Table 8, Appendix A). Those who posted positive e-WOM tended to include positive emoticons to represent their positive experience. Conversely, those who posted negative experiences tended to use negative emoticons, as the following example shows.

Thread SA5

<p>Member 1 (main inquirer)</p> <p><i>“Hi girls”</i> (greetings / community bonding)</p> <p><i>“Don’t use it - it is a bad product”</i> (negative 1 – AQ)</p> <p><i>“This cream destroys my hair”</i>  (negative 1 – AQ)</p> <p>Member 2 (contributor)</p> <p>5/5/2013</p> <p><i>“Use MARA products”</i>  (neutral 1 – AQ)</p> <p><i>“It was perfect on my face”</i>  (positive 1 – AQ)</p>
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Sometimes, inquirers or seekers also posted negative emoticons at the beginning of a thread and positive emoticons later, if they intended to adopt e-WOM, as in the following example of a thread, chosen to show the way the inquirers posted emoticons.

Thread SA 6

<p>Member 1 (main inquirer)</p> <p>1/2/2013</p> <p><i>“Peace be upon you girls”</i> (Greeting – CM)</p> <p><i>“I need to solve the acne on my face”</i>  (solve problem – INF)</p> <p><i>“God bless you”</i> (religious expression – CB)</p> <p>Member 2 (contributor)</p> <p>1/2/2013</p> <p><i>“Use the Roche cream”</i> (neutral 1 – AG)</p>
--

Hence, sadness and negative emoticons appeared where members did not indicate their intention to adopt and in threads where they did not adopt e-WOM. One possible explanation is that seekers and interested members used them to represent their need for help, or sadness at having a problem to solve.

The fourth sub-code was ‘thanks’ or ‘gratitude behaviour’. A total of 1312 instances were found in the SA forum. Forty-nine were posted by users who did not adopt e-WOM (20.25%), followed by members who adopted the e-WOM (248; 14.2%) and those who did not express any opinion (1015; 12.56%). The fifth sub-code was ‘emotional feelings.’ Contributors tended to share their emotional feelings towards other OC members. For example, dominant emotional feelings were love for the online community and for products where users intended to adopt e-WOM and where they did not indicate their adoption, whereas those who did not adopt e-WOM were more likely to express negative emotions such as embarrassment, dislike and not being convinced as their main reasons for not intending to adopt it. See (Table 10, Appendix A). The following thread contains examples from each group, where quotes from one inquirer and one poster represent the use of emotional feelings in those threads.

Thread SA7

Member 1 (main inquirer)

“Good morning girls” (Greeting / CB)

“I need your recommendation girls”. “Cream for acne in a sensitive area” (find e-WOM / INF)

Member 2

“Go to Al-Noor hospital” (neutral – AQ)

Member 3 (contributor)

“Hi” (greeting – CB)

“Go to Kawthar hospital” (neutral – AQ)

Member 1

“I’m embarrassed. (Emotional feeling – CB) I don’t think I will follow your recommendation”. (EA)

“I need to solve my problem” (solve problem – INF)

In this thread (SA7), embarrassment was the main reason for not adopting the e-WOM, as the inquirer stated that she preferred not to go to hospital to treat her problem. This suggests that she would prefer product advice to overcome her embarrassment issue. In other threads, positive emotional feelings were not expressed as a frequent pattern by seekers or contributors in group three, except for affection or love towards products, which was mainly posted by contributors.

The sixth sub-code was ‘luck’. A total of 648 contributors wished good luck for the main seeker or interested members, slightly more often than where they did not express any opinion (521; 6.45%), followed by members who adopted e-WOM (115; 6.6%) and then those who did not adopt e-WOM (12; 4.96%).

The seventh sub-code was ‘photos’. A total of 443 images were included in the content analysis. These appeared in all groups, most often where members did not express any opinion (384; 4.75%), followed by those who did not adopt e-WOM (3; 3.31%) and lastly by users who adopted e-WOM (51; 2.92%).

The eighth sub-code was 'links'. A total of 399 links were shared in messages, most often hyperlinks to relevant e-WOM messages in the same forum. In other words, women strongly preferred to use links within the OC. The others were hyperlinks to other online communities such as Instagram, YouTube or other female OCs, as women tended to use other social networks as part of their e-WOM messages. Links occurred most frequently where females did not express any opinion (341; 4.22%), followed by those who adopted e-WOM (51; 2.92%) and those who did not (6; 2.48%). One explanation is that more messages were posted where members did not express any opinion. The ninth sub-code was 'online activities,' 138 being found in all threads, indicating further e-WOM or messages passed privately via online messages or emails. It was found most often where members intended not to adopt e-WOM (5; 2.05%), followed by those who adopted e-WOM (33; 1.89%) and those who did not express any opinion (100; 1.24%). The last sub-code was 'jokes'. A total of 77 sentences were found to reflect a shared sense of humour, with only slight differences in frequency between those who did not adopt e-WOM (2; 0.83%), those who expressed no opinion (65; 0.80%) and those who adopted e-WOM (10; 0.57%).

5.6.3. Receiver involvement

Receiver involvement was the third most common category that appeared in the threads. A total of 4059 units contributed to e-WOM messages under this category. The first element was 'pushing up the topic to the top of threads', which was mainly posted by interested members so that others could post their comments or recommendations. Hence, those who did not express any opinion were dominant in this sub-code. The second element was 'involved in the issue' and the last was 'discussion in mind,' the element least often expressed among all members, especially where they did not adopt e-WOM, where it was mentioned only once (Table 11, Appendix A).

5.6.4. Information need fulfilment

A total of 4067 units used this code. The dominant elements in information needs fulfilment were to find e-WOM in the OC, solve problems, help to make decisions and learn new things. Within the information needs fulfilment category, the most dominant sub-codes were the need to find e-WOM and to solve problems. These were expressed mainly by seekers (thread initiators or inquirers) and interested females. 'Make decision'

was expressed slightly more often when users intended not to adopt e-WOM (Table 12, Appendix A). The last element was learning about new ideas and trends.

5.6.5. Information Usefulness

Seekers tended to state explicitly in their threads that the e-WOM would be useful and helpful. In other instances, interested members also did so. Table 13 (Appendix A) shows that most participants believed that e-WOM tended to be useful by being helpful, informative and valuable. A total of 1439 units were coded in this category. The element most often mentioned in all groups was ‘beneficial (helpful).’ SA members explicitly stated that the e-WOM would be useful and helpful, for this reason. The next most common element was ‘informative,’ followed by ‘valuable,’ which was expressed least often in this online forum, especially among those who did not adopt e-WOM.

5.6.6. Source Credibility

A total of 1293 units mentioned source credibility. The most common element in all groups was ‘not knowledgeable,’ which was mainly expressed by interested members and sometimes by initiators. The second element was ‘expert,’ where seekers and interested members clearly stated that other online forum members were experts in beauty issues. The third element was ‘trustworthy’; seekers and interested members tended to believe that contributors were trustworthy. The fourth element was ‘reliability of the source,’ which was mentioned in all groups. Last, ‘not trustworthy’ was used by some who did not express any opinion and to a lesser extent by those who intended to adopt e-WOM. Eight sentences indicated a lack of trust, especially of online sellers and especially where participants intended not to adopt e-WOM (Table 14, Appendix A).

5.6.7. Offline Activities

The Offline Activities code indicates how users shared their mobile or personal contact numbers, in order to share product information offline. Only two sentences within the analysis indicated that members were meeting each other in offline activities such as exhibitions to discuss e-WOM; one of them intended to adopt e-WOM and the other did not express any opinion.

5.6.8. Satisfaction

Satisfaction was mentioned 12 times (100%) in the online beauty forum, only where members intended to adopt e-WOM; thus, twelve initiators reposted to reveal that they were satisfied with the e-WOM that they had read.

5.7. Online behavioural roles in Saudi Arabia

In this section, the discussion turns to online behavioural role classifications that were derived from the content analysis phase, helping to answer the third research sub-question (Chapter 1, section 1.3). In common with the Kuwaiti members, content analysis findings of 4320 contributions show that among Saudi members, participation in these online conversations can be classified into three groups as follows. First, 600 **inquirers** were found in the Saudi threads. Their main activities were to inquire about e-WOM and to initiate threads. The main roles of those logging in to the beauty OC were to read and to ask for information about products or services. Interestingly, most of the females who adopted the e-WOM tended to be inquirers, because they tended to inquire about beauty recommendations. Example (Thread SA8) is of a thread where the inquirer starts a conversation or discussion, then concludes by adopting the e-WOM in the thread.

Second, a total of 2480 **contributors** were found. Their main activity was to post e-WOM in order to help other members to find the beauty products or the services they needed. In other words, they cooperated with other member to provide recommendations. They shared information in the threads and posted neutral, positive and negative e-WOM. Their contributions included community bonding patterns such religious expressions, greetings, emoticons, thanks, emotional feelings, luck, photos, links, online activities and jokes.

Finally, a total of 500 posts to the Saudi forum were by **interested members**, who showed the same interest in products or services. These were members who tended to read the posts of contributors about product or services, then showed the same interest as the main inquirer about the recommendation. Their main activity pattern was to be engaged with the receiver involvement factor. For example, they tended to reveal how they were involved in the issue raised about a product or service. Thread SA8 shows examples of all three main online behavioural roles.

Thread SA8

<p>Member 1 (main inquirer)</p> <p>5/5/2013</p> <p>Hi girls (greetings-community bonding)</p> <p>I want to know your experiences regarding a hair product (Find e-WOM – INF)</p> <p>Because I want to solve my hair loss problem (solve problem- INF)</p> <p>Member 2 (interested)</p> <p>I am interested in the same issue (involved in the same issue - RI)</p> <p>Member 3 (contributor)</p> <p>5/5/2013</p> <p>Use MARA products</p> <p>It is goood for hair (positive 4-AQ)</p> <p>You will see amaziioooooing results (Positive 5 - AQ) 😊 (smiley face - emoticons - CB)</p> <p>Member 1 (main inquirer)</p> <p>5/5/2013</p> <p>Thank you member 2 (Thanks - CB)</p> <p>I will follow your recommendation (IA)</p>
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5.8. Comparison of content analysis between the two cases

This section reviews the data analysed in this chapter in order to answer the comparative aspects of the three research sub-questions (Chapter 1, section 1.3). The results of content analysis of the two cases show some interesting similarities and differences between the two cases.

The first sub-question, RQA, is concerned with the similarities and differences in e-WOM determinants between Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian culture. The analysis above shows that the key determinants of e-WOM were quite similar in the two cases: argument quality, community bonding, receiver involvement, information need fulfilment, information usefulness, source credibility offline activities and satisfaction were all found to be present in posts made in both forums.

The salient differences between the two cases were evident in the sub-codes. For example, in argument quality, the Kuwaiti members were more likely to be affected by the positive 5 element, where the positive adjective was considerably lengthened. In other words, in the Kuwaiti case the participants tended to adopt e-WOM containing such greatly lengthened adjectives. By contrast, the Saudi participants were more likely to be influenced by the positive 1 element, where the product or service was described by a single unmodified adjective. Another major difference is that in the Kuwait case, the members tended to use more emoticons, emotional feelings and thanks, rather than religious expressions, whereas in the Saudi case, the dominant elements were religious expression, greetings, emotional feelings and then thanks. Another difference was found in the receiver involvement sub-codes. In the Kuwaiti case, the dominant elements were ‘involved in the issue’, followed by ‘pushing up the topic’ and finally ‘issue in mind’, while in the Saudi forum, the dominant element was ‘pushing up the topic’, followed by ‘involved in the issue’, then ‘issue in mind’. A smaller difference was found in the Information Need Fulfilment category. In the Kuwaiti case, the dominant element was ‘finding e-WOM’, followed by ‘need to solve problems’, then ‘learn new ideas and trends’ and finally ‘help in making decisions’; in the Saudi case, the first two elements were the same, the only difference being that ‘help in making decisions’ came third, followed by ‘learning new ideas and trends’. There were also some differences in Source Credibility. In the Kuwait case, the dominant sub-codes were knowledgeable, then expertise, trustworthy, reliable, not knowledgeable, and not trustworthy, whereas in the Saudi forum the dominant element was ‘not knowledgeable’. As to the final category, the Saudi members expressed their satisfaction somewhat more frequently than the Kuwaiti members: 12 Saudi females expressed satisfaction, compared with only four members of the Kuwait OC.

To summarise the findings relevant to RQA, the major similarities were that all of the same determinants were identified in both cases and that within the Information Usefulness category, the frequency of the elements was almost the same; there were nonetheless a number of differences in the frequency rankings of the sub-codes in the remaining categories.

The second key comparison concerns the message characteristics, in answer to RQB: *What are the message characteristics that influence females to adopt e-WOM?* As noted above, Kuwaiti females tended to be influenced to adopt by the most extreme form of positive e-

WOM, labelled 'positive 5', whereas Saudi females were more likely to be affected by the plain 'positive 1' form, where a simple adjective was used to describe the product or service.

Finally, in response to RQC, a comparison is now made of the online behavioural roles adopted by the members in both cases. In the Kuwait case, the dominant role was that of inquirers (600 members) followed by contributors (480), then interested members (400). In the Saudi Arabia case, the total numbers were much greater, as was the extent to which the leading role dominated, and the order was different. Thus, the leading role by a very large margin was that of contributors (2440), then inquirers (600) and finally interested members (540). This means that Saudi females were more much willing to share and post e-WOM in the beauty threads. They tended to post e-WOM in order to help other members to find the beauty products or services that they needed. They tended to post neutral, positive and negative e-WOM. In addition, they often used community bonding patterns such religious expressions, greetings, emoticons, thanks, emotional feelings, luck, photos, links, online activities and jokes.

By contrast, in the Kuwaiti forum the dominant role was that of the inquirers, who preferred to ask about products or services and read other members' e-WOM. As one of the Kuwaiti participants stated, the main roles of those logging in to the beauty OC were to read and to ask for information about products or services. Interestingly, most of those who adopted e-WOM tended to be inquirers, because they tended to seek recommendations for beauty products and services. Interested members also appeared in the forum as contributors. This indicates that females in the Kuwaiti online community showed the same interest in products or services as inquirers. When inquirers asked about beauty products, it seems that the interested members were also affected by inquirers' questions, exemplified by Thread K7:

Thread K7

Member 1 (main inquirer)

12/2/2013

"Peace be upon you girls" (Greeting / community bonding)

"How are you today?" (Greeting / CB)

"I need your recommendation girls" (Find e-WOM / INF)

"I need to solve the dryness in my hair" (Solve problem / INF)

"Girls I trust your recommendation" (Trustworthy / SC)

"I love you girls" (Love / emotional feeling / CB)

Member 2 (Interested)

12/2/2013

"I am involved in thread topic" (involved in the issue / RI)

Member 3 (interested)

12/2/2013

This thread discussion about cream for hair was in my head in the previous days. (Discussion in mind lately- RI)

"Pushing up the topic to the top of the thread" (Pushing the thread / RI)

5.9. Summary

This chapter began by reporting the results of the qualitative content analysis of 765 Kuwaiti threads. A detailed description of three main groups who participated in those threads was presented, then further analyses were done to provide a more detailed examination of the pattern of forum use in the case of the Kuwaiti OC. The results of the Saudi case were then reported in the same way and the chapter concluded with a section comparing the results of the two cases. The next chapter reports the findings of the interview phase.

Chapter 6: Phase Two - Analysis of Interview Data

6.1. Introduction

This chapter continues the analysis of empirical data begun in Chapter 5, aiming to deepen understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by studying the findings of semi-structured interviews with 25 members of each of the Kuwaiti and Saudi online communities. The findings are both qualitative, involving the codes and sub-codes assigned to the units of analysis, and quantitative, such as their frequencies of occurrence. The main aim of the analysis is to refine the conceptual model that was proposed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.8, Figure 3.4). More specifically, it aims to refine the sub-codes reported in Chapter 5, which would help to show the similarities and differences in terms of e-WOM determinants between Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabia culture. Finally, the analysis will help to gain more knowledge about the current classification in terms of online role behaviour in female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

6.2. Method

6.2.1. Aim of the interviews

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the purpose of the interviews was threefold:

- 1) To refine the existing constructs and relationships of the research model developed during the first phase (content analysis) to fit this specific context. This would help to answer the first research sub-question: *What are the similarities and differences in terms of e-WOM determinants between Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabia culture?*
- 2) To understand the current situation regarding online role behaviours in female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in order to evaluate online participation patterns and their influence on e-WOM adoption. This would help to answer the third research sub-question: *What is the current classification in terms of online role behaviour in female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia?*
- 3) To help answer the main research question by gaining more knowledge about the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the beauty industry context.

6.2.2. Structure of the interview

The interviews were conducted following this structure.

a. Opening time

The researcher greeted the interviewee with a general question: “Peace be upon you, how are you?” The researcher tried to begin the conversation in as friendly a way as possible. The interviews were informal to encourage the respondents to feel relaxed so they could answer the questions very easily.

b. Ask question and gather information

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore in greater depth the participants’ experiences, opinions and feelings regarding the phenomenon under investigation, helping the researcher to gain a better understanding and explanation of behaviour from the participants’ own words (Matthews and Ross, 2010). The interview protocol comprised a total of five open-ended questions. These questions can be listed as:

- 1- In your opinion, why do you adopt e-WOM in this OC?
- 2- Could you describe the characteristics of the members within the OC, and do you think these help you to adopt e-WOM?
- 3- What types of messages are there in this OC? Do you think these types of messages affect your adoption of e-WOM?
- 4- How would you describe your role as a member of this OC? How important is this to e-WOM adoption?
- 5- Do you want to add any further comments regarding the impact of e-WOM adoption on a female online community?

The researcher let the respondents take their time while answering. The researcher’s role was to take notes very carefully and try to concentrate on the respondents’ answers. The researcher allowed the interviewees to answer in their own terms, but kept the conversation focused on the topic of e-WOM adoption. For example, the researcher asked, “Could you please elaborate on that specific point?” Or the researcher asked for additional examples, “Can you give me some examples?” The researcher should control the conversation; the interviewee should do most of the talking.

c- Closing

The researcher thanked the interviewees for their time and their answers.

6.2.3 Format and length

The researcher personally conducted all interviews on a one-to-one basis, mainly by Skype, during June and July 2015. Skype was used because members of OCs could be expected to feel comfortable being interviewed online, as this is the medium of their communities. The average duration of each interview was 45 to 90 minutes. All were conducted in Arabic, which is the national language of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Walsham (2006) argued that research should wherever possible be conducted in the main local language. The present researcher therefore chose to use Arabic, to understand interviewees' opinions about e-WOM adoption, because it enabled free and clear communication. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher and then translated into English.

6.2.4 Ethical considerations

The interview protocol was reviewed and approved by Brunel University Research Ethics Committee prior to any data collection. All participants in the interviews were granted confidentiality and anonymity. Signed consent forms were obtained before data collection began. In addition, all interviewees were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. The data were kept in a Word doc file. The respondents' anonymity was protected by giving each respondent a number identifier; for example, informant 1 was called number 1 as shown in Appendix B. In addition, to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees no voice recordings were made.

6.2.5 Profile of the informants

The criteria for choosing the respondents was as mentioned. This sample cannot be taken as representative of the overall membership of the two OCs, since the method used to recruit interviewees was snowball sampling, which produces a non-probability sample. According to Baltar and Brunet (2012), the snowball sampling technique is the appropriate technique to recruit online samples. Since this research was conducted in an online community, this technique was employed. The researcher began by interviewing members of the OCs whom she knew personally, being a member herself. She then asked each interviewee to suggest the names of other members known to them who would be willing to participate, continuing this process until she had interviewed 25 members of each OC.

Each interviewee was given a number to protect their anonymity. The profile of the informants can be found in Appendix B.

6.2.6 Sample

According to Morse and Mitcham (2002), a qualitative sample has to be appropriate, which means that those participants should be selected who are best able to respond to the research question about the current situation, in this case the online role behaviours of female members of online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. In the second phase of the field study, interviews were thus conducted with 25 members of each of the online communities. According to Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006), 30 is the most appropriate sample size for qualitative research, whereas Kuzel (1992) suggests six to eight interviews for a homogeneous sample and 12 to 20 when the researcher is looking for disconfirming evidence or trying to achieve maximum variation.

This sample cannot be taken as representative of the overall membership of the two OCs, since the method used to recruit interviewees was snowball sampling, which produces a non-probability sample. The researcher began by interviewing members of the OCs whom she knew personally, being a member herself. She then asked each interviewee to suggest the names of other members known to them who would be willing to participate, continuing this process until she had interviewed 25 members of each OC.

6.2.7 Data analysis

Interview transcripts were translated into English then examined analytically. The analysis involved coding all the answers given by the interviewees and classifying words under the main codes and sub-codes that were used in the content analysis reported in Chapter 5.

6.3. Case Study 1: Kuwait Online Community

6.3.1. Interviewee profiles

All 25 interviewees were Kuwaiti females. After introducing herself and explaining the purpose of the interviews, the researcher elicited basic demographic data. The majority (80%) of Kuwaiti interviewees were aged between 40 and 50 years. Almost three-quarters (72%) of the sample were employed and the same percentage were married. Most of the

Kuwaiti interviewees (92%) had been members of this particular community for at least two years and 72% reported spending half an hour daily in this OC.

6.3.2. Q1: *In your opinion, why do you adopt e-WOM in this OC?*

The purpose of this first interview question was to address the main research question: *What are the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the beauty industry context?* The researcher asked the interviewees to list the factors according to their importance and to explain their choices. Their responses indicate the general belief that e-WOM adoption is influenced mainly by the following factors: argument quality, community bonding, receiver involvement, information needs fulfilment, information usefulness, source credibility, offline activities and satisfaction. These factors (and their sub-codes) are now discussed in turn.

6.3.2.1 Argument quality

This code contains nine main sub-codes: neutral, positive, negative, quotes, completeness, accuracy and non-accuracy. All 25 interviewees listed argument quality as having a role in e-WOM adoption. The discussion of the sub-codes is presented later, in response to question 2.

6.3.2.2 Community bonding

This code comprises 10 sub-codes, which interviewees listed according to their importance as follows: emoticons, emotional feelings, online activities, religious expression, photos, links, thanks, greetings, luck and jokes. The interviewees were asked what they thought about these sub-codes and how they affected their intention to adopt e-WOM.

- **Emoticons**

All 25 interviewees strongly agreed that emoticons played a part in e-WOM adoption. They agreed that emoticons represented the way that a product or service had an impact on forum members. One opinion was that emoticons represent members' negative or positive moods and their expression regarding usage of the product, as these extracts show:

Emoticons play an important role in e-WOM adoption. For me, it reflects how the member feels about using a product or service and this has an impact on the members. Of course, I would follow a recommendation if it was followed by positive emoticons. It would have a positive impact on me to adopt the e-WOM.
(Member 12)

Oh, the emoticons represent how the member feels about a product. It is the member's reflections about her usage experience. (Member 25)

- **Emotional feelings**

Twenty-four (96%) of the interviewees commented that emotional feelings were a key factor in e-WOM adoption. They agreed that emotions which contain all types of emotion—such as anxiety, boredom, confusion, forgiveness, love for OC members, affection for the product, hate, embarrassment, convinced, not convinced, fear, sadness, surprise, anger and happiness—would help them to adopt e-WOM.

Emotions reflect the feelings that come from a member's heart, so for me posts and comments that contain emotional feelings are true comments. That's why I would follow comments that contain true emotional feelings from the heart. (Member 16)

Emotional feelings, either positive or negative, would influence me to adopt or not to adopt e-WOM. If it was a positive feeling I would adopt the e-WOM, but if it was negative it I would not. (Member 18)

- **Online activities**

Twenty-four interviewees also said that online activity strongly affected whether they chose to adopt e-WOM. Their responses identified social network sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube as channels that affected their decisions to adopt and use e-WOM.

In my opinion, online sites such as Instagram, Twitter and Facebook are channels for promoting products and services, so if a member mentioned them in her comments, it would make the comments stronger. It will strengthen the position of the comments. For myself, I would always prefer to read a comment that mentions other channels if I was going to adopt the comment. (Member 21)

Including online channels such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook in the online community posts would strengthen the posts. Online sites are very famous tools for buying and selling products. For example, last week I saw a comment about laser hair removal. It was a positive comment, which also contained a link to a whole profile about it in Instagram. I contacted the member and logged in to Instagram. I followed the recommendation because of the Instagram profile. (Member 24)

- **Religious expression**

Twenty-three (92%) of the interviewees commented that the inclusion of religious references in the conversation played an important role in the e-WOM adoption process.

Religion is everything in our Islamic society and our online community is no exception. It is our virtual world. I see comments every day that contain religious expressions. Last time, I read a comment that contained a religious expression warning members against using a so-called permanent tattoo service. She wrote the expression in a religious way. I followed her recommendation not to use the service, because of the religious expression. (Member 24)

Yes, I see references to religious texts in almost every comment. It is an important aspect of many posts. In my opinion, it either warns you not to adopt the e-WOM, or encourages you to adopt it. For example, once I adopted e-WOM because the religious expression was extremely encouraging. The member blessed another member who recommended the product. Immediately, I found myself writing down the product name and all the information I needed, then I bought it. (Member 8)

- **Photos**

A total of 22 interviewees (88% of the sample) agreed that product photos or images helped them to adopt e-WOM. They commented that such images helped them to recognise the products being recommended more easily and quickly.

They say that seeing is believing, so when I see an image of a product or service, it helps me to adopt the e-WOM, because I will remember it. It would stick in my mind and I will remember it immediately. It makes the adoption of members' recommendations much easier. (Member 2)

Of course, product photos are very important for me. Last week, I bought a beauty product after I read a comment about it and the member uploaded the photo, which helped me to remember it. (Member 1)

- **Links**

Eighteen (72%) of the Kuwaiti interviewees strongly agreed that hyperlinks to products or services helped them to adopt e-WOM. They explained that these provided an online referral channel that helped them to make a decision.

Hyperlinks in the comments are like online referrals. They sometimes provide extra recommendations. Members tend to refer to other members' recommendations by using these links. Thus, using these links helps members to adopt e-WOM by providing the extra information they need. (Member 8)

I remember two months ago, I referred to a link that a member provided in order that other members could follow it in case they needed a further recommendation. I used that link and I got all the information I needed. I read the member's comment and the comment on the link. It was very helpful for me to adopt the member's recommendation to buy that product. You could call it an extra referral channel. (Member 11)

The other sub-codes of community involvement—thanks, greetings, luck and jokes—were less often mentioned by the interviewees, only 11 of whom, representing 44% of the sample, commented that these elements would be helpful in e-WOM adoption.

6.3.2.3 Receiver involvement

Interviewees agreed that the more they were involved in a discussion about the product, the more they would have the intention to use e-WOM. They were asked about the three main sub-codes: pushing up the topic, involved in the issue, and the discussion in mind.

- **Pushing up the topic**

All interviewees strongly agreed that ‘pushing up the topic to the top of threads’ played a role in the adoption of e-WOM which had been posted by interested members so that others could post their comments or recommendations.

I always use ‘pushing the topic’ in threads. It can help other members to provide recommendations so they can benefit from adopting the recommendations. I can say that yes, it is significant in the adoption of recommendations. (Member 2)

Pushing up the topic is one of the main tools that can help in e-WOM adoption. Let me illustrate that to you. Some threads need that tool to remind the member to provide more recommendations so other members can read them and then adopt them. Without that tool some threads can be neglected and members would not provide the recommendation. (Member 15)

- **Involved in the issue**

Twenty members (80%) strongly agreed that being involved in the issue played a role in e-WOM. They agreed that the more they were involved in the topic of discussion, the more they would adopt the recommendations.

Once I was involved in the same product topic in the thread. They were talking about a facial product and to be honest I was interested in that topic because of my own facial issues, so I followed the recommendation. (Member 13)

Members express their involvement in discussions, either by telling us about their experiences using a product or third-party involvement by family members, relatives or friends. In addition, members can be involved in the discussion when they having an interest in the products or services in the discussion. (Member 10)

- **The discussion in mind**

Lastly, 17 interviewees (68%) strongly agreed that the ‘discussion in mind’ sub-code was one of the main characteristics of e-WOM adoption in the online community.

If the discussion is in my mind or if I've been thinking about it recently, then of course the chance of adopting the girl's recommendation would be greater. For example, recently I was thinking of buying a product for my body. Suddenly, when I was reading a beauty thread, I noticed that there was a thread with the same issue in mind, so I read it and took all the information I needed. You can say yes, I adopted the recommendation in that thread because the discussion was in my mind. (Member 10)

Yes of course, if the thread is discussing something I was thinking about, I would immediately follow the recommendation. (Member 8)

6.3.2.4 Information need fulfilment

The elements of this category were: finding e-WOM in the OC, solving problems, learning new ideas and decision development. The more fully seekers' information needs were met, the more likely they were to adopt e-WOM.

- **Finding e-WOM**

Within the information need fulfilment category, the dominant sub-code was the need to find e-WOM. A total of 22 members (88%) strongly agreed that finding e-WOM motivated them to adopt e-WOM.

When I have the need to find a recommendation, I am more likely to adopt it, because I have the desire and I want it. (Member 19)

My desire to find the recommendation I need is my motive to adopt it. (Member 22)

- **Solving problems**

Twenty interviewees stated that the problem-solving element in the comments helped them to adopt the e-WOM concerned.

I recently read recommendations about a product that helps hair grow. The comment explained how the product solves the problem of hair loss, which indicated that it was useful in helping me with my hair problem. I adopted that recommendation because of my need to solve my hair problem. (Member 14)

Solving problems is my second motive to adopt a recommendation. I want to solve my beauty and other problems, that's why I adopt the recommendations here. (Member 12)

- **Learning new ideas**

Nineteen interviewees, representing 76% of the sample, agreed that another reason to adopt e-WOM was to learn new ideas.

I adopt the recommendations in this online community because I want to follow the latest trends in beauty. Also the member who posts the recommendation usually mentions that she has learnt something new. That's why I want to adopt the recommendation. (Member 10)

I follow other members' recommendations in the online community because it fulfils my information need. (Member 10)

- **Decision making**

Eighteen interviewees (72%) mentioned that they would seek help to make decisions and would adopt a recommendation if there was some indication that it would help them in the decision-making process.

I adopt the recommendations in this online community because this helps me to make my decisions easier and quicker. I don't have to look around and ask everyone, just go to the thread and ask the members. They would give me a recommendation which would help me to decide. (Member 19)

The recommendations help me to make my decision to choose the best product or service. (Member 10)

6.3.2.5 Information usefulness

A total of 24 interviewees agreed that they were influenced by e-WOM usefulness, where they perceived the e-WOM as beneficial (useful), informative or valuable. They asserted that if the information was not useful they would not adopt the e-WOM.

- **Beneficial**

A total of 24 interviewees (96%) commented that the more the member indicated that the e-WOM was useful, the more likely they would be to adopt it.

In my opinion, when the members post explicitly in the threads that the recommendation is beneficial and useful, I would be more likely to adopt the recommendation, because it would be useful for me. The usefulness of the recommendation is my way to adopt girls' recommendations. (Member 10)

I would follow immediately without thinking if I find that the post emphasizes that the recommendation is useful. But without the indication of usefulness I won't

follow the recommendation. It is the focal construct to adopt the e-WOM. (Member 19)

Interviewees' responses indicated that the other sub-codes, 'informative' and 'valuable', were less important to them, while 'beneficial' or 'useful' was the sub-code of greatest importance for them, or the main gate to adopting e-WOM.

6.3.2.6 Source credibility

Source credibility (believability of other OC members, as perceived by the recipient of the message) played an important role in the e-WOM adoption process. The six sub-codes most commonly identified were the knowledge, expertise, trustworthiness and reliability of the source, plus the negative elements 'not knowledgeable' and 'not trustworthy'. Interview responses indicated that all of these sub-codes played a role in e-WOM adoption. Here, the researcher asked the question: *Could you describe the characteristics of the members within OC, and do you think these help you to adopt the e-WOM?*

- **Knowledge**

The dominant element was knowledgeability. Twenty-three interviewees (96%) agreed that when a member who wrote a comment appeared to have full knowledge about the product or service, this made them more likely to adopt her e-WOM.

The more knowledge the member has about the product or service, the more I am willing to adopt the e-WOM. There are a lot of members who have full and very detailed knowledge. When I say knowledge I mean solid experience of the product or service. She knows about all aspects of the product from her own experience. That's why some members have that knowledge, not just information. Those types of members, I like to adopt their recommendations, because they know every tip and every issue from their long personal experience. (Member 20)

Through my membership of this online community, I can tell you that a lot of members have the knowledge which comes from experience, which is beyond information. Some members know the products very well. They know every aspect of them. They have the skills to do so. Their awareness of every aspect motivates me to adopt their recommendations and tips. (Member 13)

- **Expertise**

Twenty-two interviewees (88%) agreed that the expertise of the member writing the recommendation was an important characteristic in helping other members to decide whether to adopt it.

I can tell you that there are gurus in this online community. They are very talented in particular areas. For example, in the beauty online forum there is a hair guru, a facial guru and so on according to their expertise. I am willing to adopt their recommendations because of their skills. (Member 22)

In this online community, there are members who have a high degree of expertise in certain aspects of the subject. For example, there are members who are known for their expertise in beauty, fashion, shopping and so on. The fact that they have special expertise and skills motivates me to adopt their recommendations. (Member 19)

- **Trustworthiness**

A total of 20 interviewees agreed that the trustworthiness of the member was an important aspect of any decision to adopt e-WOM.

During the two-way communication, usually the member who adopts the e-WOM comes back to the thread to write her comments and thank the member who provided her with a trustworthy and truthful recommendation. Those members will be known as trustworthy and honest. This would motivate me to adopt their recommendations. (Member 1)

Some members are able to be relied on as honest and truthful because members can believe in their recommendations, so I am likely to adopt their recommendations too. (Member 24)

- **Not trustworthy**

Twenty interviewees commented that if they believed the source not to be trustworthy or knowledgeable, it would influence them not to adopt the e-WOM in the message.

If a recommendation is written by an untrustworthy member of course I will not adopt it, because I will not be able to judge the honesty. (Member 17)

I wouldn't believe in a recommendation that was written by a member who was not trustworthy, so I wouldn't follow anything she would recommend or say. (Member 25)

- **Reliable**

Finally in this category, 19 interviewees (76%) asserted that the recommendations in their online community were reliable because the members could be relied on.

I adopt the recommendations in this online community because the members are well known to be reliable. (Member 13)

This online community is reliable, so I can adopt the recommendations because I can trust and rely on the members. (Member 2)

6.3.2.7. Offline activities

The interviewees agreed that when a member posting e-WOM shared her mobile number or other personal contact details, this made them more willing to adopt the e-WOM. There were two sub-codes identifying the elements of this category: contact by phone and contact by exhibition.

- **Contact by phone**

There were 21 interviewees (84%) who strongly agreed that contacting other members by phone motivated them to adopt e-WOM.

More than once I've contacted the member who provided me with a recommendation. We talked on the phone about the products. This helped me a lot in following their recommendations. (Member 25)

Providing contact numbers would allow the members to get the extra recommendations they need by using the member's phone. This would facilitate the adoption of the recommendations. (Member 12)

- **Contact by exhibition**

Eighteen interviewees (72%) strongly agreed that contacting other OC members via exhibitions would motivate them to adopt their recommendations.

Contacting another member via an exhibition helped me in adopting her recommendation. I once met a member at the online community exhibition that was held before Ramadan. We chatted about the product. She provided me with the recommendation I needed, so face-to-face communication at the exhibition helped me a lot. (Member 3)

I like to meet other members at exhibitions. It's like an extra channel to provide a recommendation, but face to face. It's a second channel to get more information about the original electronic word of mouth. (Member 10)

6.3.2.8. Satisfaction

Nineteen interviewees agreed that the more satisfied they were with a recommendation, the more likely they were to follow it.

I can say that if I am satisfied, I would adopt the recommendation. Satisfaction is assurance and certainty. It is like my compass, which tells me to adopt the e-WOM or not to adopt it. (Member 17)

I can tell you that satisfaction represents for me the assurance and certainty which fulfils my wishes, so if I am satisfied I would adopt the e-WOM, but if I am not satisfied I would not adopt the e-WOM. (Member 20)

6.3.3. Q2: What types of messages are there in this OC? Do you think these types of messages affect your adoption of e-WOM?

The above interview question corresponds to this research question: *What are the message characteristics of e-WOM that most influence members to adopt e-WOM?*

- **General advice**

All 25 interviewees commented that general advice on using products or services, falling mainly under the sub-code ‘neutral 1’, played a role in e-WOM adoption.

The message characteristics motivate me to adopt e-WOM. When I see general advice on using a certain product or service, the first impression for me is to use the e-WOM. The more other members suggest using a certain product or service, the more I would have the intention to use e-WOM. (Member 1)

Of course I will choose neutral 1. General advice on using the product always persuades me to use e-WOM in the online community. I always follow what others are saying about products or services. When I see them saying use this product, I want to use it too. (Member 3)

All of the interviewees agreed that general advice on using products motivated them to adopt e-WOM in the online community.

- **Price**

According to 24 interviewees (92% of the sample), the second most important factor affecting their motivation to adopt e-WOM was the price of the product or service, as the following responses illustrate.

Whenever I see price in the girls’ comments, it helps me to adopt the e-WOM, because the price makes me decide whether to follow the comments or not. If the price suits me, I will follow their recommendation for sure, but if it doesn’t, I’ll consider it when I have the available budget. (Member 13)

Price is an important factor for me to decide whether to follow the comments in this online community or not. For example, if it suits my budget, I'll buy it, otherwise I'll save up until I can afford to buy it. (Member 22)

- **Location**

A total of 23 interviewees revealed that details of the location of the product or service in the comments would persuade them to adopt and use e-WOM in the online community.

The other factor that affects whether I adopt e-WOM is the product location. The location is important to me. If it's near to me, I'll follow the recommendation on the same day. (Member 1)

The physical location of the product is important to me. Many times I've followed recommendations and gone to buy products because the place was easy and accessible for me. (Member 25)

The elements represented by the other three neutral sub-codes were mentioned by relatively few participants. A total of 18 interviewees said that they were influenced in their adoption of e-WOM by advice on how to use products or services, contact information or descriptions of products and services.

The above discussion has addressed the neutral characteristics of e-WOM messages. Consideration now turns to the following sub-codes: 'positive', 'negative', 'accurate', 'not accurate' and 'complete'.

- **Positive**

The positive sub-code comprises five levels, which are: 1) Product or service is amazing, 2) Product or service is really amazing, 3) Product or service is really really really amazing, 4) Product or service is amaziining and 5) Product or service is amaziining.

Interestingly, all of the interviewees agreed that positive 5, where the e-WOM contains one or more words with letters repeated to make a much longer word, would influence their adoption of the e-WOM, which proves that this sub-code is likely to represent the most strongly preferred message characteristic among members of the Kuwaiti online community.

Personally, I prefer to follow a comment that contains a long adjective to describe the products. I feel that the longer the adjective is, the more it shows that the product was helpful to the member who wrote a comment about it. (Member 17)

For sure I always read a comment that describes the product in a certain way in writing. For example, yesterday I saw that one of the members had written a comment about a beauty product. She described it by lengthening the adjectives all through the thread. When a member writes a comment in this way, from my personal point of view, that means she really likes it. As a result I would follow it because of the way she described the adjective in writing. (Member 22)

Of course without any doubt the more positive the e-WOM is written, the more I would follow a recommendation to adopt it. If you ask me why I would tell you that the first impression would be that writing it in that way tells me about the strong relation between the member and the product. (Member 10)

Another interviewee commented that the style of writing reflected an affectionate relationship between the writer and the product.

A strong relation between the member and the product is obvious when I see that the positive e-WOM is written in very long words in the threads. It tells me a story about a love affair with the product. (Member 3)

It was apparent that interviewees all preferred e-WOM coded as ‘positive 5’.

- **Negative**

Negative e-WOM was similarly categorised as ranging from 1 to 5 as follows: 1) Product or service is bad, 2) Product or service is very bad, 3) Product or service is very very very bad, 4) Product or service is baaaaaad and 5) Product or service is very baaaaaaad. When they were asked about negative e-WOM, all of the interviewees not surprisingly agreed that elements coded negative 5 were important in helping them to decide to adopt the e-WOM and as a consequence not to buy the product.

I said before that a strong relation between the member and the product is obvious when I see very positive e-WOM . The same applies when I read negative e-WOM that contains very very long words in the threads. It tells me a story about, let me say, a dislike relation between them, so I would follow the recommendation and as a consequence I would not buy that product. (Member 3)

I will adopt a comment that contains negative e-WOM, especially 5, where the member stretches the negative adjective to describe a product or service, and I won't buy that product. (Member 2)

No way will I buy a product where the e-WOM is written in the negative 5 way, which means that the member had a bad experience, from the way she wrote her comment in the thread. (Member 8)

- **Quotes**

Twenty interviewees commented that e-WOM containing quotations of other members helped them to decide to adopt the e-WOM.

I agree that quotes can help members to adopt e-WOM. From my personal experience I can tell you this. Once I saw a lot of quotes of previous experiences about using a product. I said to myself why not to try it, since all the members in the thread were quoting the same experience, so I followed the quotes, which helped me to adopt and use the e-WOM. (Member 4)

Oh, whenever I see quotes that means to me that the e-WOM in that comment is significant, and as a result I want to follow it. (Member 8)

- **Completeness**

The interviewees expressed mixed opinions about completeness. Two-thirds of them (17 members) commented that completeness had a vague definition for them, so what was complete for them might be not complete for other members.

It doesn't matter if the whole post or each separate thread contains details of the product, price and location. Wherever I see these sub-codes is sufficient for me. In this case I would consider them as complete, but maybe other members would not consider these comments as complete. (Member 5)

The remaining eight interviewees stated that for them, completeness meant that in each post the e-WOM must contain all the information they would need in order that they could follow it.

The completeness of any comments depends on the member who is reading it. For example, if I read a comment that contains only information about using the product or service it won't seem complete to me. I would prefer to see one post containing the whole lot: general use of the product, price, location, contact number and description of the product. I want to see the complete e-WOM in one post in the thread and not in separate posts. (Member 23)

Well, completeness of the e-WOM means to me that in one post I will have all the information I am looking for. I don't want to look in many posts to gather all the information I need. (Member 9)

- **Accuracy**

Accuracy means that the e-WOM is accurate, precise and free of error. Interviewees agreed that accuracy was a matter of fact, indicating the extent to which the e-WOM reflected true information about a product or service from true-to-life experience. A total of 16 of the interviewees (64%) reported that the e-WOM in their OC was accurate.

The comments about products and services in this online community are accurate. The members don't get any commercial benefit from posting. It is their experience. I do believe that the posts are correct and precise, so that's why I always follow their recommendations. (Member 12)

The comments in this online community are fact-based. The member is sharing her truthful e-WOM in the post, that's why I consider it correct and follow it with no doubt in my mind. (Member 22)

- **Non-accuracy**

Only nine interviewees (36%) expressed the view that correctness could not always be assured because some members would exaggerate in their comments, which sometimes affected the accuracy of e-WOM.

Sometimes the accuracy of the comment is affected by the member exaggerating in writing the comments. A lot of exaggeration in the comments about a product or service spoils the accuracy of the e-WOM. (Member 20)

One explanation offered was that the commercial interests of some members compromised the accuracy of their e-WOM.

I can say that the e-WOM is sometimes not 100% accurate. In some comments, some members have a commercial interest, especially if she is a seller of a certain product or service. When she writes a comment about a product or service she is selling, in some way I would doubt the accuracy of her e-WOM. (Member 24)

6.3.4. Q3: How would you describe your role as a member of this OC? How important is this to e-WOM adoption?

The above interview question is related to the following research question: *What is the current classification in terms of online role behaviour in female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia?*

Interviewees agreed that their preferred online role varied according to the situation. For example, if they wanted a certain recommendation and asked for it, they would be seekers; if they posted a recommendation, then they would be contributors; and if they showed an interest in a topic, then they would be interested. When each interviewee was asked to identify the role that she generally preferred to adopt, the results were the following.

- **Inquirer**

Nineteen interviewees (three-quarters of the sample) stated that they preferred to adopt the role of inquirer (seeker), i.e. they usually inquired about e-WOM and initiated threads.

I think of myself as a recommendation seeker. I log into the thread and ask for a certain recommendation. I want a recommendation to be posted. Then, when I find the recommendation I need, I adopt it. As a recommendation seeker, I ask about a recommendation, I get feedback which contains a recommendation, which other members can adopt too, so my role can help others to adopt a recommendation. (Member 13)

- **Contributor**

Four interviewees (16%) said that they preferred to be contributors, posting e-WOM messages which helped readers to learn and understand various aspects of the requested recommendations.

I like to post recommendations because I want to help other members to adopt them. I want them to fulfil their needs and be satisfied with my recommendations. (Member 5)

- **Interested**

Only two members chose the third sub-code, stating that they always showed some interest or involvement in products or services.

Many times when I've read recommendations, I've showed other members that I'm interested in their topic. I've often adopted their recommendations because I was involved in the discussion. (Member 7)

6.4. Case study 2: Saudi online community

6.4.1. Interviewee profiles

All 25 participants in the second set of interviews were female and all except one were of Saudi nationality. As with the Kuwaiti sample, the researcher introduced herself and explained the purpose of the interviews, then elicited basic demographic data by asking each interviewee to state her nationality, age, occupation, marital status, how long she had been a member of the OC and how many hours she would typically spend each day logged in to the community. After introducing herself and explaining the purpose of the interviews, the researcher elicited basic demographic data. The majority (92%) of the interviewees were aged between 20 and 25 years. Almost all (96%) of the sample were employed and almost three-quarters (72%) were married and **university educated**. Most (92%) had been members of this particular community for at least two years and 80% reported spending an hour daily in this OC.

The next sections discuss the responses given by interviewees when questioned about the main constructs identified in the content analysis, which the researcher investigated to examine their relation with e-WOM adoption. The research codes were developed according to their importance in the content analysis (Chapter 6). The same order is followed in reporting this phase. Each of the semi-structured interview questions was developed to investigate a single sub-code, while the main research questions were based on the factors affecting e-WOM adoption.

6.4.2. Q.1: *In your opinion, why do you adopt e-WOM in this OC?*

The above interview question was designed to elicit data to address the following research question: *What are the key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the beauty industry context?*

6.4.2.1. Argument quality

The argument quality code comprised the following sub-codes: general advice on using products or services, location, price, contact information, how to use the product, and description of the product. All 25 interviewees reported that argument quality either impeded or facilitated their adoption of e-WOM. Their detailed comments are analysed in response to question 2 below.

6.4.2.2. Community bonding

The interviewees listed the ten sub-codes of community bonding according to their importance as follows: religious expression, emoticons, emotional feelings, online activities, photos, links, thanks, greetings, luck and jokes.

- **Religious expression**

All 25 interviewees stated that the existence of religious textual references in a conversation played an important role in e-WOM adoption. Thus, they confirmed that religion tended to have a major impact on e-WOM adoption.

Religion is very important in our Saudi community, thus in our virtual world. A religious expression either warns us about using a product or emphasizes that we should use it. For example, I recently read a post that recommended not removing the eyebrows, in a religious way. I followed it because it was mainly religious. I did not follow the other recommendation, which recommended removing eyebrows, because of the religious expression. In other situations, other members using religious expressions when thanking the member who has provided the e-WOM has motivated me to follow the recommendation myself. (Member 3)

I always adopt e-WOM because the religious expression motivates me to follow their recommendations. Because of the religious expression of blessing the member who provides us with the e-WOM in the thread. This religious expression tells me the member's recommendation can be adopted. (Member 8)

- **Links**

A total of 22 interviewees (88% of the Saudi OC sample) agreed that hyperlinks constituted an extra online referral system that helped them to adopt the e-WOM posted in the forum.

It's like online referral. It sometimes provides extra recommendations, usually in the online community. These links help members to adopt e-WOM by providing extra recommendations about the product from other forums within the online community. (Member 2)

I remember getting all the information I needed from one of the hyperlinks I recently visited... I read the member's comment and the linked comment. I adopted the recommendation and bought that beauty product. (Member 13)

- **Online activities**

Nineteen interviewees (76%) stated that online activity which included social network sites would help them to adopt e-WOM. They commented that social network sites were further tools that motivated them to adopt and use e-WOM.

Mentioning online sites in the recommendation is a tool for promoting products. It motivates me to visit those social online sites and to adopt the comments in the online community. (Member 3)

Online sites are very famous tools for buying and selling products nowadays. For example, last month I saw a comment about lipstick. I went to the Instagram account and looked at the lipstick colours. Without Instagram I would not have followed the recommendation and bought that lipstick. (Member 12)

- **Emotional feelings**

Twenty of the 25 interviewees identified emotional feelings as a key factor in e-WOM adoption. They agreed that emotions which contain all types of emotion, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, would help them to adopt e-WOM.

Emotional feelings are feelings that come from the heart. I would follow a comment that contains true emotions. (Member 11)

I always follow positive emotional feelings when they represent positive e-WOM. (Member 23)

- **Photos**

A total of 18 interviewees (72%) agreed that photographs or other images of products persuaded them to adopt e-WOM. They explained that such images motivated them by helping them to recognize the recommended goods more quickly and easily.

An image or photo of the product would make that recommendation stick in my mind, which would help me to remember the product more easily. (Member13)

Photos of the product would definitely help to remember the product and find it more easily. (Member 25)

The other sub-categories—greetings, emoticons, thanks, luck and jokes—were mentioned less often by the interviewees, only 12 of whom (fewer than half) strongly agreed that these codes had influenced them to adopt e-WOM.

6.4.2.3. Receiver involvement

Receiver involvement was also found to play a role in e-WOM adoption. Interviewees were asked about the three main sub-codes: ‘pushing up the topic’, ‘involved in the issue’, and ‘discussion in mind’.

- **Involved in the issue**

A total of 22 of the interviewees (88% of the sample) said that the more they were involved in the discussion topic, the more willing they were to adopt the recommendations.

I've often followed a recommendation because I was involved in the same product topic in the threads. (Member 2)

Members can be involved in the discussion when they are interested in the product or service in the discussion. Last month, I adopted an e-WOM because it was the same as my interest. It was a hair removal product. (Member 8)

- **Pushing up the topic**

Eighteen interviewees agreed that ‘pushing up the topic to the top of threads’ played a role in e-WOM adoption. This would be posted by interested members so that others could post their comments or recommendations.

I can say that pushing the topic is a significant factor in the thread. It can help other members to provide recommendations so they can benefit from adopting them. (Member 8)

Pushing up the topic is like a reminder for other members to provide more recommendations so other members can read it and then adopt it. I think of it as an online tool that helps us to follow other members' recommendations. (Member 15)

- **Discussion in mind**

Only 10 of the 25 Saudi interviewees said that having the discussion in mind played a role in their e-WOM adoption.

6.4.2.4. Information need fulfilment

Most interviewees strongly agreed that the dominant elements in information need fulfilment were finding e-WOM in the OC, solving problems, learning new ideas and decision development. The greater their information need, the more likely they were to adopt e-WOM.

- **Finding e-WOM**

The dominant sub-code was the need to find e-WOM. Thus, 22 interviewees (88%) agreed that where their motive was their desire to find a recommendation, they would be likely to adopt it.

Whenever I need to find a recommendation, I am more willing to adopt the e-WOM. (Member 10)

The need to find a recommendation is my motive to adopt it. (Member 4)

- **Decision making**

A total of 19 interviewees (76%) stated that help with decision making would encourage them to adopt e-WOM. They would adopt a recommendation if there was some indication that it would help them in the decision making process.

The adoption of recommendations in this online community helps me to make my decisions simpler and quicker. (Member 19)

Making my decision can be easier because of e-WOM adoption. By adopting the recommendation, I can make my decision to buy a product or to choose a certain service. (Member 10)

- **Solving problems**

Eighteen interviewees said that the problem-solving function of the comments helped them to adopt e-WOM in the online community.

The product recommendations here in this online forum always help me to solve a problem, which is one of my information needs. (Member 7)

If I want to solve my beauty and other problems, I visit this online community; I adopt the recommendation to fulfil my need. (Member 10)

- **Learning new ideas**

Eleven interviewees (fewer than half) agreed that a third reason to adopt e-WOM was to learn new ideas.

I always adopt the recommendations in this online community because I want to learn new things. Learning new things helps me to follow the latest trends in fashion and beauty. (Member 10)

When a member who posts a recommendation mentions that she has learnt something new, this encourages me to adopt her recommendation. (Member 8)

6.4.2.5. Information usefulness

The interviewees agreed that e-WOM usefulness referred to the perception of the e-WOM as beneficial (useful), informative and valuable.

- **Beneficial**

A total of 24 members commented that the more the originating member indicated that the e-WOM was beneficial, the more likely they were to adopt it.

The members usually post explicitly in the threads that the recommendation is beneficial. This would encourage me to adopt that recommendation because it was useful for them, so why not, it would be useful for me too. (Member 1)

If the members in thread say that the recommendation is useful, then I would follow it because of its usefulness for them. From my point of view, if the information or recommendation isn't useful, there's no point in adopting the e-WOM. I would strongly agree that information usefulness is like a bridge to e-WOM adoption. It's a kind of in-between construct that must be available in the online messages so I can adopt them. (Member 8)

6.4.2.6. Source credibility

The interviewees indicated that source credibility (the believability of other OC members, as perceived by the recipient of the message) played any important role in the e-WOM adoption process. The six sub-codes most commonly identified were the same as for the Kuwaiti forum, but not in the same order of importance. The Saudi OC interviewees agreed that e-WOM adoption was influenced by all of the sub-codes below, beginning with the most important. The researcher here asked: *Could you describe the characteristics of the members within OC, and do you think it helps you to adopt the e-WOM?*

- **Trustworthiness**

The dominant element was whether the initiator was trustworthy. Twenty-four of the 25 interviewees agreed that the trustworthiness of the member was an important factor in deciding to adopt the e-WOM.

Members of our online community are known as trustworthy and honest, which motivates me to adopt their recommendations. (Member 11)

I am willing to adopt members' recommendations, because I rely on their honesty and truthfulness. (Member 2)

- **Knowledgeable**

A total of 23 members (94%) agreed that if a member who had written a comment had full knowledge of the product or service, they would be more likely to adopt her e-WOM.

The members of this online community have good knowledge about the products and services. They know every aspect of each product from their experience. That's why I'm willing to follow their recommendations. (Member 10)

Members are knowledgeable. They have the experience of knowing every aspect of the products or services. This knowledge of every aspect motivates me to adopt their recommendations and tips. (Member 4)

- **Expertise**

Twenty interviewees (80%) agreed that the expertise of the member posting a recommendation was an important factor affecting whether other members would follow it.

I am willing to adopt their recommendations because a lot of members are experts in some products and services. (Member 20)

- **Not trustworthy and not knowledgeable**

Fewer than a third of interviewees (eight in total) stated that if a contributor was untrustworthy or not knowledgeable, this would be an obstacle to their adoption of the e-WOM.

I will not be able to judge the honesty of the members online, that's why it is difficult to adopt the recommendation. (Member 1)

I wouldn't believe in a recommendation that was written by an untrustworthy member, so I wouldn't follow anything she would recommend or say. (Member 18)

Sometimes I feel that some members don't have the necessary knowledge. Then I'm not willing to adopt their recommendations, because of the lack of awareness and knowledge. (Member 9)

6.4.2.7. Offline activities

Interviewees agreed that the more a member shared her mobile number or personal contact details, they more willing they were to adopt her e-WOM. This code comprised two sub-codes: contact by phone and contact by exhibition.

- **Contact by phone**

Eighteen of the 25 interviewees agreed that contacting other members by phone motivated them to adopt e-WOM.

Talking on the phone about the products motivates me to follow members' recommendations. (Member 12)

I always make contact if there is a phone number, so I can talk more about recommendations, which helps me to adopt the recommendations. (Member 20)

- **Contact by exhibition**

A total of 17 interviewees (68%) agreed that meeting other members of the online community face-to-face motivated them to adopt their recommendations.

I always chat about online recommendations at product exhibitions, which really helps a lot in deciding whether to adopting the recommendation. (Member 3)

Meeting other members face to face at an exhibition helps me to talk more about electronic word of mouth, which helps me to adopt it. (Member 1)

6.4.2.8. Satisfaction

Half of the interviewees (12) agreed that the more satisfied they were with the recommendation, the more willing they were to adopt e-WOM.

Satisfaction represents the fulfilment of my certainty, so if I am satisfied I will adopt the e-WOM. (Member 8)

Satisfaction for me represents certainty, which tells me to adopt the e-WOM or not to adopt the e-WOM. (Member 10)

6.4.3. Q2: *What types of messages are there in this OC? Do you think these types of messages affect your adoption of e-WOM?*

The above interview question corresponds to this research question: *What are the message characteristics of e-WOM that most influence members to adopt e-WOM?*

- **General advice on using products or services**

All 25 interviewees commented that general advice on using products or services was influential.

Argument quality has an impact on e-WOM adoption. The first thing for me is to read how the member recommends using the product. The better the advice, the more likely I am to have the intention to adopt the recommendation. (Member 11)

When the girls in the online forum write 'Use this product', this general advice motivates me to follow the recommendation. (Member 5)

All of the interviewees thus revealed that general advice on using products motivated them to adopt e-WOM in the online community.

- **Location**

A total of 24 interviewees (96%) stated that finding the location of the product or service in the comments would persuade them to adopt and use that e-WOM.

Location, location, location. As you know, Saudi Arabia is a big country. For example, I live in Riyadh. It's not convenient for me to follow a recommendation to buy a product if the shop is three hours away from Riyadh. If I read in the recommendation that the product can be found nearby, of course this would motivate me to adopt the recommendation. Thus, the location is important to me. (Member 20)

Last time I followed a recommendation, it was because the location was nearby, only two blocks away from my house. Location is important, because if it was too far I wouldn't be able to follow the recommendation and buy it. (Member 21)

- **Price**

According to 23 interviewees (92% of the sample), the factor having the second strongest influence on them to adopt e-WOM was price.

The price makes me decide whether to follow girls' comments or not. If I have the available budget I tend to follow the recommendation, but if it's too expensive for me, I won't follow it. (Member 8)

I totally agree that the price is a significant factor for me to decide whether to follow the comments in this online community or not. It is important to keep my budget on track and not to exceed it. (Member 22)

- **How to use products**

A total of 22 interviewees (88%) stated that directions on how to use products played a role in e-WOM adoption.

The directions on how to use the product helped me in following a recommendation on how to use a laser machine for hair removal at home instead of going to a laser clinic. (Member 17)

Girls' instructions on using products in their posts motivates me to follow their recommendations. I can say it has helped me many many times. (Member 22)

- **Contact information**

Twenty-one interviewees commented that contact details such as telephone numbers motivated them to adopt online recommendations.

A contact number is a very important aspect of the recommendation. I always read the comments that have contact information so I can follow the recommendation. (Member 22)

Definitely, a contact number always helps me to follow a recommendation. More than once I've contacted the seller following a girl's recommendation. (Member 18)

- **Positive (1)**

In contrast to the results of the Kuwait interviews, all of the Saudi OC interviewees expressed a preference for following positive e-WOM if the positive elements were expressed in straightforward language (positive 1) rather than the hyperbolic forms (positive 5) favoured by the Kuwaiti interviewees.

I prefer to follow a comment that contains positive word of mouth. It does not need to have long phrases to describe the good quality of the product or service. (Member 10)

I prefer to read comments that describe the product in a simple positive way, not to exaggerate and write it in very positive long phrases. (Member 12)

- **Negative (1)**

The responses regarding negative e-WOM were closely consistent with those on positive e-WOM above, again marking a strong contrast with the Kuwaiti interviewees. Thus, the Saudi OC interviewees all agreed that simple negative e-WOM (coded negative 1) would

be likely to persuade them not to buy the product or services concerned. In other words, they would adopt the e-WOM and as a consequence not buy the product or service.

Last time I read negative e-WOM which contained the comment 'the product is bad', to be honest when I read it, I did not buy the product because the e-WOM was negative. It affects me. (Member 23)

Simple negative e-WOM would have an impact on me. I will follow a recommendation if it contains negative word of mouth. Recently, I intended to buy a product, but when I read the negative comments about it in the thread, I adopted their e-WOM and did not buy it. (Member 18)

- **Quotes**

A total of 22 interviewees (88%) commented that they were more likely to adopt e-WOM if it quoted the views of another member.

Quotes of previous experiences about using product helped me to adopt and use e-WOM. When a member mentions a quote about a certain product, it tells me that the product had a big impact on them, which would motivate me to adopt that recommendation. (Member 24)

As a result of reading more quotes by the online community member about a certain product I would be motivated to adopt that recommendation. (Member 21)

- **Completeness**

Twenty-one interviewees (84%) agreed that the completeness of an e-WOM message would motivate them to adopt it.

If the recommendation contains general advice, price and location, I would consider it to be complete and I would adopt it and follow that recommendation. (Member 13)

The other four interviewees expressed a broadly similar view but defined slightly differently what completeness would mean for them, in terms of the elements a comment must include in order for them to adopt the e-WOM.

I would prefer to read the whole post if it contains information on general use of the product, price, location, contact number and description of the product. This is what the completeness of the post means for me, which would allow me to adopt the e-WOM. (Member 10)

I don't want to look in each post to gather all the information I need to adopt the recommendation. To be complete for me there should be stuff about general use of that product, price and contact number in one post, so I can I adopt it. (Member 9)

- **Accuracy**

Twenty (80%) of the Saudi OC interviewees agreed that e-WOM was accurate in their forum, as it should be.

The comments in this online community are accurate. That's why I always follow their recommendations, because they're truthful. (Member 12)

Truthful e-WOM motivates me to adopt it, because it is correct and full of fact-based information. (Member 6)

- **Non-accuracy**

The remaining five respondents said that accuracy sometimes could not be achieved, because some members exaggerated in their comments. They added that online sellers sometimes provide inaccurate recommendations.

Online sellers sometimes provide inaccurate recommendations when they write a comment about a product or service they're selling. I would not follow online sellers' e-WOM because of the inaccuracy issue. (Member 22)

6.4.4. Q3: How would you describe your role as a members of this OC? How important is this to e-WOM adoption?

The above interview question is related to the following research sub-question: *What is the current classification in terms of online role behaviour in female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia?*

Interviewees agreed that online role varied according to the situation. Thus, a member who wanted a certain recommendation and asked for it was a seeker, one who posted a recommendation was a contributor and one who showed an interest in a topic was interested. As to the role each interviewee preferred to adopt, the responses were the following.

- **Contributor**

Twenty interviewees (80%) said that they would prefer to be contributors. They posted e-WOM messages and helped readers to understand and learn various aspects of the requested recommendations.

Posting recommendations is the preferred role I like to follow. I want to help other members to choose products. (Member 20)

- **Inquirer**

Four other interviewees stated that they preferred to be seekers, i.e. women who usually inquired about e-WOM and initiated threads.

I am a recommendation seeker. I ask for recommendations and get feedback that contains recommendations, which other members can adopt too, so my role can help in the adoption of a recommendation. (Member 13)

- **Interested**

The remaining member considered herself to be described by the third sub-code, because she always showed the same interest or involvement in products or services.

Many times I've adopted a recommendation because I was involved in the discussion and very interested in the topic. (Member 7)

6.4.5. Q4: Can you name any other factors that help you to adopt e-WOM?

Three of the Saudi OC interviewees commented that traditional word of mouth from family members, relatives and friends helped them to adopt the e-WOM in the online community.

I can tell you that If I read a comment in the online community, I will ask a member of my family about that product. I want to get confirmation. (Member 10)

I always like to ask for confirmation from my family if I read a comment about a product or service. In my opinion, family members guide me and help me to adopt the e-WOM. (Member 12)

6.5. Comparison between the Kuwaiti and Saudi OCs regarding e-WOM e-WOM adoption

This section considers the similarities and differences between the Kuwaiti and Saudi OCs regarding e-WOM adoption. It discusses the most important factors that interviewees identified and prioritised. The key similarity was that the two sets of data identified the same key determinants: argument quality, community bonding, receiver involvement, information need fulfilment, information usefulness, source credibility, offline activities and satisfaction. The key differences appeared to be in the elements represented by sub-codes. For example, there was widespread agreement among interviewees that **argument quality** had a key role in e-WOM adoption, but significant differences as to the nine sub-codes of this category, discussion of which is presented in section 6.17.

There were also differences between the two OCs on the **community bonding** sub-codes, particularly emoticons: all 25 Kuwaiti interviewees, but only half of their Saudi counterparts, said that emoticons influenced them to adopt e-WOM. There was more agreement on the remaining community bonding sub-codes. Twenty-four (96%) of the Kuwaiti interviewees commented that emotional feelings were a key factor in e-WOM adoption, while slightly fewer Saudi interviewees (20 = 80%) agreed. A similar degree of difference emerged on online activities. Again, 24 Kuwaiti interviewees said that social network sites affected whether they chose to adopt e-WOM, compared with only 19 Saudi interviewees. There was closer agreement on the religious expression sub-code: 23 Kuwaiti and all 25 Saudi interviewees reported that the inclusion of religious references in the conversation played an important role in their adoption of e-WOM. On the next sub-code, 22 Kuwaiti interviewees and 18 Saudis agreed that images of products helped to persuade them to adopt e-WOM. The situation was reversed for the 'links' sub-code, as 18 Kuwaiti and 22 Saudi interviewees stated that hyperlinks to products or services encouraged them to adopt e-WOM by providing an extra online referral channel. The remaining sub-codes of community bonding—greetings, thanks, luck and jokes—were mentioned less often by the interviewees. Fewer than half of each sample (12 Saudis and 11 Kuwaitis) agreed that these factors had influenced them to adopt e-WOM or that they would be helpful in e-WOM adoption.

In the **receiver involvement** category, there was broad similarity between the two groups on one of the sub-codes and notable differences on the other two. Thus, 22 Saudi

interviewees and 20 Kuwaitis said that the more they were involved in the discussion topic, the more willing they were to adopt the recommendations. In other words, there was strong agreement that being involved in the issue played a role in e-WOM. On the other hand, while all Kuwaiti interviewees agreed that ‘pushing up the topic to the top of threads’ played a role in the adoption of e-WOM, only 18 Saudis (72%) agreed with this proposition. The two groups also differed on the ‘discussion in mind’ sub-code: 17 Kuwaiti interviewees (68%) agreed that this was a major factor in e-WOM adoption, whereas only ten Saudi interviewees (40%) were of this opinion.

Of the four sub-codes of **information needs fulfilment**, the two interview samples gave generally similar responses on three and differed on the other. They agreed closely on the need to find e-WOM, as 22 members of each community said that where their motive was their desire to find a recommendation, they would be likely to adopt one if they found it. Nineteen Saudi interviewees and 18 Kuwaitis stated that they appreciated help in making decisions and would adopt a recommendation if there was some indication that it would help them in the decision-making process. Similarly, 20 Kuwaiti interviewees and 18 Saudi ones stated that the problem-solving element in the comments helped them to adopt e-WOM. There was, however, a marked difference between the two groups on learning new ideas, where three-quarters of Kuwaiti interviewees (19) said that this was one reason to adopt e-WOM, whereas fewer than half of the Saudi interviewees (11) agreed.

There were strong similarities between the groups on the **information usefulness** category. Twenty-four Kuwaiti interviewees and all 25 from the Saudi OC stated that they were influenced by e-WOM usefulness, where they perceived the e-WOM as beneficial (useful), informative or valuable. Conversely, if the information was not useful they would not adopt the e-WOM. On the ‘beneficial’ sub-code, 24 interviewees from each OC said that the more the posting member indicated that the e-WOM was useful, the more likely they would be to adopt it. In both cases, the other two sub-codes (informative and valuable) were seen as less important. Thus, for both groups, the ‘beneficial’ sub-code was the most important aspect of information usefulness when deciding whether to adopt e-WOM.

Source credibility (the believability of other OC members, as perceived by the recipient of the message) played an important role in e-WOM adoption in both cases. The six sub-codes most commonly identified were: the knowledge, expertise, trustworthiness and reliability of the source, plus the negative elements ‘not knowledgeable’ and ‘not

trustworthy'. There was a major difference between the interview groups on only one of these, reliability. On the 'knowledgeable' sub-code, 23 interviewees in each of the two samples agreed that if a member who had written a comment had full knowledge of the product or service, they would be more likely to adopt her e-WOM. There was also complete agreement between the two groups on the negative elements: 20 interviewees in each case commented that if they believed the source not to be trustworthy or knowledgeable, it would influence them not to adopt the e-WOM in the message. Agreement on expertise was not quite as strong: 22 Kuwait interviewees and 20 Saudis felt that the expertise of the member writing a recommendation was an important characteristic in helping other members to decide whether to adopt it. On trustworthiness, 24 Saudi interviewees said that the trustworthiness of the member was an important factor in deciding whether to adopt her e-WOM. On the whole, the Kuwaiti interviewees agreed, although those who did so were slightly less numerous (20). Finally in this category, 19 Kuwaiti interviewees asserted that the recommendations in their online community were reliable because the members could be relied on. In a very marked contrast, none of the Saudi interviewees mentioned this factor as important in e-WOM adoption.

In the category of **offline activities**, the interviewees generally agreed that when a member posting e-WOM shared her mobile number or other personal contact details, this made them more willing to adopt the e-WOM. There were two sub-codes identifying the elements of this category: contact by phone and contact at exhibitions. There was a small difference between the samples on contact by phone, whereby 21 Kuwaiti and 18 Saudi interviewees stated that contacting other members by phone motivated them to adopt e-WOM. Agreement was closer on contact at exhibitions: 18 Kuwaiti and 17 Saudi interviewees agreed that meeting other OC members at exhibitions would motivate them to adopt their recommendations.

The final category, satisfaction, showed little agreement: 19 Kuwaiti interviewees (76%) said that the more satisfied they were with a recommendation, the more likely they were to follow it, but in the Saudi case only twelve interviewees (48%) agreed with this assertion.

6.5.1. The influence of message characteristics on e-WOM adoption

This subsection considers the message characteristics that influenced participants to adopt e-WOM. The message characteristic representing the dominant element of argument

quality was general advice on using products or services. All Kuwaiti and Saudi interviewees said that such advice, falling mainly under the sub-code 'neutral 1', played a role in motivating them to adopt e-WOM, but the two groups differed sharply on the details of positive and negative argument quality. All of the Kuwaiti interviewees agreed that 'positive 5', where the e-WOM contains one or more words with letters repeated to make a much longer word, would influence their adoption of the e-WOM, indicating that this sub-code is likely to represent the most strongly preferred message characteristic among members of the Kuwaiti OC. In contrast, all of the Saudi OC interviewees expressed a preference for following positive e-WOM if the positive elements were expressed in straightforward language (positive 1) rather than the hyperbolic forms favoured by the Kuwaiti interviewees. Similarly, when the Kuwaiti interviewees were asked about negative e-WOM, all of them stated that elongated elements coded 'negative 5' were important in helping them to decide to adopt the e-WOM and as a consequence not to buy the product, whereas the Saudi OC interviewees all agreed that simple negative e-WOM (coded negative 1) would be most likely to persuade them not to buy the product or services concerned. In other words, the negative e-WOM findings are completely consistent with those for positive e-WOM.

In contrast to the sharp differences on the details of positive and negative message characteristics, there were broad similarities between the two groups of interviewees on most of the other sub-codes in this category. Twenty-four Kuwaiti and 23 Saudi interviewees said that the price of the product or service was an important factor affecting their motivation to adopt e-WOM. There was the same degree of agreement on the 'location' sub-code: 24 Saudi and 23 Kuwaiti interviewees said that finding the location of the product or service in the comments would persuade them to adopt and use that e-WOM. A total of 22 Saudi interviewees stated that directions on how to use products played a role in e-WOM adoption and 21 reported that the inclusion of contact details such as telephone numbers motivated them to adopt online recommendations. Slightly fewer Kuwaiti interviewees (18) said that they were influenced in their adoption of e-WOM by advice on how to use products or services, contact information or descriptions of products and services. As to the 'quotes' sub-code, 22 Kuwaiti and 20 Saudi interviewees stated that they were more likely to adopt e-WOM if it quoted the views of another member. There was rather less agreement on the 'completeness' element, with Saudi interviewees expressing a stronger tendency to be motivated by the completeness of an e-WOM

message than their Kuwaiti counterparts. Twenty-one Saudi interviewees said that completeness would motivate them to adopt e-WOM, while the other four expressed a broadly similar view but defined slightly differently what completeness would mean for them, in terms of the elements a comment must include in order for them to adopt the e-WOM. The Kuwaiti interviewees expressed rather more mixed opinions of completeness. Almost three-quarters (17) of them commented that completeness had a vague definition for them, so what was complete for them might be not complete for other members. For the remaining eight interviewees, completeness meant that in each post the e-WOM must contain all the information they would need in order to follow it. There were also some differences concerning 'accuracy', a sub-code designating e-WOM that was precise and free of error. Twenty of the Saudi OC interviewees believed that e-WOM was accurate in their forum, as it should be, while the number of Saudi interviewees who thought that this was true of their forum was a little smaller, at 16. Finally, there was considerable disagreement over non-accuracy: nine Kuwaiti interviewees and five from the Saudi OC expressed the view that correctness could not always be assured, because some members would exaggerate in their comments, which sometimes affected the accuracy of e-WOM. In particular, online sellers were accused of sometimes providing inaccurate recommendations.

6.5.2. Members' behavioural roles

In this subsection the discussion turns to online behavioural role classifications, which will help to answer research sub-question RQC (Chapter 1, section 1.3). In Saudi Arabia, when asked about their preferred online role behaviour, twenty interviewees (80%) said that they would prefer to be contributors, posting e-WOM messages and helping readers to understand and learn various aspects of the requested recommendations. One of them said: *"We share, participate, post the recommendation so we can help other members to read the recommendation and adopt it."* As mentioned before, **contributors** are those who posted e-WOM messages. Their main activities were to post e-WOM in order to help other members to find the beauty products or services they needed. In other words, they cooperated with other members to provide recommendations. They shared information in the threads and posted neutral, positive and negative e-WOM. In addition, they used community bonding patterns such as religious expressions, greetings, emoticons, thanks, emotional feelings, luck, photos, links, online activities and jokes.

By contrast, the majority of interviewees (76%) in the Kuwaiti forum were inquirers, who preferred to ask about products or services and read other members' e-WOM. One of these members stated: *"I like to inquire about product or service recommendations in this online community. By asking other members, I am sure that I will get the recommendation I need and then I can follow it."* As mentioned before, their main activities were to enquire about e-WOM and to initiate threads. The main roles of those logging in to the beauty OC were to read and to ask for information about products or services. Interestingly, most of the members who adopted e-WOM tended to be inquirers, because they tended to enquire about beauty recommendations. The following example shows how an inquirer starts a conversation or discussion, eventually adopting the e-WOM in the thread:

<p>Member 1 (main inquirer)</p> <p>1/2/2013</p> <p><i>“Hello girls”</i> (greeting-community bonding)</p> <p><i>“In need your experience in a skin product”</i> (find e-WOM-INF)</p> <p><i>“I need to solve the acne on my face”</i> (solve problem-INF)</p> <p><i>“Girls I need to benefit from your experience”</i> (beneficial-IU)</p> <p>Member 2 (contributor)</p> <p>1/2/2013</p> <p><i>“Use Lancaster cream”</i> (neutral (1)- AQ)</p> <p>Member 4 (contributor)</p> <p>1/2/2013</p> <p><i>“The discussion about skin product was in my mind lately”</i> (discussion in mind - RI)</p> <p><i>“I want to find girls experiences too”</i> (find e-WOM- IN)</p> <p>Member 5 (contributor)</p> <p>2/2/2013</p> <p><i>“Use Paparazzi cream”</i> (neutral(1)-AG)</p> <p>Member 1 (main inquirer)</p> <p>10/2/2013</p> <p><i>“Thank you member 2”</i> (Thanks - CB)</p> <p><i>“I am following your advice”</i> (adoption of e-WOM)</p> <p><i>“You provided me with beneficial information”</i> (beneficial - information usefulness)</p>
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6.6. Summary

This chapter has discussed the findings of the second phase of the study, resulting from the analysis of interview data. It has examined the main factors affecting the adoption of e-WOM by members of two online communities, such as argument quality, community bonding, receiver involvement; information needs fulfilment, source credibility, satisfaction and online activities. In addition, it has identified the main neutral, positive and negative characteristics of the forum messages that members believed themselves to be influenced by in their decisions to adopt or ignore e-WOM.

The following chapter provides a discussion of the findings set out here and in the preceding chapter, in light of the literature review.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an interpretive discussion of the findings of the two phases of data collection, i.e. the content analysis (Chapter 5) and online interviews (Chapter 6), as well as those of the literature review (Chapter 2), in order to examine what motivates members of female online communities to adopt e-WOM. It focuses on the case studies of a Kuwaiti and a Saudi female OC.

7.2. Interpretation of qualitative analyses

This section considers the findings of the content analysis in order of their importance, from highest to lowest. First it presents the final model from the two cases which includes key determinants factors of e-WOM adoption (RQ1, Chapter 1, section 1.3), in order to answer the research sub-question RQB on message characteristics and to identify the current situation of online roles (RQC). Finally, it summarises the main differences between the two cases (RQA).

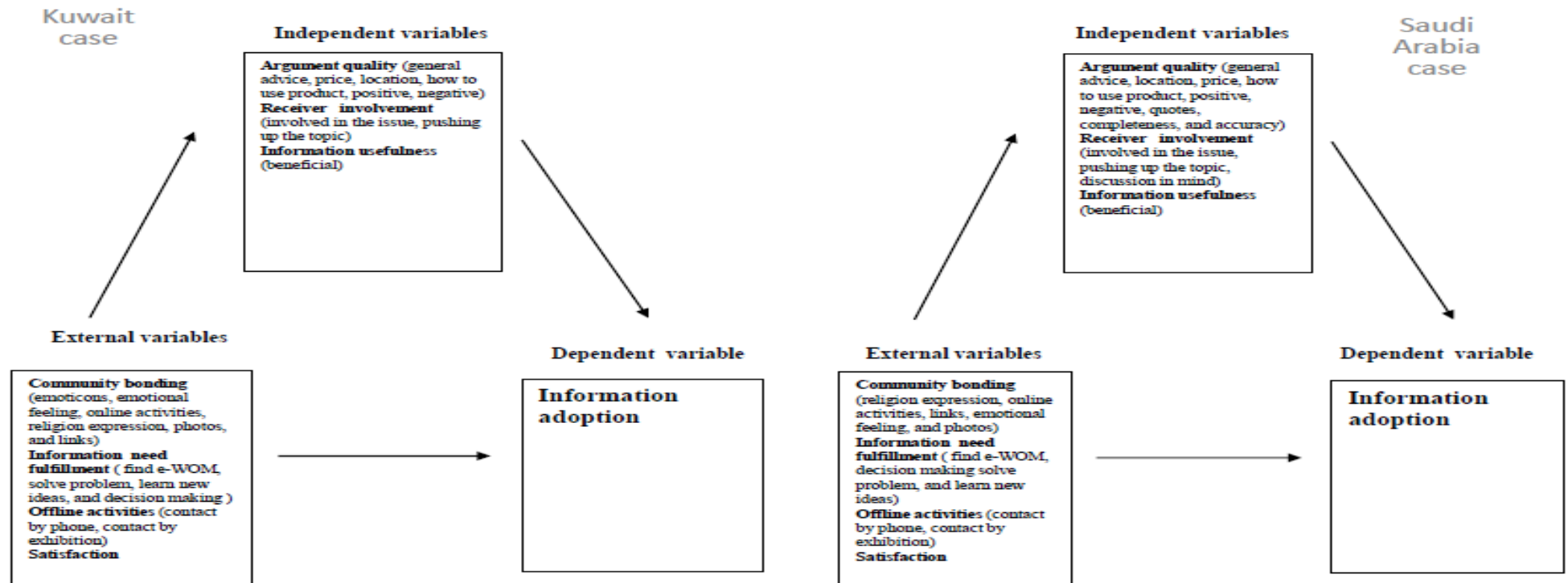


Figure 7.1: The final models including factors and sub-codes of the Kuwaiti and Saudi case.

7.2.1. Key determinants of e-WOM adoption in the beauty industry context

7.2.1.1 Argument Quality

This research has proven argument quality to be an important construct in e-WOM adoption. The content analysis findings show that both Kuwaiti and Saudi females asserted that it influenced them to adopt e-WOM messages. In online interviews, both sets of interviewees agreed that argument quality played a significant role in their e-WOM adoption. Many interviewees commented that argument quality was an antecedent in the e-WOM adoption process.

This is consistent with the finding of the literature review that argument quality has proven to be an important element which people use to evaluate incoming messages in an online community (Cheung and Lee, 2007). Many researchers have shown that argument quality directly affects the attitude of the message receiver, whether offline (Cacioppo, Petty and Morris, 1983) or online, in the adoption of e-mail advice (Sussman and Siegal, 2001), across genders (Awad and Ragowsky, 2008) and particularly in online forums (Jin et al., 2009). Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn (2008) attempted to build upon the information adoption model by applying it to a single online community of restaurant users in China, adding four constructs as argument quality dimensions: relevance, timeliness, accuracy and comprehensiveness. Of these, they found that only relevance and comprehensiveness significantly affected perceived informational usefulness.

In another study, Wang, Lui and Fan (2011) identified six argument quality dimensions and three source credibility dimensions in data extracted from a popular online community. Their online survey findings showed that all these dimensions improved performance over a traditional text classification technique that considers word-based lexical features only. Similarly, Yan (2008) showed that source credibility, argument quality and trustworthiness had strong and positive associations with information seekers' trust and their perceptions of the information's usefulness. A study by Ha and Ahn (2011) found that both argument quality and source credibility influenced users' individual perceptions of information usefulness in adopting e-WOM in Twitter. They argue that users consider the sender's credibility (for instance, based on expertise and prior activities on Twitter) to assess the information in the tweet.

The findings of the present study may be correlated with those of Laaksonen (2012), who found that Facebook users tended to value the e-WOM of other regular users of Facebook in their group, which had an effect on their valuation of products. Similarly, Niu (2013) found that consumers in Taiwan tended to be persuaded by the influence of peer recommendation and high quality when deciding whether to shop online. The present findings confirm that participants tended to adopt e-WOM from their peers in the same community.

7.2.1.2 Community bonding

- **Emoticons**

Emoticons were used slightly more by members of the Kuwaiti OC, according to the content analysis and online interviews, to reveal their emotions. For example, contributors used smileys and flowers to represent their positive experience of using a particular product or service and these emoticons were dominant in both OCs. Members tended to express their thanks after requesting e-WOM by posting smiley faces with flowers; and in some instances, they would post smiley emoticons holding flowers to wish luck to other initiators. Kiss and love emoticons were also posted to show how much participants loved other OC members, or to show affection for a product or service.

Other emoticons, such as sadness or crying, were mainly posted by inquirers after requesting a recommendation or to show that they needed help to solve their skin or body problems. In some instances, a member would post a negative emoticon after her e-WOM to show that the product was not successful in her case when she used it. Other emoticons, such as calling and asking for help, were posted by inquirers in order for others to pay attention to their request for a recommendation. In some instances, members showed their surprise when others posted an e-WOM message that they were not familiar with.

The finding that emoticons, especially the smiley and the smiley holding flowers, were frequent in these female forums is consistent with that of Wolf (2000), who showed that females tended to post more emoticons representing a sense of humour. More often, emoticons can be found in informal online communities where members tend to share their ideas online (Derk, Bos and Grumkow, 2007). Similarly, Vandergriff and Fuchs (2013) found that German students used smiley emoticons to represent their agreement with what other students had commented in online discussion boards.

The present research is one of only a few such studies set in the Middle East and analysing messages from real online conversations among members of female-only OCs, although similar research has been done in Western and Asian countries. Using emotive acts, such as showing feelings in ways other than in writing, is reminiscent of the finding of Huang, Yen and Zhang (2008) that emoticons were a valuable addition to email communication in the United States. However, it contradicts those of Guiller and Durndel (2006), whose findings showed a lack of emoticons. This may explain why members of the Saudi OC tended not to post emoticons as much as their Kuwaiti peers, preferring to convey meaning through their language rather than relying on emoticons to convey the tone of their messages.

- **Religious expression**

Religious expressions tended to be used by members of both OCs, according to the content analysis and interview data; however, they were used slightly more often in the Kuwait case to reveal the emotions of the participants, whereas more direct prayers and blessings, such as ‘God bless you,’ ‘I will pray for you’ and ‘May God cure you of your problem’, were much more common in the Saudi case. One explanation for this distinction is that Saudi Arabia is a more conservative country than Kuwait and the cultural influence of Islam is particularly strong (Long, 2005).

More generally, the frequent use of religious language in the data reflects the relatively conservative nature of both Kuwaiti and Saudi religious culture, Islam being the dominant religion in both countries. The importance given to religion is reflected in the text of many online conversations, which show evidence of OC members, mainly in the Saudi case, refusing to adopt certain recommendations for reasons related to religion. The explanation for this importance given to religious expression, that in such conservative societies Islam guides people in many ways, is consistent with the findings of Midden and Ponzanesi (2013), that Muslim females tend to reveal their religious identity via various online media. Hence, religious culture offline tends to shape religious identity online, where information and recommendations tend to be shared with other like-minded members.

This thesis makes a novel contribution by reporting the use of religious expression in the context of sharing beauty e-WOM in the Middle East, where few studies have compared patterns of e-WOM through content analysis, although some have investigated women’s seeking of fatwa or religious opinion online. Ali (2010) and Piela (2013) investigated an

English-language online forum restricted to Muslim women in the United States, in order to explore the role of gender in Islam. The present study extends knowledge with the finding that religious expression in an online beauty forum in a Middle Eastern context was part of the daily interaction in a non-religious female community.

- **Emotional feelings**

The content analysis and interview findings show that emotional feelings were more frequently expressed in the Kuwaiti case, where participants tended to share their feelings towards other members, but almost the same patterns appeared in both communities. Common elements were expressions of love for the OC itself and affection for products which posters had had a positive experience using. Other emotional feelings, such as sadness or crying emoticons (see above) appeared where inquirers expressed their informational need to solve their beauty problems. In addition, explicitly negative e-WOM posts tended to be accompanied by sad faces in order to warn other inquirers about the products or services. This finding is similar to that of McColl-Kennedy et al. (2009), who asserts that the expression of negative emotional feelings reflected the negative experiences of consumers when using a product or service previously.

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, negative experiences tended to be less often expressed in the Saudi forum. Other emotional feelings, such as embarrassment and confusion, also appeared in both communities, especially among members of the third group, who tended not to adopt e-WOM because of embarrassment, mainly in the Saudi case. Hate or dislike were dominant among the group that did not adopt e-WOM, where prior knowledge of a disadvantage of the product or service, such as smell or location, prevented members from adopting e-WOM, and where they expressed hatred or dislike as their main reason for not adopting the e-WOM. Participants often expressed their emotional feelings while they were sharing product-related information online.

Inquirers tended to express feelings of anxiety, boredom and confusion to other members. In many cases, contradictory e-WOM confused participants, as illustrated in Chapters 5 and 6, causing them not to adopt the e-WOM. Similarly, Derks, Bos, and Von Grumkow (2007) found that OC members were guided by their feelings. More specifically, Zembylas (2008) found that females tended to express stress and anxiety in online course communications. Siriaraya et al. (2011) found that positive emotional feelings tended to be slightly more common than negative ones among teenagers in Western online support

communities, while Guiller and Durndell (2007) report that online contact among female students was more likely to have emotional contributions in sync with traditional female role stereotypes. Negative feelings, however, were strongly shared among young Muslim members of online forums in Germany, and more specifically among females in health OCs (Burri, Baujard and Etter, 2006). This thesis builds upon the existing literature in that it shows the different patterns of emotional feelings expressed by females in beauty online communities, where e-WOM messages are shared and adopted.

- **Thanks**

In the content analysis phase, expressions of thanks or gratitude were found to be posted mainly by inquirers at the end of a recommendation request, or as a response to those who had posted recommendation messages. While this happened slightly more often in the Saudi case, this simply reflects the fact that more threads were initiated there than in the Kuwaiti case. Sometimes, posters thanked the initiators in return. Interviewees from both OCs commented that the expression of thanks did not have an important impact on their decision whether to adopt the e-WOM.

In other contexts, Burri, Baujard and Etter (2006) found that females tended to share expressions of gratitude more frequently than males in an ex-smokers' online forum, while Hall and Irvine (2009) affirm that females used words of gratitude and appreciation when sharing information about their toddlers in a Canadian online discussion board.

- **Photos**

Photos and product images were shared in both online communities, slightly more often in the Kuwaiti case. One possible explanation is that in cases where images of beauty products depicted certain parts of the female body, these would be censored by the site administrators in Saudi Arabia in line with official policy regarding indecent exposure, which is somewhat stricter in Saudi Arabia than in Kuwait, although the same rules regarding the exposure of some parts of the female form were in some way applicable to the Kuwaiti forum. Feng and Qian (2013) found that members tended to share photos in three online product communities. The evidence of photo sharing in this study is consistent with this, albeit only as applied to beauty discussion boards.

- **Online activities**

In both the Kuwaiti and Saudi communities, members tended to exchange private messages by email via the online forum technology. Content analysis suggests that this was slightly more frequent in the Kuwaiti case, while the interview data indicate the reverse. Posters tended to offer further advice by stating that they were willing to offer additional information via private messages. One possible explanation for this behaviour is that these members tended not to hold back or be reluctant; this is why they offered initiators the opportunity to receive additional recommendations via private messages. This finding is similar to that of Debrand and Johnson (2008), who report that female US students tended to use email as a useful tool; more directly relevant to the Middle Eastern context, they found that email communication tended to be one of the most popular internet uses among females in the United Arab Emirates.

- **Links**

Hyperlinks were found to be shared among members of both OCs. Content analysis indicates that this occurred more frequently in the Saudi case, while interview data show that Saudi females were also more willing to be influenced by links. One possible explanation is that there were simply more posters in the Saudi forum than the Kuwaiti one. Alternatively, it may be that members of the same online forum had more knowledge of the right recommendation. There is some indication in both communities that some posters uploaded links to other online communities, such as Instagram. This shows that members of both forums tended to refer inquirers to other OCs in order to find the right recommendation for them. This echoes the finding of Ali-Hassan and Adamic (2007) that Kuwaiti bloggers tended to use links in their blogs.

- **Greetings**

The interview findings show that greetings had little impact on e-WOM adoption; however, their existence was evident from content analysis. Members were found to post greetings at the beginning and end of each request for other members to provide e-WOM. Alternatively, greetings could be posted when members adopted e-WOM. Members of both communities confirmed that expressions of greeting were part of e-WOM. In other words, posting such expressions should be seen as part of the process of product recommendation in these threads.

- **Luck**

Content analysis revealed that members of both forums used expressions of luck or wishing luck, although these were slightly more frequent in the Kuwaiti case. However, members of both OCs commented in interview that it had little importance in the e-WOM process. One explanation for the difference between the two forums is that Saudi posters tended to couch their wishes for good health or success in religious terms. Posts categorised as wishing luck were mainly uploaded by those who wished inquirers success in finding the right recommendation or to show support for inquirers in overcoming their beauty problems.

- **Jokes**

Interviewees from both OCs felt that jokes did not form an important component of community bonding, although there was some evidence from content analysis of their use in the Kuwaiti the case only. One possible explanation is that the Kuwaiti participants tended to have more of a sense of humour than their Saudi counterparts. Shifman (2007) affirms that a sense of humour is a common type of communication that is widely used online. In another study, Shifman and Blondheim (2010) found that a large number of jokes were shared between members about specific Microsoft IT products. Similarly, Zifei (2012) found that jokes were often exchanged in Chinese online communities. The inconsistency of the present findings with these examples from the literature may arise because they apply only to online beauty forums, where only females were members and few shared jokes with each other.

7.2.1.3 Receiver involvement

Receiver involvement was obvious among the main inquirers who sought recommendations in the forums, and who made it clear that the issue was relevant to them. Some expressed this in a very detailed way. In other words, those who commonly showed that they were closely involved in the issue tended to show their strong involvement regarding purchase by posting expressions such as: “I am really involved in this issue girls, that is why I need your recommendation”. Evidence of receiver involvement was found in both forums and was much stronger in the Saudi case, where female initiators, posters and interested members tended to be greater in number. One interesting finding under this category was that ‘pushing the topic to the top of thread’ was a behaviour mainly engaged in by interested members, who usually came to the thread to reveal that they were also in need of a recommendation. They therefore sought to push up the topic, so that others might

view the main inquiry about their advice or recommendation, thus increasing the likelihood that some of these readers would post their own recommendations or e-WOM.

Furthermore, it was found that some females who replied to the main thread stated that only posts on their message from others who were facing the same issue were required. This shows that they came to a particular thread in order to find other members' recommendations. In other words, their involvement persuaded them to come to the thread in question in order to show that they were closely involved in the issue. This is why they tended to push up the topic to the top of the thread. Another explanation for this behaviour is that some who contributed by posting their previous experience began their comments by explaining that they were involved in the same issue or topic, then expressed their experience as neutral, positive or negative.

This behaviour was found to differ according to context. In Chinese online communities, for example, Zifei (2012) found that pushing up the topic motivated the action of reposting the original post, because a post with a pushing element could increase the opportunity for reposting. Second, revealing that others were involved in the issue discussed in the thread concerning a product or service increased the possibility that posters in return shared the same needs as them, since they faced similar issues. According to the ELM and the IAM, receiver involvement represents motivation level and the degree of elaboration that the receiver is likely to engage in (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Sussman and Siegal, 2003). Moreover, it is crucial that the moderators must be included in order to understand information processing under different contexts. By measuring differences in factors that are likely to alter levels of elaboration likelihood, central and peripheral processes during actual information interpretation processes can be predicted. If an OC member is strongly involved with the issue that the message addresses, then she is likely to perceive the argument quality more positively (Sussman and Siegal, 2003).

According to O'Keefe (2002), a receiver's degree of involvement in the topic or the personal relevance of the topic increases the motivation to engage in an elaboration process through two routes: central and peripheral. The central route is where elaboration is really high. Persuasion commonly comes about through extensive thinking on the issue: careful examination of the information contained in the message and close scrutiny of the message's arguments. In other words, persuasion through the central route is achieved through the receiver's thoughtful examination of relevant issues, whereas the peripheral

route represents the persuasion processes involved when elaboration is relatively low. Such persuasion occurs when the receiver employs cues such as source credibility and source trustworthiness as evidence, instead of extensive issue-relevant thinking.

Another behaviour that tends to relate to female inquirers is that some OC members expressed themselves as sharing and being involved in the same issue; and they sometimes attracted other users to post their e-WOM, especially when the topic was shared. Receiver involvement has also been found to be a key characteristic that has the potential to explain e-WOM. The findings of both the content analysis and interview phases confirmed this notion. More participants tended to be involved in e-WOM recommendations or e-WOM inquiries. The more they were involved in e-WOM issues, the more likely they were to be persuaded by argument quality, the central route in ELM. Those who were not involved in the e-WOM message, conversely, were more likely to be influenced by the peripheral route: source credibility (Sussman and Siegal, 2003).

More specifically, the Kuwaiti participants tended to be highly involved in the issue, so they followed the central route (argument quality), while their Saudi counterparts showed evidence of mixed high and low involvement, so their receiver involvement tended to be affected by argument quality and the peripheral route: source credibility. Both O'Keefe (2002) and Ha and Ahn (2011) found that e-WOM was more likely to influence individuals when they were in a high involvement purchase situation, while Xue and Phelps (2004) suggest that individual reactions to consumer-generated product reviews on independent online forums are moderated by receiver characteristics, such as product involvement. In both OCs investigated in the present study, it was found that receiver involvement elements in textual conversations were conveyed by language choices. Cheung, Xiao and Lui (2012) found that consumer involvement played an important role in moderating the effects of online social interactions on consumer purchase decisions. Those who displayed consumer involvement were likely to share product-related experience more frequently.

7.2.1.4 Information need fulfilment

Evidence of information need fulfilment was found in both online communities, although Saudi OC members were more likely to find a recommendation or e-WOM because inquirers and thread initiators were more numerous than in the Kuwaiti case. Another possible explanation is that females in Saudi Arabia tended to be more interested in cosmetics. As the cosmetics market is witnessing an unprecedented boom across the globe,

Gulf nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, have the world's highest consumption rates. Saudi Arabia ranks first among the Gulf nations in consumption of skin and hair care products, which may explain why Saudi females tended to inquire more about recommendations. These findings correlate with the first stage of the decision-making model of Engel, Kollat and Blackwell (1973), denoted need recognition and problem awareness, where the consumer recognizes a problem or need that consumers tend to face.

This may be why females in beauty online forums tend to express their information needs more widely. Another explanation is that cosmetics tend to attract females, which makes them more open to expressing their information needs. According to Allam (2010), Saudi women spent almost \$2.4 billion on cosmetics, among the highest per capita expenditure in the world, and analysts predict that the market will grow rapidly. Especially strong drivers of growth for retailers and brands are the buoyant economies of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which are forecast to experience GDP growth. Comments ranged widely, from females seeking e-WOM to resolve skin, face, hair and other beauty problems.

The Kuwaiti participants tended to express their request for e-WOM as part of the information need fulfilment process, in which the dominant elements were to find e-WOM in the OC, solve problems, learn new things and help to make decisions. In the Saudi case the dominant elements in information need fulfilment were again to find e-WOM in the OC and solve problems, while making decisions was in third place and the last element was learning new things. Kuwaiti participants appeared more likely to continue using e-WOM for learning new things and making decisions, whereas their Saudi counterparts were more interested in facilitating decision-making than in learning new things. The former tended to reveal their need to learn new things, rather than researching decision making.

Members of both OCs tended to express their information needs very clearly. Interview responses support the finding that the more they fulfilled their information needs, the more willing they were to continue using e-WOM. Ma and Agarwal (2007) found that information need fulfilment had a positive impact on knowledge contribution in two online communities in the United States. As for continuance behaviour, Shi et al. (2010) found that information-seeking (finding) motivation had a significant impact on continued participation in Facebook in Hong Kong.

Moreover, the analysis of interview data presented in Chapter 6 shows that information need fulfilment affected e-WOM adoption in both forums, where ‘finding e-WOM’ was a dominant sub-code. The next sub-code, ‘solving problems’, was ranked higher in Kuwait than Saudi Arabia. The Saudi participants commented that decision making, rather than problem solving, was their motive to adopt e-WOM. Last, Kuwaiti interviewees were more interested in learning new things than Saudi interviewees, for whom this was least important.

It is significant that this thesis concerns two female online communities in a Middle Eastern context, where few studies have discussed online information need fulfilment (Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010).

7.2.1.5 Source credibility

Source credibility was another key variable that had an effect on e-WOM’s perceived usefulness, which may explain the continued usage of e-WOM in both forums, with a slightly higher frequency in the Saudi case. Evidence of all four elements—trustworthiness, expertise, knowledgeability and reliability—was found in both content analysis and interview data. Content analysis revealed that posters expressed clearly their belief that the source of e-WOM was knowledgeable when inquiring about certain products or recommendations. This is consistent with the finding of Meng, Wei and Zhu (2011) that opinion leaders tended to play an important role in consumer behaviour because of their professional knowledge and the reliability of their recommendations, which also affected patterns of e-WOM sharing and purchasing decisions.

Although the majority of inquirers clearly stated that they had no knowledge of certain products or recommendations, some tended to state that they were expert, trustworthy and reliable in their recommendations. Similarly, the majority of Saudi respondents revealed that they were not knowledgeable in the main inquiries, followed by expert, trustworthy and non-trustworthy, which is similar to the Kuwaiti case when an online seller became involved. Lastly, members tended to refer to the reliability of other members as sources of recommendations.

In interviews, Kuwaiti participants listed source credibility sub-codes in the following order: knowledgeability, expertise, trustworthiness and reliability. Their Saudi counterparts

expressed a different emphasis, preferring that the source should be trustworthy, knowledgeable and expert in order for them to adopt the e-WOM.

These findings are consistent with those of previous studies. Al-Maghrabi and Dennis (2010) found that trust was one of the factors that had a different level of influence on continuance intention in online shopping among females in three regions of Saudi Arabia. Another online shopping study set in Saudi Arabia, by Al-Maghrabi, Dennis and Halliday (2011), found that younger respondents tended to be more influenced by trust than older ones.

Cheung et al. (2007) report that source credibility led to e-WOM adoption in a Chinese online forum. In the same vein, Mazzarol, Sweeney and Soutar (2007) claim that source credibility is a critical factor in determining the effectiveness of WOM, while Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn (2008) explain that source credibility tends to influence the recipient of a message in the online environment, where individuals have unlimited freedom to publish and exchange information without revealing their real identity. Thus, in online communities, the more credible the source of the message content is perceived to be by a member, the more likely it is that the member will adopt the information in that message (Zhang and Meng, 2008). Similarly, Jin et al. (2009) report that source credibility influenced intention to continue using information in a university online forum in China, although previous studies had relied on quantitative online surveys. Hashim, Tan and Andrade (2012) found that trust played an important role in the intention to continue to contribute knowledge. On the other hand, source credibility had no influence on e-WOM adoption in online restaurant forums in China, because it may be difficult to determine the credibility of online posters by attempting to evaluate their trustworthiness or expertise (Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008). In both communities studied in the present research, low source credibility tended to contribute to decisions not to adopt e-WOM in some cases, as explained in Chapters 5 and 6.

7.2.1.6 Information usefulness

Another key factor, according to both the content analysis and interview findings, was whether information was considered useful, helpful and informative. Members of both OCs expressed an interest in the usefulness of information when deciding whether to adopt e-WOM. However, this was more marked in the Saudi sample because of the online role categories, while Kuwaiti participants tended to mention it less because readers were

equivalent to contributors, so they only tended to mention it once. In addition, the interview findings show that both Kuwaiti and Saudi interviewees agreed that the more useful they believed the information to be, the more likely they were to adopt e-WOM. They thus confirmed that information usefulness is the gateway to e-WOM adoption.

Participants disclosed that their main motivator to continue using e-WOM was that it was beneficial and useful to them. This is consistent with the findings of other studies, such as that of Barnes (2011), who argues that usefulness is a dominant condition and that the more the content was helpful and beneficial to a member, the more she was willing to play the game in online communities. Hashim (2012) found that online knowledge-sharing was influenced directly by usefulness as perceived by forum members. In addition, information usefulness tended to be one of the factors that Saudi participants considered when not adopting e-WOM, as explained in Chapter 6.

In both cases, participants made it clear that information or recommendations were useful to them. For example, one member of the Kuwaiti OC said, “I need your useful recommendations girls,” while a Saudi member wrote: “We all want to benefit from the useful information you have, girls.” In their interview responses, members of both forums also stated that information usefulness was their main motivator to continue using e-WOM in these particular communities.

This confirms what other researchers have found in similar contexts. Information usefulness is a cue widely utilized in many contexts when deciding to adopt or continue with the intention to use e-WOM. In the context of adoption, Sussman and Siegel (2003) found that information usefulness had a significant positive impact on online forum e-WOM and its resultant adoption. In a mobile context, Shen et al. (2012) found that information usefulness led to the adoption of mobile word of mouth in China. As to continuing use, perceived usefulness is identified as an important determinant of continuance behaviour (Bhattacharjee, 2001).

There is evidence that the more valuable, informative and helpful information is, the more likely it is that OC members will adopt it and will continue to use it. In other words, users’ perceptions of the expected benefits of using IS tends to effect continuance intentions (Tiwana and Bush, 2005; Jin, Lee and Cheung, 2010; Jin et al., 2010; Barnes, 2011; Hashim, 2012; Ham et al., 2012; Zhao, Stylianou and Zheng, 2012; Hashim, Tan and Andrade, 2012; Kang et al., 2013). In the case of the Saudi forum, the results show that the

perceived usefulness of e-WOM was influenced by three factors: argument quality, source credibility and receiver involvement, as a moderator of argument quality and source credibility. A great deal of evidence has supported the proposal that perceived usefulness has been shown to be a powerful determinant of user acceptance and adoption behaviour (Davis, 1989; Davis, Bagozzi and Warshaw, 1989; Mathieson, 1991; Taylor and Todd, 1995a; Taylor and Todd, 1995b).

7.2.1.7 Satisfaction

Satisfaction was mentioned in some instances in both forums, and slightly more frequently by Kuwait than Saudi interviewees. Thus, in interviews, Kuwaiti participants clearly stated that they were satisfied by the e-WOM that they read. On the other hand, Saudi interviewees rarely discussed their satisfaction with e-WOM. One explanation for this behaviour is that satisfaction is usually a hidden factor that will not become obvious unless it is explicitly revealed. Thus, even if they were satisfied, OC members did not relate this satisfaction or dissatisfaction in their textual conversations. Another possible explanation is that inquirers may have chosen not to convey their satisfaction when adopting e-WOM through language use, preferring to do so by returning to threads and stating explicitly that they were using the product mentioned in the e-WOM, thus indirectly conveying that they were satisfied with what they had read and adopted, and had continued to use those specific e-WOM messages.

The Saudi findings correlate with those of Kang et al. (2013), who, unlike other researchers, found that in social network use, satisfaction had no direct impact on continuance intention. For example, analysis by Ham et al. (2012) showed that members of the Korean social network Cyworld were more satisfied with a virtual community when they were actively participating in it through community networks.

In the same light, if Kuwaiti OC members were mostly satisfied, they might return and reveal that they were using or following e-WOM. Satisfaction could thus be seen to fit the final stage of the model of Engel, Kollat and Blackwell (1973), who suggest that consumers tend not to return when they feel that an alternative would have been preferable. The present study has found that members tended to return to the forums to make themselves feel that the e-WOM that they had adopted and the products that they had bought in response to particular e-WOM messages were indeed their preferred choice.

Hence, satisfaction was slightly higher among members of the Saudi than the Kuwaiti OC, perhaps because the Kuwaitis were more likely to feel that they had not made the best choice.

The satisfaction findings correlate with one of the few earlier studies set in the Middle East. Al-Lozi (2011) found that personal attitudes such as satisfaction significantly affected Jordanian members' intention to continue participating in the Facebook online community. Outside the Middle East, previous studies have shown that satisfaction in OCs was associated with several key outcomes, such as continued use and positive word of mouth (Cheung, Lee and Thadani, 2009). Tiwana and Bush (2005) found that satisfaction in using the network had the strongest positive relation with continuing intention in two expertise-sharing networks in the United States.

Chen (2007) reports that satisfaction was the strongest predictor of intention to continue participating in a professional community in Taiwan. Similarly, the findings of Shi et al. (2010) support the idea that satisfaction is important in determining the continued use of Facebook. Wang and Lin (2010) also highlight the role of positive e-WOM and continuance behaviour as outcomes of satisfaction. Similarly, Lee et al. (2006) indicate that satisfaction was positively and significantly associated with continued participation in a Chinese online forum. In the same way, Jin et al. (2010) indicate that the impact of satisfaction was stronger among those expressing the intention to continue using an online forum. In an e-WOM context, Chen, Yen and Hwang (2012) identified a strong relationship between e-WOM and an individual's intention to continue using Web 2.0. This thesis expands on the existing literature by clearly showing through OC members' textual conversations how they expressed their satisfaction with the e-WOM messages they had read via online discussion board technology in question-and-answer forums. Equally, Ruth (2012) investigated intention to continue using fee-based question-and-answer services in the Google online community and found that satisfaction mediated the conversation, which had a strong direct effect on the continued use of that service.

7.2.1.8 Offline activities

Offline activities appeared rarely in the analysis of content from either OC, although in both cases there was some evidence of contact between two members through the exchange of personal telephone numbers, and interview data indicate that when members did engage offline activities, they were likely to be influenced to adopt e-WOM. One

possible explanation is that members of both communities preferred not to reveal their personal contact information where social relations tended to be weak between them. However, in interviews, both Kuwaiti and Saudi participants agreed that offline activities such as contact by phone and exhibition tend to play a role in e-WOM adoption.

This contradicts the findings of Ma and Agarwal (2007), who investigated the effect of such offline activities on member's knowledge contribution in two online communities and found no impact. In the e-WOM context, however, Xue and Phelps (2004) found that individual reactions to consumer-generated product reviews on online forums (i.e. consumer-to-consumer e-WOM) were moderated by offline consumer-to-consumer communication. In other words, the more contact members had offline, the more they tended to be persuaded by e-WOM (Dolen, Dabholkar and Ruyter, 2007). While this relationship has not been fully addressed in the continuance behaviour literature, the findings of Shi et al. (2010) support the contention that offline contacts have significant effects on user satisfaction and thus on continued use within the Facebook community.

7.2.2. The characteristics of e-WOM messages

The discussion in the following subsections turns to the characteristics of e-WOM messages, in order to answer the research sub-question RQB, set out in Chapter 1 (section 1.3).

7.2.2.1 Neutral

According to the qualitative content analysis (Chapter 5) and the interview data (Chapter 6), argument quality tended to affect the adoption of e-WOM in both OCs studied. This subsection deals with the neutral sub-codes within this category. Units of analysis denoted 'neutral 1' are those conveying general advice on the use of a product. This was the most frequently observed category in the two cases, being dominant in both content analysis and interview data. Interviewees stated that it had an impact on their e-WOM adoption. The second subcategory of neutral e-WOM stated the price. In the Kuwaiti case, data gathered in both phases showed that members tended to prefer to read the price in the online forum comments. On the other hand, the Saudi interviewees placed this sub-code third after 'location'. In the GCC context, Karim (2011) found that females in the UAE tended to be influenced by price among other factors when deciding whether to buy cosmetics. In Iran, Hannzaee and Aghasibeig (2010) found that young female consumers were also affected

by price, among other factors, when making decisions. In an Islamic Asian context, Mokhlis and Salleh (2009) found that females tended to be influenced by several factors, among which lower prices tended to persuade them to decide to shop. Similar findings are reported from other contexts. Hansen (2005) found that price and perceived quality affected consumers' emotions significantly. In addition, Park and Gretzel (2010) found that consumers looking for good value for money were more likely to shop across websites to find suitable alternatives. Finally, Bakewell, Mitchell and Rothwell (2006) report that females were more likely than males to be influenced by price.

The third most important subcategory of neutral argument quality, according to content analysis and interview findings taken together, was location, with Saudi participants showing a stronger preference than Kuwaitis for adopting recommendations stating the location of a product or service. One explanation is that the large geographical size of the country made Saudi consumers more concerned with the distance they might need to travel to make a purchase. The fourth subcategory in both cases was contact information, whereby users tended to prefer that the contact number of the product supplier was mentioned in e-WOM. The fifth sub-code, 'how to use the product', applied to postings on both OCs and was mentioned by both Kuwaiti and Saudi interviewees. While Kuwaitis mentioned it more frequently than Saudis, participants generally agreed that directions on using the product or service would motivate them to adopt e-WOM and continue using it. The least important neutral sub-code was 'description of product or service', referring to details such as model number and size. This was particularly unimportant among the Kuwaiti sample, whereas Saudi participants tended to emphasize the importance of mentioning this type of message in their online forum.

The literature has seldom discussed the classification of neutral e-WOM in a female contact context. Although the term 'neutral e-WOM' appears in the literature, when the recommendation is neither positive nor negative (Cheng and Zhou, 2010), there is no clear definition of the term. This thesis differs by offering a clear classification of the various subcategories of neutral e-WOM according to the type of additional information provided.

7.2.2.2 Positive

The findings reported in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 show that messages which contained a combination of extremely positive elements with one or two neutral (2, 3, 4, 5) ones tended to influence members of the Kuwaiti forum to endorse particular messages. Saudi users, by

contrast, tended to be influenced by neutral patterns with positive e-WOM, such as 2, 3, 4 and 6, because many contact details were mentioned in some forums. Another interesting finding is that in positive e-WOM, members tended to recommend certain products or services to other females in a very positive way, some explicitly expressing this as in positive 4 and 5; for example, product B was “amaziiiiing”, or “product A is amaziiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing”. This was ranked higher where females tended to adopt e-WOM, with 333 females adopting such e-WOM in the Kuwaiti online forum. For example, they tended to lengthen adjectives in positive e-WOM to differentiate positive recommendations from neutral information on e.g. price, or negative recommendations. Thus, the findings indicate that Kuwaiti participants tended to express positive e-WOM differently from neutral or negative comments.

These findings correlate with those of Park and Gretzel (2010), who found that while consumers who are confused by over-choice do not like comparison shopping, believing that it would create even more information overload, they perceive comparison shopping tools as useful to overcome their confusion. This indicates that expressions of emotional feelings tend to influence females in their decision making, as reported in Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis.

In the Saudi case, the findings were different: posters tended to write positive e-WOM in the form of either positive 1 or positive 2, e.g. describing the product as ‘amazing’ or ‘really amazing’, whereas the positive 3, 4 and 5 forms were rarely used. This was confirmed by the interview responses of Saudi participants, who agreed that simple positive statements about a product or service written in normal phrases were more likely to motivate them to adopt e-WOM, rather than the exaggerated forms favoured by their Kuwaiti counterparts. In addition, the Saudis tended to write less negative e-WOM than the members of the Kuwaiti online community.

This finding is consistent with WOM being characterised as having either negative or positive valence when applied to goods and services, as a stream of research has focused on the occurrence and effects of negative versus positive WOM. East, Hammond and Wright (2007) found that positive e-WOM had higher penetration than negative e-WOM. In addition, subjects tended to give positive WOM about their current brand and negative WOM about other brands. Similarly, Zhang, Craciun and Shin (2010) showed positive e-

WOM to be more persuasive than negative in a product with promotion consumption goals, when consumers identified useful information for achieving desirable outcomes.

7.2.2.3 Negative

Unsurprisingly in light of their tendency to use lengthened adjectives in positive e-WOM, it was found that Kuwaiti contributors also tended to express negativity by lengthening the adjectives in negative e-WOM. Kuwaiti interviewees confirmed that such lengthening of the negative adjective would affect them: if they read a comment containing a lengthened negative adjective, this would motivate them to follow the advice not to buy that product or service. This is why some females tended to feel confused when they were reading positive and negative e-WOM, which made them decide not to adopt e-WOM at all. Again, as with positive e-WOM, members of the Saudi forum preferred to write and to follow negative e-WOM expressed in simple terms such as ‘the product is bad’, which the interview findings confirmed was more likely to have the desired effect on them.

This finding is similar to that of Gheorghe and Liao (2012), who showed that Romanian females tended to post more positive than negative e-WOM, but that the negative e-WOM tended to have a powerful impact linguistically. The evidence discussed in Chapter 5 indicates that the way e-WOM is written may influence Kuwaiti females to adopt or not adopt e-WOM messages, while the way e-WOM was written in the Kuwaiti forum is interesting in light of earlier findings reported in the literature. For example, according to Pollach (2006), emotive language in online communities can be made obvious in five different ways using words and paralinguistic forms: the use of capital letters (e.g. WOW), the use of acronyms (e.g. lol), the use of emoticons [e.g. (: or);], the placing of words between two asterisks (e.g. *really*), and the repetition of exclamation marks (e.g. Recommend!!!).

This contrasts with the present findings in a Middle Eastern context, especially in the Saudi case, where both content analysis and interviews indicate a preference for writing and following simple negative statements of opinion. As to the Kuwaiti OC, members were often found to stretch out the adjectives in both positive and negative e-WOM, in order to attract other females to post their experiences. In return, members tended to be influenced by extreme forms of positive e-WOM (4 and 5) in their decision-making, such as when they returned to the forum to reveal that they were following other members’ recommendations, as shown in Chapters 5 and 6.

In other contexts, by contrast, negative e-WOM is more persuasive than positive when examining a product with prevention goals, namely when consumers identify useful information for undesirable outcomes. Uncles, East and Lomax (2010) found that positive e-WOM was more common than negative e-WOM, occurring three times as often. Doh and Hwang (2009) showed that positive e-WOM was helpful in promoting positive attitudes toward products, while negative WOM can be helpful too in promoting a positive attitude toward a website and the credibility of e-WOM. It was also found that consumers with higher prior knowledge of a product can be more sensitive to negative WOM. Cheung et al. (2009) showed that positive e-WOM in online consumer reviews significantly affected their trusting beliefs, emotional trust and online purchase decision-making.

Dolen, Dabholkar and Ruyter (2007) found that OC members were significantly influenced by positive e-WOM within the context of an online chat group. Gupta and Harris (2010) report that the more positive e-WOM they encounter, the more consumers become motivated to spend time shopping. Conversely, it has been found that negative e-WOM reduces the probability that a purchase will be made (East, Hammond and Lomax, 2008). Indeed, Zhang, Craciun and Shin (2010) argue that negative e-WOM is more persuasive than positive e-WOM. Zhao, Stylianou and Zheng (2013) have found that information quality was slightly more influential than system quality in determining members' continuing intention, based on their study of users' intention to consume and provide general travel information in a virtual community in the United States.

7.2.2.4 Quotes

Quotes were often used in both forums. The content analysis findings show that members would quote each other, with quotes usually containing a recommendation for a beauty product. When quotes were used more than once, seekers tended to adopt the e-WOM, as indicated in the online interview chapter. The Saudi interviewees confirmed that the use of quotes helped them to adopt e-WOM.

7.2.2.5 Completeness

The completeness sub-code was applied more often to the Saudi content than to that from the Kuwaiti forum, because it seems that the Kuwaiti members were more concerned with the accuracy of the message than with its completeness. The content analysis indicates that members were occasionally concerned with whether the information or e-WOM was accurate and some tended to express this textually. However, in interviews, the Kuwaitis

commented more often that an important characteristic of the message or e-WOM was its completeness. The definition of completeness varied according to members' needs and viewpoint. For example, comments containing general advice and information on price and location were considered complete by some users, whereas others commented that a message was complete if it contained general advice, contact information and price. The Saudi interviewees agreed that the completeness of a message would motivate them to adopt the e-WOM. This may be because of the question-and-answer nature of the online forum, where members post and share their experience without the need to confirm the completeness of this information. Another indication of information completeness that members sometimes used was quotes to reply to specific posts in order to thank the poster, send greetings or appreciation, or show their involvement in the same issues. No indication of non-completeness of information was mentioned. If too few replies were received, seekers tended to show their feelings by putting exclamation marks or surprised emoticons to represent the need for more replies or more recommendations.

7.2.2.6 Accuracy

In both cases, accuracy was identified as relevant. The content analysis revealed some comments to the effect that the e-WOM was accurate, although accuracy was not mentioned heavily in the messages posted in either forum. Nonetheless, the majority of both Kuwaiti and Saudi interviewees agreed that the accuracy of comments affected whether they would follow recommendations, which confirms that accuracy is one of the message characteristics that helps forum members to adopt e-WOM.

On the other hand, some respondents agreed that correctness cannot always be achieved, because some members exaggerate in their comments, which therefore cannot be seen as accurate. They added that an online seller would sometimes provide inaccurate recommendations and that the suspicion of inaccuracy would cause them not to adopt the e-WOM or follow it. This was an obstacle to adoption of e-WOM for both Saudi and Kuwaiti interviewees.

7.2.3. Discussion of online behavioural roles

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, one of the main aims of conducting the interviews was to gain more knowledge of participants' online role behaviour and its relation to e-WOM. Understanding their online roles would help to explain the participants' behaviour in online

activities, especially e-WOM. A majority of the Kuwaiti interviewees stated that they usually acted as inquirers, asking for recommendations regarding certain products and services. In their opinion, their inquiries about these recommendations helped them to adopt other members' e-WOM. The Kuwaiti findings correlate with the argument of O'Reilly (2007) that such OC members are "consumers"; they consume the information they read online, which influences the success of the online community. Similarly, Wise et al. (2012) suggest that the main activity of these passive members is reading, by which they receive knowledge and information from other members.

Unlike their Kuwaiti counterparts, the Saudi interviewees reported that they tended to be "contributors". From their point of view, their activities in the online forum helped other members, who sought recommendations, to adopt them. They pointed out that providing others with their recommendations would help them to follow these recommendations. The literature suggests that the main activity of such members is sharing their opinions and information with other members so that they can benefit from them (Rood and Bruckmann, 2009). Similarly, Ploderer et al. (2013) suggests that contributors, who offered advice, were the most active users in the online community.

7.2.4. Discussion of other factors

Other factors involved in the adoption of e-WOM included demographic variables. For example, in the Kuwaiti case, all of the interviewees were of Kuwaiti nationality, three-quarters were aged from 20 to 25 years and the majority of the sample was in employment. The largest numbers of comments were made by married women (72%) who had been members of the OC for more than 5 years (92%) and who spent two hours in the OC each day (88%). In the Saudi case, all but one of the twenty interviewees were of Saudi nationality, the same number were in employment and 92% were aged from 20 to 25 years. The largest number of comments were made by married women (72%) who had been members for more than 10 years (96%) and who spent an hour per day in the OC (80%). Three of the Saudi interviewees reported that they were influenced by traditional word of mouth from family members, relatives and friends, adding that they sought such advice because they wanted family members to confirm that the e-WOM was suitable for them.

7.3. Summary

Content analysis and examination of the interview data have revealed both expected and unexpected factors. One of the expected results was that argument quality affected the behaviour of online community members, who tended to share and post more neutral and positive recommendations than negative ones, while in the first group, where members tended to use e-WOM, positive e-WOM was written differently. To illustrate this, in the Saudi forum, positive e-WOM tended to fall into the two most extreme categories, positive 4 and positive 5, which involved emphasising salient characteristics by reduplicating vowels to lengthen positive adjectives, whereas members of the Kuwaiti OC tended to use more straightforward positive language. Negative e-WOM was also written differently in the Kuwaiti forum, where some females tended to fear following the recommendations due to the use of extremely negative e-WOM.

Interestingly, community bonding was significant in textual conversations. For example, emoticons were often shared between members of the Kuwaiti forum, while religious expressions tended to be dominant in the Saudi forum. This was followed by emotional feelings towards products, their situation or the online community, frequently expressed in messages. Receiver involvement was also significant in terms of the posters who clearly indicated that they were involved in the same situation that the main inquirer faced. On the other hand, the main inquirers often confirmed to other users that they were facing the same situation. As to information needs fulfilment, the need for e-WOM was mainly posted by the main inquirers, asking others for recommendations to solve their problems and seeking to learn new things from other members' e-WOM. In the online role category, the female seekers or initiators, who were mostly concerned for their inquiry and certain recommendations from other females, explained their need to find recommendations, solve their problems, learn new things and make decisions.

Information usefulness was mainly expressed by readers when inquiring about e-WOM, and by posters who provided the e-WOM and concluded their messages by stating that their recommendations would be useful to the inquirers. The main dependent variable or outcome in the model developed in this thesis is e-WOM adoption. Source credibility tended to be less obvious in the main conversations. Some members stated in their inquiries that the comments of others were trustworthy and reliable, although a few indicated that certain posters tended not to be trustworthy in their recommendations

because they believed them to be sellers who had infiltrated the OC. Interestingly, offline contact, whether by phone or face to face, had little impact on e-WOM adoption and was rarely discussed by participants. Similarly, satisfaction was rarely mentioned in posts on the forums. Finally, the analysis of the messages revealed certain factors other than argument quality that tended to be hidden in the content of the messages, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Results for the Saudi OC were similar to those for the Kuwaiti OC, in that community bonding was significant in textual conversations. Religious expressions were used most often, followed by greetings, thanks, emoticons, wishing luck, photos, links and online activities. In terms of receiver involvement, the pattern was different: pushing up the topic was most important, followed by involvement in the discussion. Interestingly, the order of importance in the information needs fulfilment category was finding e-WOM, solving problems, making decisions and learning new things from other members.

The content analysis and interview findings in both the Kuwaiti and Saudi cases place argument quality and community bonding as the two most important categories, although there were also some interesting differences. Thus, emotions and feelings were dominant sub-codes in the Kuwaiti case, whereas religious expressions and greetings were dominant in contributions to the Saudi forum. Female roles were more obvious in the Saudi community, where more participation also occurred. Both inquirers and posters were more active in the Saudi forum. Receiver involvement was also obvious in both KU and SA. Information needs fulfilment was discussed in both forums. Information usefulness also tended to be mentioned in both communities, although the dominant element was benefit. OC members expressed interest in source credibility, with trustworthiness and expertise being dominant sub-codes in both cases. E-WOM adoption was mentioned in both forums, with a slightly higher frequency in the Kuwaiti case. Satisfaction, on the other hand, was more evident in textual conversations in the Saudi forum than in the Kuwaiti one. Offline activities were mentioned very rarely in either case. Finally, the satisfaction effect appeared to be stronger in the Saudi OC, whose members sometimes stated their satisfaction regarding e-WOM adoption.

The following are the main factors that motivated members of the Saudi OC to adopt e-WOM: information usefulness, argument quality, source credibility, community bonding and photos. The same patterns appeared in the Kuwaiti case. As to the impact of

demographic factors on e-WOM adoption, the results for the Kuwaiti forum reveal that adoption was influenced by three factors: hours spent reading and posting on the forum, education level and age. In the Saudi forum the three most influential demographic factors were hours spent reading and posting on the forum, employment status and age.

To sum up, this chapter has discussed the findings of the two empirical phases of this study and related them to relevant work reported in the literature. The next chapter concludes the thesis by summarising the findings, discussing the contributions made by the present study, considering its limitations and making suggestions for future research into what motivates people to adopt e-WOM.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1. Introduction

This thesis began with an introduction to its main topic, an outline of the research motivation and background, and a statement of the aims, objectives and research questions. Chapter 2 comprised a structured review of literature on the important predictors of e-WOM adoption. The conceptual framework developed for this study on the basis of three existing models (IAM, ISCM and KCM) was presented in Chapter 3. The next chapter set out the interpretive research methodology, which involved analysing content from two online forums collected over a six-month period, then interviewing a small sample of their members. The results of the content analysis for the Kuwaiti and Saudi forums were presented in Chapter 5, while Chapter 6 offered a discussion of data gathered in semi-structured online interviews with members of both OCs. All of the above findings were then discussed in light of the relevant literature in Chapter 7.

This concluding chapter first offers a summary of the research findings and seeks to demonstrate that the research questions have been successfully answered. The next section discusses the contributions made by the research, from theoretical, methodological and managerial perspectives. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the present study and some suggested future research directions.

8.2. Summary of Findings

The first empirical phase of the research, content analysis, revealed that argument quality and source credibility had significant positive effects on e-WOM usefulness, which tended in turn to influence information adoption. Consistent with reports in the literature, these results show that both argument quality and source credibility are crucial predictors to be taken into account in the context of e-WOM adoption in female online communities. Receiver involvement also tended to be significant in e-WOM adoption, whereas satisfaction and offline activities were not recognised as having an impact in either community.

The qualitative content analysis phase of the research has added an interesting dimension to this thesis, in that new category was identified as contributing to e-WOM adoption. This

was community bonding, analysed in terms of a number of sub-codes: religious expression, emotional feeling, links, luck, thanks, online activities, photos and jokes. Another crucial construct, argument quality, was also sub-categorised. The dominant category, 'neutral', was classified into six subtypes, as illustrated in Chapters 3, 5 and 6. The next sub-category was positive e-WOM, where there was a refinement of the coding with the aim of highlighting the strength of positive units on a scale of 1 to 5. The most strongly positive subtype was typically exemplified by the lengthening or stretching of words, as shown in Chapters 6 and 7. The third element is negative e-WOM, also classified on a 5-part scale with 5 as the most strongly negative, again using reduplication for emphasis, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, although this was not as significantly weighted as positive elements of argument quality. The remaining subcategories appeared with far lower frequencies, indicating the persuasiveness of positive and neutral units of analysis, which more explicitly relayed members' opinions on products and services. Other model constructs which were seen to contribute to e-WOM adoption were source credibility, receiver involvement, information need fulfilment, information usefulness, offline activities and satisfaction.

In the second phase, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with small numbers of OC members, with a threefold purpose: to deepen knowledge about the factors impeding and facilitating e-WOM adoption; to understand better the current situation regarding online role behaviours in female-only online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in order to evaluate online participation patterns and their influence on e-WOM adoption; and to refine the constructs and relationships within the research model developed as a result of the content analysis phase.

Addressing the first purpose, demographic variables were identified as additional constructs, not discovered in the content analysis phase, which tended to impede and facilitate e-WOM adoption. For example, Kuwaiti interviewees were more likely to adopt e-WOM if they were between 20 and 25 years old, in employment and married, if they had been members of the OC for more than five years and if they usually spent two hours per day in the forum. As to the Saudi interviewees, they were more likely to adopt e-WOM if aged from 30 to 35 years, in work, married, members for more than 10 years and tending to spend an hour a day in the OC.

As to the second aim of the interview phase, further knowledge was indeed acquired concerning online role behaviour and its relation to online activities, especially e-WOM adoption. The Kuwaiti interviewees said that they acted as inquirers or readers, asking for recommendations and reading other members' recommendations, whereas in the Saudi case, interviewees reported acting as contributors, mainly concerned with providing feedback and e-WOM for other members to share and adopt.

8.3. Thesis Contribution

This section examines the contribution made by this thesis from three perspectives: theoretical, contextual and practical. The last of these addresses certain policy and managerial implications.

8.3.1. Contribution of knowledge

Although many studies and research have explored the impact of adoption of e-WOM in many countries, mostly developed nations, very few studies have been conducted in GCC countries. However, 10 studies were conducted in a similar cultural context, such as Arabic or Islamic. There were no comprehensive studies about the adoption of e-learning or the important factors that would influence the adoption of e-WOM in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, especially in female online communities. The lack of useful empirical studies and research about the impact of e-WOM adoption has resulted in reduced understanding of females' adoption of e-WOM. Therefore, the outcomes of this research have contributed to the literature and knowledge in the field of e-WOM adoption in three major ways:

8.3.1.1. Novelty

This study is among the first studies to investigate the manner in which a female online community promotes e-WOM behaviour within two online beauty communities. This study aimed to address limitations and contribute to current knowledge in several respects. First, this study is one of the few studies to build a comprehensive conceptual model explaining e-WOM adoption in two female online communities in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Second, this study contributes to the literature by examining contextual factors such as offline activities and information need fulfilment. This study presents a detailed picture of how different types of behaviour in online communities drive the female community members to adopt e-WOM. In addition, unlike previous research, this research

identifies a new dimension of e-WOM adoption by studying the raw data from real online textual conversations to analyse e-WOM behaviour dimensions.

8.3.1.2. Commercially important

This research can help companies better understand the value of online beauty communities in promoting e-WOM behaviour, especially that beauty products are the most strongly preferred products among females in GCC countries (Allam, 2010). This would help beauty companies and managers to study how female members interact online and promote e-WOM. This leads to another commercial contribution: beauty companies should design beauty brand online communities that consist of features and content that effectively improve the adoption of e-WOM. For example, in both cases, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia positive e-WOM tends to be the main driver to encourage female members to adopt e-WOM. Online managers and beauty companies should promote positive e-WOM in their online brand community. In other words, companies should allow online members to generate discussions around their brands and products because community members are enthusiastic about brands and seek like-minded others with whom they can share their common passion for a brand (Relling et al., 2016).

8.3.1.3 Cultural and contextual factors

This thesis extends the prior literature by offering a grounded model that is mostly derived from the study of two female online communities. The work contributes to the literature by presenting a specific culture that has rarely been discussed. Most other studies have been conducted either in a Western or Asian context as highlighted by my literature search as discussed in Chapter 2. My study is culturally important because it investigates females who are enthusiastic about brands and seek like-minded others with whom they can share their common passion for a brand (Relling et al., 2016). In other words, it examines a specific gender group, females, and the study is centred on some beauty online communities. Moreover, this study identifies that e-WOM behaviour can be found in the forms of photos, emoticons and videos instead of textual conversation.

8.3.2 Theoretical contribution

The main theoretical contribution of the current research lies in its development of a new theoretical framework for investigating e-WOM adoption, by integrating three existing IS

models: IAM, ISCM and KCM. More specifically, it combines significant elements of the Information Adoption Model and the IS Continuance Model, adding two constructs from the Knowledge Contribution Model.

The proposed conceptual model was developed to examine the impact of e-WOM adoption in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The outcomes of this research have provided empirical findings on the factors and issues that influence (positively or negatively) the adoption of e-WOM in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and, more specifically, in female online communities. These factors were identified and discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. The findings were derived from a study based on Kuwait and Saudi Arabia; they could be applied in developing countries that have similar cultural and contextual characteristics, such as the GCC countries. The revised conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 is a novel contribution in itself. First, this research argues that no previous studies exist that have attempted to adopt three models in the context of e-WOM adoption in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. Second, this research identified a lack of theoretical models that explore and analyse the different factors that have an impact on e-WOM adoption. Third, this research proposed a conceptual model to overcome this lack and provide a better understanding of these factors. This conceptual model was used in content analysis and was further revised in the interview chapter. This conceptual framework offers a road map for online community managers and beauty online retailers to examine e-WOM adoption online. Finally, it combines and analyses raw content analysis data from the real textual online conversations, which could be used by academics and researchers to examine e-WOM adoption factors in cultures that differ from Western cultures. This model may motivate other researchers to conduct further studies to investigate and explore other factors that could influence e-WOM adoption in similar female online contexts.

The results of this research also identified new elements to be added to the model so that it would provide a better representation and explanation of the facts of e-WOM adoption. First, this study introduces the construct of community bonding, which is not present in other models reported in the literature. The second addition is of new sub-codes within the category of argument quality: neutral, positive, negative, quotes and non-accuracy. These sub-codes were shown to denote factors tending to affect e-WOM adoption.

The primary objective of this study was to develop a conceptual model with the capacity to predict the factors motivating females to adopt e-WOM in a Middle Eastern context. In pursuit of the research objective it was necessary to develop a theoretical foundation, so a systematic literature review was carried out, as reported in Chapter 2. This identified IAM and ISCM as the most influential theoretical models in the IS acceptance and continuance intention fields. The ISCM has demonstrated its suitability as the underlying theoretical lens to examine continuous knowledge-sharing intention (Bhattacharjee, Perols and Sanford, 2008), while IAM has tended to be one of the most widely used approaches when investigating e-WOM or information adoption in different online communities (Jin et al., 2009). Cheung and Thadani (2010) point out that no particular theory or set of theories currently dominates research in the case of online communities and the phenomenon of e-WOM; to this end, researchers are recommended to build their own theories, which is why the present researcher undertook the integration of three models, extending IAM and ISCM by adding two KCM factors.

All the literature examined was critically synthesised by examining both significant and insignificant findings. The synthesis of the literature suggests that relatively little attention has been afforded to understanding the adoption of e-WOM in the Middle East, with most published studies having taken information adoption and information sharing as their dependant variables. The majority of such studies have also been conducted either in a Western or an East Asian context, whilst only two thus far have been set in the Middle East, namely one on the continued use of online shopping in Saudi Arabia (Al-Maghrabi, Dennis and Halliday, 2011) and the other on continued participation in Facebook in Jordan (Al-Lozi, 2011). It can be concluded from the above discussion of the relevant literature that studies of e-WOM adoption within online communities are still rare, especially in the context of the Middle East.

A further important point is that previous researchers who adopted the ISCM did not always include the main construct of this theoretical model. Rather, depending on their particular research focus, they tended to integrate continued use as the dependant variable with other factors—notably social, personal or technical—as predictors of continuance behaviour. This is perhaps because there is no clear direction as to the type of factors that should be taken into account when examining continuance behaviour, leading to a poor understanding of what factors strengthen forum users' intention to continue using e-WOM. Thus, the present study combines factors from three models in an effort to provide better

explanatory power when examining the determinants of e-WOM adoption and continuance behaviour. From this point of view, IAM was considered to be the most appropriate model to be integrated with ISCM, while the need for additional variables provides justification for the inclusion of two variables from KCM, i.e. offline activities and information needs fulfilment. The key strength of the extended model is thus its comprehensiveness, based on empirical findings. The resultant comprehensive model as developed in the current study makes an additional contribution to the literature by grounding key predictors through their application to a new context, the Middle East, and specifically Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

8.3.3 Methodological contribution

The majority of e-WOM adoption and continuance studies reported in the literature have used online surveys as their main methodological approach. The major methodological contribution of the present study is thus the use of the case study strategy to investigate the message characteristics of two online communities using content analysis, as explained in Chapters 3 and 5, and online interviews (Chapter 6). According to the literature (Cheng and Zhou, 2010; Fong and Burton, 2006), an appropriate method of evaluating e-WOM is through content analysis. A further major contribution is contextual, in that this study has investigated message characteristics where few other researchers have studied females, i.e. in the Middle East and more specifically in two GCC countries (Sharif and Al-Kandari, 2010). In addition, this is one of few studies utilising the MAXQDA software, which enables the analysis of Arabic textual material without losing its original form or meaning, as discussed in Chapter 3.

8.3.4 Contribution to Practice

This research contributes to knowledge not only in terms of theory but of policy towards information systems, in several ways. First, e-WOM is exchanged on various online platforms, including discussion communities or forums; thus e-WOM, along with other online content, is considered a topic of interest to information systems researchers. This study offers a theoretical framework within which to understand e-WOM use and adoption in online communities. Its findings provide support to females in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, who are likely to be particularly dependent on online bulletin board communities to obtain information (Sherif and Alkandari, 2010).

The second central contribution concerns the integration of the Information Adoption Model—which takes account of message characteristics, such as completeness and accuracy, and receiver characteristics, such as trustworthiness, knowledge, expertise and reliability—and the traditional IS Continuance Model, with the addition of two factors from the Knowledge Contribution Model: offline activities and information needs fulfilment.

Third, this study has focused on the adoption of e-WOM in online communities, such as through different mediated messages, rather than technology adoption, in contrast to the approach of Sussman and Siegal (2003), who studied single mediated messages.

Its fourth practical contribution is to further the understanding of ways in which females adopt e-WOM in online forums, thus helping online community initiators to understand processes that support effective e-WOM intention. Practitioners can understand the e-WOM adoption components in online communities, where e-WOM is transferred either through a central route (argument quality or message factors) or by a peripheral route, via source credibility, which signifies a non-message route. This will help in terms of understanding the routes that females prefer when adopting e-WOM, so that practitioners can understand why it may be important to take non-message factors into account (Sussman and Siegal, 2003).

The findings of this study could also help OCs to develop review systems for their products and services so that members can review products and services, especially when considering that most online communities have online sellers and online review systems. The novelty of the work reported in this thesis demonstrates the potential value of the influence of e-WOM in social contexts for future research.

These findings have practical implications in that e-WOM in online social exchanges between females represent a valuable strategy for e-businesses, e-retailers, web designers and online community managers who are concerned about gaining the advantages of females' access to e-WOM. The originality of this study is that it is one of only a few to have used content analysis to examine the influence of e-WOM characteristics and patterns of decision making by female consumers, by exploring their retention and their tendency to return to the same forum to reveal their adoption of e-WOM.

This research has also investigated the importance of community bonding between females and its contribution to e-WOM adoption, as certain patterns of community bonding were found to be widely applicable to online beauty forums. These patterns—the use of emoticons, expressions of emotional feelings, links, religious expressions, online activities, jokes, photos, greetings and luck—were exhaustively studied in the context of e-WOM adoption, whereas they have rarely been discussed by other researchers where e-WOM is shared. Thus, the findings reported in this thesis open the door for other researchers to include such emotional constructs when examining the behaviour of females online, where they tend to appear widely.

8.3.5 Managerial contribution (new insight)

As to its managerial contribution, this thesis offers important insights into patterns of e-WOM communication, carrying implications of value to online community managers, practitioners, administrators, corporations, organisations and consumer behaviour researchers. In other words, for those who are involved in female online communities, there are implications concerning the factors affecting e-WOM adoption, whose understanding this research has enhanced. The findings show that Kuwaiti females were motivated to adopt e-WOM by the use of hyperbolic expression, designated by the ‘positive 5’ sub-code, and by the inclusion of emoticons in the thread posts. In the case of the Saudi interviewees, the role of the straightforward ‘positive 1’ sub-code of argument quality was crucial in deciding to adopt e-WOM. Saudi females also tended to adopt the e-WOM if they were influenced by religious expression in the thread posts. A factor which played a role in the adoption of e-WOM in both countries was ‘pushing up the topic to the top of the thread’. It was also shown that the desire to find e-WOM helped female OC members to adopt it more quickly. Almost all interviewees said that they were influenced by e-WOM usefulness, while the element of source credibility most commonly identified as affecting the adoption of e-WOM was perceiving the member as knowledgeable. The interviewees generally agreed that when a member posting e-WOM shared her mobile number or other personal contact details, this made them more willing to adopt the e-WOM. Finally, both Kuwaiti and Saudi interviewees commented that the more satisfied they were with a recommendation, the more likely they were to follow it.

The following issues need to be taken into consideration by OC managers and practitioners. First, it is advisable for managers to carefully monitor those who participate

in their communities, such as inquirers and especially contributors, who are heavy users and who have a tendency to offer recommendations and e-WOM. A close look into these activities of inquiring and sharing e-WOM is needed. The typology of OC members' roles should be taken into consideration, especially since there are two basic types of female members who tend to adopt e-WOM the inquirers and interested members. Thus, online sellers also pay attention to product recommendations by opinion leaders, due to their important role in influencing other members of the group (Meng, Wei and Zhu, 2011). Online managers and e-retailers may consider rewarding these opinion influencers with status, rank or recognition as experts in special product areas, so that other members can refer to them. For example, the review system could include a referral icon which opens a list of opinion leaders according to their expertise and which would help members to find the recommendations they need.

E-retailers and web designers could also adopt a star rating system which would, for example, rate the number of reviews and of positive, negative and neutral e-WOM messages. This would help members by evaluating the posted comments. The review system scores would provide information on e-WOM usefulness, so this feature would help users to focus on the helpfulness of the review, which might in turn influence them to adopt the e-WOM.

Online service providers might alternatively create a rating system with a “trusted expert” feature so that members who inquire about e-WOM can assess the expertise of the poster. Similarly, a “knowledgeable” feature would allow readers of the review to assess the level of expertise of contributors and take this into account when deciding whether to adopt e-WOM.

Online community designers and e-retailers could also develop a feature such as “add new product or services”, which might help to fulfil the need of members to learn more about the latest developments in products or services in the market.

This study's innovative introduction of the concept of community bonding could benefit e-retailers, who might make use of emotional feelings—for example, affection for a product—to influence members toward the adoption of e-WOM or a recommendation. Moreover, web designers should consider the high value of using emoticons when designing for female users, in light of the finding that participants in this study often used emoticons to represent their emotions.

Online managers should encourage users to provide more pictures and links in social interaction contexts, where females tend to share. In addition, online managers, e-retailers and providers of e-services should consider the importance of religion in Moslem societies. Evidence from qualitative analysis suggest that religious expressions were provided in e-WOM in social contexts, especially if the e-WOM was in conflict with the religious beliefs of the contributors. Thus, providers should consider how religion might affect e-WOM adoption. For example, they should take care to avoid participants posting recommendations that conflict with other users' religious beliefs, as this would harm business.

Finally, a closer look must be taken at the role of subjective norms, especially in developing countries, where the family still plays a role in decision making (Long, 2005). Some evidence from the Saudi case study indicates that some participants were willing to continue using e-WOM as long as they had the confirmation of the traditional word of mouth of family members.

8.4 Limitations and Future research

It has already been noted that this is one of the few studies that have examined e-WOM in a Middle Eastern context. This final section considers its limitations and explores avenues for further work.

The first limitation of the study is that the data were gathered exclusively from users of two female-only online beauty forums, one in Kuwait and the other in Saudi Arabia, and the messages posted there; this means that the results may not be representative of other Middle Eastern female populations, other topics or other platforms. Thus, other researchers might consider examining e-WOM in different consumer opinion platforms, such as online review sites, to provide a richer understanding of consumers in this cultural context. Geographically, the research could fruitfully be extended to females in the other four GCC countries, namely Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman, in an effort to increase its generalizability. As to topic, the content analysis was restricted to messages posted in the two beauty forums. Other researchers might investigate online forums specialising in other topics, such as fashion, where females tend to engage in heavy consumption. An alternative avenue of research would be to address the gender limitation by investigating e-WOM adoption among males. Methodologically, data were gathered

exclusively by means of content analysis and online interviews. Other methods which could be used to broaden the methodology of future research are focus groups and online experiments, which could highlight the use of more e-WOM. Finally, this study examined only argument quality, source credibility, receiver involvement, information usefulness, information need fulfilment, offline activities and satisfaction as factors potentially explaining e-WOM adoption. It did not consider the influence of technological and related factors. This could be done by extending the framework developed here to include technological factors such as website quality.

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Appendix A: Additional content analysis data

Table 1: Other argument quality sub-codes in Kuwait forum

Members who adopted e-WOM		Members who had neutral view	Members who did not adopt e-WOM
Sub-codes	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage
Quotes	386 (36.31%)	113 (3.15%)	3 (14.56%)
Accurate	5 (0.14%)	57 (1.59%)	0
Not accurate	0	5 (0.14%)	0
Complete	4 (0.11%)	4(0.11%)	0

Table 2: Emoticons in Kuwait forum

Members who adopted e-WOM			Members who did not mention any opinion			Members who clearly stated that they would not adopt		
Total threads 218 Total number of units of analysis 7039			Total threads 534 Total number of units of analysis 10385			Total threads 13 Total number of units of analysis 745		
Construct	Frequency	Percentage	Construct	Frequency	Percentage	Construct	Frequency	Percentage
Community bonding Emoticons 2	2073 637	29.45% 30.73%	Community bonding Emoticons (802)	3004	28.92% 26.70	Community bonding Emoticons	216 56	29% 25.93
Smiley (happy)	90		Smiley (happy)	173		Smiley (happy)	9	
Smiley holding Flower	44		Smiley holding Flower	62		Smiley holding Flower	6	
Blissful	31		Blissful	45		Blissful	4	
Kisses	17		Kisses	43		Kisses	2	
Hear love	28		Hear love	25		Hear love	1	
Ok signs	20		Ok signs	8		Ok signs	3	
Crying from joke	2		Crying from joke	1		Crying from joke	1	
Sad	201		Sad	173		Sad	12	
Crying face	132		Crying face	172		Crying face	3	
Anger	5		Anger	10		Anger	1	
Calling emoticons	50		Calling emoticons	58		Calling emoticons	10	
Guessing	19		Guessing	24		Guessing	14	
Surprise	0		Surprise	8		Surprise	0	

Table 3: Emotional feelings in Kuwait forum

Members who adopted e-WOM Total threads 218 Total number of unit of analysis 7039			Members who did not express any opinion Total threads 534 Total number of unit of analysis 10385			Member who clearly stated not to adopt Total threads 13 Total number of unit of analysis 745		
Construct	Frequency	Percentage	Construct	Frequency	Percentage	Construct	Frequency	Percentage
Community bonding	246	11.87	Community bonding	393	13.08	Community bonding	38	17.59
Emotional feeling			Emotional feeling			Emotional feeling		
Anxiety	0		Anxiety	1		Anxiety	0	
Boredom	2		Boredom	2		Boredom	0	
Confusion	2		Confusion	5		Confusion	5	
Forgiveness	1		Forgiveness	2		Forgiveness	0	
Love toward online members	160		Love	150		Love	0	
Affection to product	138		Affection to product	45		Affection to product	0	
Hate	2		Hate	12		Hate	26	
Embarrassment	1		Embarrassment	1		Embarrassment	4	
Convinced	2		Convinced	1		Convinced	0	
Not convinced	0		Not convinced	0		Not convinced	1	
Fear	2		Fear	4		Fear	1	
Sadness	65		Sadness	152		Sadness	0	
Surprise	3		Surprise	6		Surprise	1	
Anger	0		Anger	0		Anger	0	
Happy	7		Happy	12		Happy	0	

Table 4: Receiver involvement in Kuwait forum

Members who adopted e-WOM		Members who did not express any opinion	Members who did not adopt e-WOM
Sub-codes	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage
Pushing up the topic	386 (36.31%)	948 (49.25%)	23 (14.56%)
Involved in the issue	630 (59.27%)	922 (47.90%)	128 (81.01%)
Discussion in mind lately	47 (4.42%)	55 (2.86%)	7 (4.43%)

Table 5: Information need fulfilment in Kuwait forum

Members who adopted e-WOM		Members who did not express any opinion	Members who did not adopt e-WOM
Sub-codes	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage
Find e-WOM	417 (64.15%)	824 (70.61%)	39 (72.22%)
Solve problem	184 (28.31%)	253 (21.68%)	10 (18.52%)
Make decision	13 (2.00%)	37 (3.17%)	1 (1.85%)
Learn new things	36 (5.54%)	53 (4.73%)	4 (7.41%)

Table 6: E-WOM usefulness in Kuwait forum

Sub-codes	Frequency and percentage		
	Members who adopted e-WOM	Members who did not express any opinion	Members who did not adopt e-WOM
Beneficial	227 (92.65%)	340 (92.39%)	17 (94.44%)
Informative	16 (6.53%)	23 (6.25%)	1 (5.56%)
Valuable	2 (0.82%)	5 (1.32%)	0.00

Table 7: Source credibility in Kuwait forum

Members who adopted e-WOM		Members who had neutral view	Members who did not adopt e-WOM
Sub-codes	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage
Not knowledgeable	79 (49.07%)	205 (63.27%)	4 (40.77%)
Knowledgeable	20 (12.42%)	53 (16.36%)	3 (23.08%)
Expert	26 (16.15%)	27 (8.33%)	1 (7.69%)
Trustworthy	24 (14.91%)	24 (7.41%)	3 (23.08%)
Reliable	12 (7.45%)	10 (3.09%)	2 (15.38%)
Not trustworthy	0.00	5 (1.54%)	0.00

Table 8: Other argument quality sub-codes in Saudi forum

Members who adopted e-WOM		Member who did not express any opinion	Members who did not adopt e-WOM
Sub-code	Frequency (percentage)	Frequency (percentage)	Frequency (percentage)
Quotes		795 (9.77%)	20 (5.45 %)
Complete	126 (5.74%)	0	0
Accurate	28 (1.18%)	66 (0.81)	7 (1.91%)
Not accurate	4 (0.11)	8(0.10)	2 (0.54%)

Table 9: Emoticon sub-codes in Saudi forum

Members who adopted e-WOM Total threads 310 Total number of units of analysis 6105			Members who did not express any opinion Total threads 803 Total number of units of analysis 25045			Members who clearly stated intention not to adopt Total threads 55 Total number of units of analysis 691		
Construct	Frequency	Percentage	Construct	Frequency	Percentage	Construct	Frequency	Percentage
Community bonding Emoticons	245	14.07%	Community bonding Emoticons	1442	14.20%	Community bonding Emoticons	24	9.92%
Smiley (happy)	134		Smiley (happy)	840		Smiley (happy)	11	
Smiley holding Flower	51		Smiley holding Flower	280		Smiley holding Flower	3	
Blissful	0		Blissful	0		Blissful	0	
Kisses	0		Kisses	40		Kisses	0	
Heart/ love	15		Heart/ love	30		Heart/ love	0	
Ok signs	0		Ok signs	24		Ok signs	0	
Crying from joke	0		Crying from joke	10		Crying from joke	0	
Sad	0		Sad	200		Sad	8	
Crying face	0		Crying face	30		Crying face	0	
Anger	0		Anger	2		Anger	0	
Calling emoticons	40		Calling emoticons	120		Calling emoticons	0	
Guessing	5		Guessing	12		Guessing	0	
Surprise	0		Surprise	10		Surprised	2	

Table 10: Emotional feeling sub-codes in Saudi forum

Members who adopted e-WOM Total threads 310 Total number of units of analysis 6105			Members who did not express any opinion Total threads 803 Total number of units of analysis 25045			Members who clearly stated that they would not adopt Total threads 55 Total number of units of analysis 961		
Emergded from content analysis								
Construct	Frequency	Percentage	Construct	Frequency	Percentage	Construct	Frequency	Percentage
Community bonding Emotional feeling	244	14.01%	Community bonding Emotional feeling	993	12.29	Community bonding Emotional feeling	34	14.05%
Anxiety	0	0	Anxiety	2		Anxiety	0	
Boredom	0	0	Boredom	0		Boredom	0	
Confusion	0	0	Confusion	0		Confusion	2	
Forgiveness	2		Forgiveness	0		Forgiveness	0	
Love for OC members	98		Love	723		Love	0	
Affection for product	75		Affection to product	123		Affection for product	0	
Hate	4		Hate	2		Hate	12	
Embarrassment	0		Embarrassment	5		Embarrassment	16	
Convinced	2		Convinced	0		Convinced	0	
Not convinced	0		Not convinced	0		Not convinced	3	
Fear	1		Fear	14		Fear	1	
Sadness	0		Sadness	127		Sadness	0	
Surprise	2		Surprise	0		Surprise	0	
Anger	0		Anger	0		Anger	0	
Happy	60		Happy	0		Happy	0	...

Table 11: Receiver involvement sub-codes in SA

Members who adopted e-WOM		Members who did not express any opinion	Members who did not adopt e-WOM
Sub-codes	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage
Pushing up the topic	330(45.14%)	2350 (73.16%)	48(41.38%)
Involved in the issue	390(53.35%)	836 (26.03%)	67(57.76%)
Discussion in mind lately	11(1.50%)	26(0.81%)	1(0.086%)

Table 12: Information need sub-codes SA

Members who adopted e-WOM		Members who did not express any opinion	Members who did not adopt e-WOM
Sub-codes	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage
Find e-WOM	428(73.54%)	2736 (80.76%)	75(77.32%)
Solve problem	133(22.85%)	537 (15.85%)	16 (16.49%)
Make decision	14(2.41%)	70 (2.07%)	70 (4.12%)
Learn new thing	7 (1.20%)	45(1.33%)	2(2.06%)

Table 13: E-WOM usefulness sub-codes in SA

Members who adopted e-WOM		Members who did not express any opinion	Members who did not adopt e-WOM
Sub-codes	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage
Beneficial	278(96.53%)	1062 (96.37%)	48 (97.96%)
Informative	9(6.53%)	32(2.90%)	1 (5.56%)
Valuable	1(0.35%)	8(0.73%)	0.00

Table 14: Source credibility sub-codes in SA

Members who adopted e-WOM		Members who did not indicate anything	Members who did not adopt e-WOM
Sub-codes	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage	Frequency and percentage
Not knowledgeable	76 (42.46%)	530 (49.07%)	15 (44.12%)
Expert	59 (32.96%)	426 (39.44%)	7 (20.59%)
Knowledgeable	19 (10.61%)	46 (4.91%)	4 (11.76%)
Trustworthy	16 (14.91%)	53 (4.91%)	5 (14.71%)
Reliable	7 (3.91%)	19 (1.76%)	3 (8.82%)
Not trustworthy	2 (1.21%)	6 (1.76%)	00

Appendix B: Informants profiles

Table 14: Profiles of the Kuwaiti informant's sample

Participants number	Nationality	Age	Educational level	Employment	Marital status	Years in community	Hours spend in community
1	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
2	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
3	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
4	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
5	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
6	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
7	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
8	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
9	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
10	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
11	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
12	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
13	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
14	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
15	Kuwaiti	40	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
16	Kuwaiti	50	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
17	Kuwaiti	50	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
18	Kuwaiti	50	BA	Employee	Married	2 years	half an hour
19	Kuwaiti	50	Phd	Retired	Divorced	2 years	One hour
20	Kuwaiti	50	Diploma	Retired	Widowed	2 years	One hour
21	Kuwaiti	30	Diploma	Housewife	Single	2 years	One hour
22	Kuwaiti	30	Diploma	Housewife	Single	2 years	One hour
23	Kuwaiti	35	Diploma	Housewife	Single	2 years	One hour
24	Kuwaiti	35	Diploma	Housewife	Single	5 years	2 hours
25	Kuwaiti	35	Diploma	Housewife	Single	10 years	2 hours

Table 15: Profiles of the Saudi Informants sample

Participants number	Nationality	Age	Educational level	Employment	Marital status	Years in community	Hours spend in community
1	Saudi	20	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
2	Saudi	20	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
3	Saudi	20	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
4	Saudi	20	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
5	Saudi	20	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
6	Saudi	20	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
7	Saudi	20	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
8	Saudi	20	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
9	Saudi	20	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
10	Saudi	20	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
11	Saudi	20	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
12	Saudi	20	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
13	Saudi	22	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
14	Saudi	23	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
15	Saudi	23	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
16	Saudi	23	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
17	Saudi	23	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
18	Saudi	25	Employed	BA	Married	2 years	One hour
19	Saudi	25	Employed	Diploma	Divorced	2 years	One hour
20	Saudi	25	Employed	Diploma	Divorced	2 years	One hour
21	Saudi	25	Employed	Diploma	Divorced	2 years	Half an hour
22	Saudi	25	Employed	Diploma	Single	2 years	Half an hour
23	Saudi	25	Employed	Diploma	Single	2 years	Half an hour
24	Saudi	27	Employed	Diploma	Single	5 years	3 hours
25	Saudi	29	Housewife	Diploma	Single	10 years	3 hours

