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**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
INTERNATIONAL MARKETING
MANAGEMENT**

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**THE EFFECTS OF ELECTRONIC WORD – OF – MOUTH TO CONSUMERS’
PURCHASE INTENTION TOWARDS COSMETICS PRODUCTS**

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Abstract

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The aim of this Master’s thesis is to study about the impacts of electronic word – of – mouth to the consumers’ purchase intention towards cosmetic products. In order to achieve the research purpose, the effect of eWOM dimensions and antecedent to consumers’ brand attitude and purchase intention of Vietnamese consumers have been studied.

The research consists of two main parts: the theoretical framework and empirical findings. The theoretical part focuses on the discussions of eWOM dimensions (valence, quality and quantity), eWOM antecedent (source credibility) and their effects to consumers’ brand attitude and purchase intention. This research utilizes the quantitative method to conduct the empirical part. A web – based questionnaire was developed and carried out over social media channels. Out of 436 responses, there were 362 responses valid for data analysis.

According to the empirical findings, positive eWOM valence, eWOM quantity and source credibility have effect on consumers’ brand attitude and purchase intention towards cosmetics products. On the other hand, eWOM quality has been found that it has no impact on consumers’ purchase intention.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The initial Chapter of this thesis aims to provide a general and broad viewpoint on the background and author's motivation for the research. The thesis objectives and main research questions are also presented. Furthermore, the author also emphasizes in illustrating the research methodology, scope of limitations and thesis structure.

1.1 Background

Since its appearance in 1969, Internet has dramatically transformed the way people communicate and do business (Bogren et al. 1999). It has also led to the development of internet marketing – a non – conventional promotional tool that dramatically changed the way companies market to both consumers and businesses. Digital marketing, internet marketing or online marketing are the terms that have been widely mentioned in recent years. These terms describe the promotional tool that employ different online channels in order to deliver values and establish relationships with customers (Miller, 2012, 6). Social media marketing is one tool of digital marketing. Nowadays, the term “social media” are widely discussed across the globe because of its strong capability to interact, connect and share information among people. They are different Internet and mobile – based channels that encourage audience participation, interaction and sharing. This has also led to the new trend of word – of – mouth marketing. It is the digital forms of information spreading about brands, products and services by customers.

The predecessor of electronic word – of – mouth (eWOM) is the conventional word – of – mouth marketing. This topic has been widely discussed by many scholars and its strong effect to consumers' purchase intention is inevitable. According to Nielsen, word – of – mouth recommendations remain the most credible and trustworthy sources of information when consumers make products or services purchase decision (Nielsen, 2015). Thanks to the huge development of Internet, many social platforms have been created to help customers spread out word – of – mouth under the digital forms. Social blogging is among one of those. A blog, originally called as “weblog”, is defined as a self – publishing

website with chronological publication of personal thoughts. The huge and massive development of blog is proved by the speedy increasing number of blogs from 35 million in 2006 to 173 million in 2011 (Nielsen, 2012). A blog post could be the combination of pictures and/or videos along with the text entry. Blog writers, also known as “blogger”, could be an individual, a group of people or corporate, depending which category of the blog is. In this research, the author only focuses on the context of personal blogs. These blogs are owned by individuals who want to express their ideas, observations, suggestions, etc. (Vaezi, et al., 2011)

This thesis concentrates on studying the impact of eWOM on consumers’ purchase intention towards cosmetic products. As the eWOM consists of a wide range of platforms and context, the author chooses to specifically concentrate on blogging – or in other words are blog posts of beauty bloggers. As a frequent user who utilizes Internet in general and reads beauty blogs in particular, the author finds herself deeply interested in this topic. The author believes that the outcome of the research is beneficial for any cosmetic company in understanding the effect of online reviews and electronic word – of – mouth communication to consumers purchase intention. Furthermore, cosmetic companies could successfully monitor, manage as well as encourage positive engagements with customers. The outcome is also a valuable source to evaluate the importance and actual effects of beauty bloggers’ reviews on social networking sites. Nowadays, consumers are not only passively influenced by brand’s advertisement but also actively search for outside evaluation from other former users. Among the most 10 popular activities of adult Internet users, usage of search engines to find information and research a product/service before making purchase are all on the list with high rank. A recent has proved that word – of – mouth content sources have three times more power than conventional marketing channels – which are controlled intensely by the marketers. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010, 153)

1.2 Literature review

Prior to the emergence of eWOM communication, its predecessor word-of-mouth (WOM) has been a favorite research area of academic researchers since 1940s. It has been acknowledged for many years as a major influence on what people know, feel and do. Even though

most researches conducted WOM from the customer – to – customer perspective, WOM is found to have more impacts on consumers behavior than other marketer – controlled sources since they always have the intention to trust and value the opinion that are directly expressed to them from a trust source, rather than the brand’s advertising campaign. (Buttle, 1998, 241) Regarding the original definition of WOM, there has been many scholars attempt to define it. Arndt characterized WOM as an “oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non – commercial, regarding a brand, product or service” (Arndt, 1967, 292). Westbrook (1987, 261) specifically defined WOM in the context of consumers’ post – purchase behavior, in which they exchange knowledge about the ownership, usage or characteristics of particular goods, services and/or their sellers. Most recently, WOM is considered as an act of providing and passing information from consumers to consumers (WOMMA, 2007). Whereas most of scholars agree that WOM is an informal communication and flow of information, Haywood is the one who considered WOM as a formal conversation. He defined WOM is a process “which is often generated by a company’s formal communications and the behavior of its representative” (Haywood, 1989, 58).

According to McKinsey, WOM communication is the primary factor behind 20% - 50% to all of purchasing decisions. It has the biggest influence especially on decision making process for high involvement purchases which require more research. (McKinsey, 2010) Furthermore, word-of-mouth also has a strong power in generating brand awareness, expectations, perceptions and behavioural intentions in customers’ mind. However, as it is non marketer – controlled communication, word-of-mouth can influence the customers’ decision and perception either positively or negatively. Statistics have proved that the negative word-of-mouth has stronger influence than the others since dissatisfied customers tell twice more than the happier one and and the story will be spreaded faster to a larger scale of recipients (Buttle, 1998).

Because of its complexity, multitude origins and motivation, it is difficult to define all specific types of word-of-mouth communication. However, the three most common forms have been defined by McKinsey in order to bring general understanding to the marketers. They are: experiential, consequential and intentional.

The most common and powerful form is experiential word-of-mouth. It results directly from the consumers' experiences with a product or service; therefore, it is relatively easy for them to create their own content and build trust on the others. This content is highly evaluated since it based on real and practical experience with the product or service and users are mostly not paid for doing that. Consequential word-of-mouth is the second type. It results from the influence of effective marketing campaigns and the passing on of brand's message. The less common form is intentional word-of-mouth, in which the brand uses celebrity involvement to create positive buzz for product launch. However, only few companies invest in this strategy because of the difficulty to measure the effect and anticipate its success. (McKinsey , 2010)

Table 1. Summary of previous researches on WOM antecedents and dimensions

Author(s)	WOM antecedents & dimensions	Context
Oliver (1997)	- Service quality - Satisfaction	Products and Services
Harrison-Walker (2001) Teo & Soutar (2011)	- Satisfaction - Affective commitment - High – sacrifice commitment	Eduacation
Lymperopoulos & Chaniotakis (2008)	- Price satisfaction - Personnel efficiency	Financial service
Ranaweera & Prabhu (2003)	- Customer satisfacton - Trust	Telephone service
Brown, Barry, Dacin & Gunst	- Consumer identification - Consumer satisfaction - Consumer commitment	Automobile retailer

Traditional WOM antecedents and dimensions have been widely researched and focused typically on the direct effects of consumers' satisfactions and dissatisfactions with previous purchase experiences and opinion leadership on WOM (Brown et al., 2005, 124). The summary of previous researches related to WOM antecedents and dimensions is listed in the Table 1.

The development of network technology and the Internet has transformed traditional face – to – face WOM communication into computer – mediated WOM, which is also known as eWOM. It refers to “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or a brand, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, 39). Although there are many identical features with its predecessor WOM, eWOM has several unique characteristics. Firstly, apart from face – to – face WOM communication, eWOM can be anonymous because it might occur between people who have little or no prior relationship with the others (Lee & Youn, 2009, 474). Secondly, while communicators exchange WOM in private conversations or dialogs, eWOM involves multi – way of information exchanges through different platforms, such as consumers blogs, brand community, online discussion forums, etc. Therefore, eWOM information does not require the presence of all communicators. Thirdly, eWOM communications are more accessible, measureable and voluminous in terms of quantity than the tradition WOM. (Cheung & Thadani, 2012, 462)

Table 2. Summary of previous researches on eWOM

Authors	Antecedents	Context
Brown, Broderick & Lee (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tie strength - Homophily - Source credibility 	Online community
Wu & Wang (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Message appeal - Source credibility - Involvement 	Brand attitude and purchase intention towards consumers products
Lopez & Sicilia (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Source credibility - Perceived valence - Perceived volume 	Tourism
Teng, Khong, Goh & Chong (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Argument quality - Source credibility - Source attractiveness - Source perception - Source style 	Social media discussion
Filieri (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall product ranking - Customer ratings - Information quality - Source credibility - Info quantity - Information diagnosticity 	Online consumer reviews about accommodations and restaurants

	- Information adoption	
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The popularity and massive development of Web 2.0 has empowered the availability of different platforms for the consumers to exchange user generated content. Some of the most common platforms have been researched are: online community, consumer review sites, blogs, forums and online brand/shopping sites (Cheung & Thadani, 2012, 464). There have been numerous researches conducted on the eWOM antecedents and dimensions in different platforms and context. The Table 2 summarizes the previous researches.

The effects of both WOM and eWOM to brand attitude and purchase intention have been researched widely across scholars. Kim (2015, 4554) found that the instrumentality and reliability of eWOM in social networking sites strongly influence the brand attitude, hence, leads to the increase in purchase intention if the brand attitude is positive. Furthermore, in the study conducted by Chen et al., (2015, 467), information sources from eWOM are perceived as useful for consumers and have positive influences on their attitude toward brand and purchase intention. Other eWOM antecedents and dimensions, such as argument quality, source credibility, information usefulness have been proved to have effect to consumers' information adoption and attitude. Cheung et al. (2008, 229), Bataineh (2015, 126) and Park et al. (2007, 125) concluded on their findings that quality and quantity of online reviews significantly and positively influence on consumers' purchase intention. The valence of eWOM is also considered as another controversial topic. It refers to the evaluative direction, which is positive, neutral or negative of the review. A positive review contains information that positively evaluates the objects, while the negative one offers the vice versa side. A neutral review does not include any evaluative direction but rather to provide descriptive information. However, negative information generally brings more powerful impact than neutral or positive review. (Herr et al., 1991, 455; Lee et al., 2009, 2)

WOM, as well as eWOM, is such a broad topic that even though researchers around the world have put much effort to advance its knowledge, there are still much to explore. This research aims to bring the most four common antecedents of eWOM (valence, quantity, quality and source credibility) into the study connected to consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention in consumer goods industry, specifically cosmetic products and the

context is Weblog. The author prospects that this thesis could somehow potentially bridge the gaps in empirical research of eWOM.

1.3 Research aim and research questions

As mentioned earlier, this thesis aim to examine the effect of electronic word – of – mouth to consumers purchase intention towards cosmetic products. In order to achieve this goal, the author explores the eWOM communication of blog readers with the case brand is the The Body Shop. Based on the aim of this study, the main research question is developed as follows:

How does electronic word – of – mouth affect the consumers' purchase intention towards cosmetic products?

In order to provide a comprehensive answer to the main research question, five sub – questions have been formulated. Four of them are aimed to examine the effect of eWOM dimensions and antecedent to consumers' brand attitude and the last one targets the purchase intention. Three eWOM dimensions are: valence, eWOM quantity and eWOM quality. eWOM antecedent is source credibility.

Firstly, eWOM valence is chosen as it is considered as one of the most important attributes in WOM (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Therefore, the first sub-question aims to explore:

What kind of effect does positive valence of electronic word-of-mouth have on consumers' brand attitude?

Further, the two following sub – questions are pointed to explore the effect of eWOM quantity and quality. Previous studies have shown the influences of these attributes to the consumers brand attitude as well as purchase intention. (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984, 71; Park et al., 2007, 128; Chen et al., 2004, 726)

What kind of effect does quality of electronic word – of – mouth have on consumers' brand attitude?

What kind of effect does quantity of electronic word – of – mouth have on consumers' brand attitude?

The following sub-question studies about the effect of source credibility. It has been prove to be one of the most fundamental predictors of consumers' acceptance towards message. (Chatterjee, 2001, 130). Therefore, the fourth sub-research question is developed as follows:

What kind of effect does source credibility have on consumers' brand attitude?

Attitude is considered as an overall persistent evaluation towards people, things or goods and brand attitude has been proved to closely connected with purchase intention. In order to find out the effect of all eWOM dimensions and antecedent mentioned above to consumers purchase intention, the last sub-question is:

What kind of effect does consumers' brand attitude have on their purchase intentions?

1.4 Definitions of the key concepts

Within this section, the author is going to define the key concepts which will be discussed in this thesis. They are eWOM, blog, eWOM valence, eWOM quality, eWOM quantity, source credibility, consumers' brand attitude and consumers' purchase intention.

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM): Being part of the phenomenon concept word – of – mouth, eWOM has many similar characteristics with its predecessor. Word – of – mouth is defined as an “informal, person – to – person communication regarding a brand, a product or a service by consumers” (Rahman, et al. 2014). eWOM, on the other hand, is the

communication that “contain positive or negative statements made by potential, actual, and former customers about a product or a brand via the Internet”. With the mass development of new media channels, there are many platforms and tools available for consumers to communicate and exchange information, such as online discussion forums, social networking sites, weblogs, consumer review sites, etc. (Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2004, 39)

Blog: It is defined as “an easily, instantly and frequently updated Web site, focused around a topic, industry or personality” (Wibbels 2006). Up to 2007, there were reported to have 112.8 million blogs worldwide. The majority of blog authors indicated that the main reason for blogging is knowledge and life experiences sharing as well as opinions about products, events or people around them. (Osman et al., 2009, 873)

eWOM valence: The valence of eWOM communication refers to how positive, negative or neutral the eWOM. In this thesis, only positive eWOM is mentioned. Positive eWOM (or “praise”) is positive endorsement and experiences about a product, service or brand are circulated (adapted from Buttle, 1998, 241)

eWOM quality: Quality of eWOM refers to the “persuasive strength of arguments embedded in an informational message” (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006, 811). It is also can be considered as the convincing power of information to the message receivers.

eWOM quantity: The recognition of a product is determined by the quantity of reviews, comments and discussion on the Internet about it. Quantity of eWOM could represent the market performance, consumer awareness and quality of product. It is an important dimension because it demonstrates the popularity of information that consumers are able to explore, which bring them confidence and reduce uncertainty while making purchase intention. (Maeyer, 2012, 134)

Source credibility: Source credibility is defined as “the perceived ability and motivation of these message source to product accurate and truthful information” (Li & Zhan, 2012). Source credibility is composed of three elements: expertness, trustworthiness and source experience (Cheung et al., 2008, 235)

Consumers' brand attitude: Brand attitude is defined as the overall evaluation, emotional feelings and behavioral tendency that consumers have towards a certain brand. The brand attitude is formed based on how consumers judge the prominent benefit or image of the brand. (Kotler & Keller, 2008, 483)

Purchase intention: The “consumers’ willingness, probability and possibility to purchase a product” is defined as purchase intention. It is related to consumers’ behavior, perception and their attitude. (Dodds et al., 1991, 310)

1.5 Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework is considered to be a structured bone of the research. It is a collection of interrelated concepts that is beneficial in guiding the research, determine the most significant theories and the relationship between them (Borgatti, 1999). In exploratory studies, theoretical framework is also crucially important. According to Anfara and Mertz (2006, 192), it has the ability to “focus a study, reveal and conceal meaning and understanding, situate the research and reveal strengths and weaknesses”.

Being aware of the essential need of a theoretical framework, the author has demonstrated a concrete research ground – which is shown in the Figure 1. The theoretical framework is constructed based on the main concepts and hypotheses of the study.

There are three main eWOM dimensions and one antecedent are mentioned in the framework: eWOM valence, eWOM quality, eWOM quantity and source credibility. All these variables have been previously studied in my journals and academic articles. However, only few of them have covered the context of blogging. Hsu et al. (2012) studied the effects consumers’ perceived trust, usefulness of recommendations and attitude to online purchase intention; Lin et al. (2012) employed blogs to investigate the consumers’ perception of eWOM quality, credibility and purchase intention. The effects of eWOM antecedens to brand attitude and purchase intention were also studied by Wu & Wang (2011) and Teng, et al. (2014).

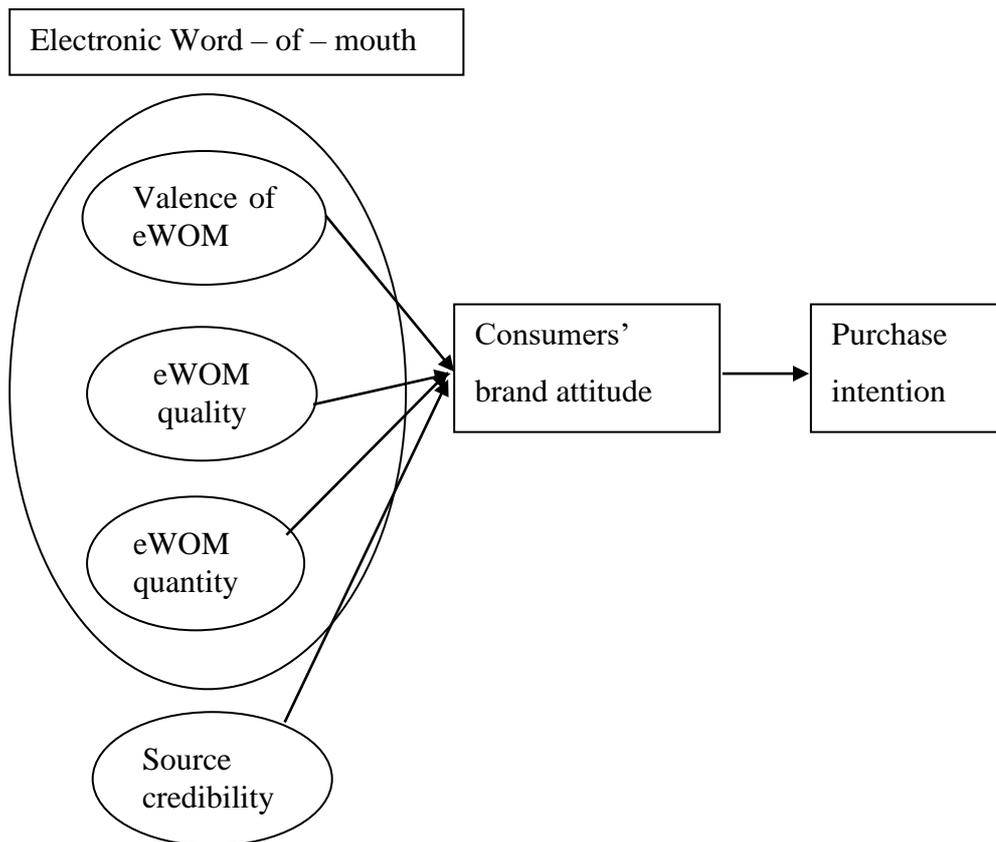


Figure 1. Research's theoretical framework

1.6 Delimitations

As mentioned in the research aim and theoretical framework, this thesis concentrates on examining eWOM, therefore, traditional WOM and face – to – face communication is excluded from the scope of research of this thesis. Moreover, eWOM communications consists of wide range of tools and platforms for consumers to communicate and exchange information, such as online discussion forums, social networking sites, weblogs, consumer review sites, etc. However, in this thesis, the author chooses to focus solely on blog, and in this research context is beauty blog. The author aims to narrow down the research scope to be focal, concentrated and comprehensive for a Master's thesis. eWOM also have variety of dimensions and antecedent which are appropriate to particular research context. In order

to avoid too wide research field, the author only concentrates on positive valence of eWOM, eWOM quality, eWOM quantity and source credibility.

Moreover, in this thesis, eWOM dimensions and antecedent are considered as the independent variables – which means that eWOM has impact on the other variables. In this research scenario, they are consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention. It should be noted that the research field is narrowed down to purchase intention. Consumers' purchase decision is excluded from this thesis as product preference and purchase intention are not always identical with the actual purchase intention. According to Kotler & Armstrong (2010, 154), there are two factors come between those, the attitudes of the others and unexpected situational factors. Attitude of the others (friends, family, acquaintances, ect.) might not be strong enough to completely change the consumers' decision but definitely reduce the chance of buying the intended one. Unexpected events might occur and then change the purchase intention, for example. price drop from the competitor, in – store experience and product availability, product discontinuity, etc. Due to that complexity, the author only focus on purchase intention.

Concerning the empirical delimitations, the focus of this Master thesis is placed on the effect of beauty bloggers' reviews and recommendations about the skincare products of The Body Shop to consumers' purchase intention. The study is geographically concentrates on Vietnamese consumers who have interest and need for cosmetic products. As the research is associated with the blog context, respondents are also frequent user of social networking sites and Internet, as well as familiar with the product information searching. The reason why the author chose that segments and geographical concentration are: Vietnamese cosmetic market has a huge potential with different foreign brands, consumers' increasing consumption and awareness and increasing living standard.

1.7 Research methodology

The thesis is structured into two main parts: the theoretical framework and empirical findings. The theoretical framework aims to provide concrete foundation on the study issue and improve the credibility of the research. It is based on variety of reliable academic sources,

such as books, articles, journals, web – based information and other online publications. The four selected eWOM dimensions and antecedent have been extensively researched on several existing academic literatures. The author chose a number of highly ranked scientific articles, such as, Canadian Journal of Administrative Science, Journal of Management Information System, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Journal of Advertising and Journal of Business Research. Those articles are researched through reliable databases, such as Science Direct, Emerald, EBSCO, etc.

Quantitative research method is utilized in the empirical part of this thesis. As mentioned earlier, an electronic survey is conducted. Questionnaires are quite popular in descriptive or explanatory research (Saunders, et al., 2009, 362). The author chose to conduct Internet – based survey as it is fast, easy to navigate and able to reach a huge number of respondents. The data collected from the survey is used to analyze the proposed hypotheses.

1.8 Research structure

In order to give an thorough overview on the research, the first Chapter of this thesis presents the literature review regarding the past researches on WOM and eWOM, as well as the research gap. The aim of research and research questions are also included. Moreover, the author also goes in depth to explain the definition of key concepts used in the research, theoretical framework and research methodology.

As mentioned earlier, the research is structured into two main parts: the theoretical framework and empirical part. The theoretical framework is covered within the Chapter 2 with the discussion about eWOM communication. First of all, the author will define the term eWOM and how it is different from the traditional WOM. As the context of eWOM in this thesis is blog, the second section is devoted to present about the eWOM communication on blog. It will be followed by the theoretical findings about eWOM dimensions and antecedent, consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention. Last but not least, the summary of proposed hypotheses based on research findings is presented.

The empirical part of this thesis is covered in the Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. In the Chapter 3, the research design and method are discussed. Specifically, the author gives a brief introduction about Vietnamese cosmetic market and case company The Body Shop. Furthermore, the questionnaire design, translation and pre – test are also mentioned. The fourth Chapter aims to illustrate to the research results and analysis.

The last Chapter of this thesis – Chapter 5 plays the role as conclusion with the discussion about theoretical and managerial contributions. The reliability and validity of the research are also evaluated, along with the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

2 ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATION

The Chapter 2 of this thesis focuses on the discussion about eWOM communication. Initially, the author focuses on defining eWOM and how it differs from the conventional WOM. Later on, the eWOM communication on blog is explained with the concentration on the historical background of blog, role of influential bloggers and beauty blog – which is the main context of this research. Within the following sections, three eWOM dimensions and an antecedent are discussed, along with their effects to consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention. Last but not least, the author summarizes the research hypotheses of this thesis.

2.1 Definition of eWOM

The mass development of Internet has enabled the emergence of eWOM communication. Being identical to its predecessor – tradition WOM, eWOM has been proved to have higher credibility, empathy and relevance to customers than marketer – generated information (Barbara & Schindler, 2001, 32). Both WOM and eWOM are acted as the external source of information if a consumer does not acquire enough amount of information to make decision. A recent study has proved that user – generated content sources have three times more power than conventional marketing channels (Kotler & Amrstrong, 2010, 153).

One of the most popular and widely – cited definition of eWOM is originally generated by Hennig-Thurau, et al.,. In their research paper, eWOM is defined as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or a company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet (Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2004, 39). Nowadays, there are a variety of different platforms on the Internet which facilitate the creation, exchange and sharing opinions of the consumers. These platforms refer to social media channels, such as social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), online discussion forums, online communities, online review sites or blogs. In the definition of eWOM, it could be easily noticed that the main dissimilarity between those two lies at the channels to transmit information. The interpersonal WOM

communication is transformed through spoken language and vanishes immediately. On the other hand, eWOM is more powerful because of its permanence, persistency and accessibility. The information exchanged in eWOM is stored in cyberspace and can be reached whenever needed. The conversation between information senders and receivers is assembled on the Web as text, video, records, etc. and available for searching via search engines. Unlike the WOM; the spread of eWOM communication is not limited within specific geographical location. It could happen on a global scale via the Internet because eWOM participants are able to pass the opinions . (Cosenza, et al., 2014, 71)

Moreover, while the sharing information of WOM occurs within small groups of individuals in synchronous mode, eWOM involves multi – dimensional exchanges of information in asynchronous mode (Cheung & Thadani 2010). These characteristics also lead to the differences in evaluating the credibility of the message. Since the traditional WOM communication is between a sender and a receiver who have known each other, the credibility is determined. On the other hand, in the eWOM context, the credibility is measured based on the associated cues through online reputation system (Cheung & Lee, 2012, 218).

Although there are few differences between those two, their effects on consumers' brand attitude and decision making process is inevitable. By sharing knowledge, experiences and viewpoint about a product or service; consumers engagements in eWOM communication help them other consumers make purchase decision. At the same time, consumers consult online reviews, blogs and other variations of online customer feedbacks as a source of information reference. Statistics have proved that 61% of consumers seek out online reviews and 89% use the Internet to search for information before making purchase decision. (Fleishman-Hillard and Harris Interactive 2012; Cheung & Lee, 2012, 218)

2.2 eWOM communication on blog

As the main concentration of this thesis is to discuss about eWOM communication on blog, within this section, the author presents the historical background of blog, role of influential bloggers in terms of eWOM communication and beauty blogs.

2.2.1 Historical background of blog

The history of blog dated back to the 1990s and now has become popular across the globe. The word “blog”, which was originally called “weblog”, was firstly introduced in 1997 by John Barger. (Pack 2004) During its early stage, the concept of “blog” was solely a place where small population of Internet users posting online journals and expressing their opinions. Nowadays, blogs exemplify the modern internet – age and become a great source of user – generated content, which is constantly and intensively changing the way people access information, form social networks and interact with acquaintances. A blog is temporarily defined as a website that “contains periodic, reverse chronologically ordered entries on a common webpage” (Kobayashi 2011). Blogs are mostly maintained by an individual, however, this trend is now shifting to organizations and communities also. A blog post is the entry that contains commentary, description of events or other materials such as graphics, photos or videos reflecting the personality of the author. A blogger (or group of bloggers) is the one who owns the blog or is responsible for the content of the blog. The interactivity between bloggers and readers is expressed through the allowance to leave comments, messages via widgets on the blogs and share over other social media channels.

Nowadays, there are different free and easy to use blogging platforms that transform the web consumers into web content providers, such as WordPress, Tumblr, Blogspot, etc (Williams, 2015). Blog – users interact and engage in various consumption experiences by creating, sharing and managing information on the own blogs. Nevertheless, there are differences in motivations behind blogging. Or in the other words, blogs are established with different purposes. Technorati’s State of the Blogosphere 2011 Report defined four different types of bloggers – as shown in the Figure 2.

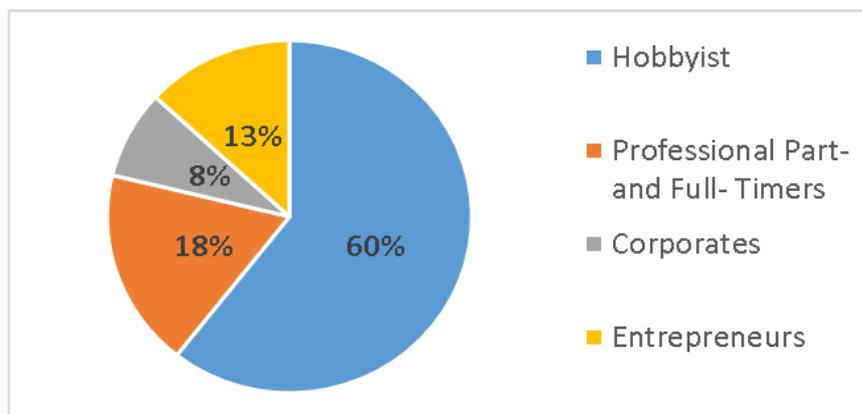


Figure 2. Blogger Segments (adapted from Technorati 2011)

The largest amount of bloggers are those who do blogging as a hobby and do not make money from it. They are not affiliated with any brand and their blog entries totally base on individual experience and consumption. The remaining segments could be considered as a “profession” and all use blogs as a marketing tools. The benefits and incentives bloggers get from their blogs, however, are not their primary source of income. Corporate bloggers primarily discuss about technology and business of their companies or organizations. The last segment is the blogs of entrepreneurs, in which they blog for a company or organization they own.

2.2.2 *Role of influential bloggers*

As mentioned earlier, “blogger” is defined as an Internet – user who creates and owns the content on his or her blog. From the perspective of digital marketing, blogging has been also considered as a new type of electronic word – of – mouth. There have been many researches focus on how bloggers’ recommendations influence the consumers purchasing behavior through reference group. To mitigate the uncertainty in making buying decision, consumers have the intention to search for opinions or recommendations from the others to convince the purchases, especially towards expensive or new products/services. (Brown & Reingen, 1987, 352; Bearden & Etfi, 1982, 190) Moreover, in contrast to marketer – controlled marketing, consumers frequently have positive attitude towards bloggers’ recom-

mendations since they are non – commercial and positive recommendations from fulfilled consumers could significantly affect and shape other consumers’ opinions and purchases (Lim, et al., 2006, 235). Blog recommendations are proved to be two times more reliable, persuasive and powerful to consumer final purchase decision than through other social networks (Charlesworth, 2015, 128).

Nowadays, blogs are not only an online personal journal but also used as a platform in which bloggers are enabled to upload and express their reviews about a particular product or service that they have experienced. These are considered as consumer reviews – a new type of eWOM communication which functions as a great source of external information search for consumers. Even though consumer reviews are less publicity than social media platforms, they have a strong power in affecting the consumers’ decision by enabling general public to make their own comments, thoughts and critics about products based on practical experience (Charlesworth, 2015, 135). Consumers’ reviews provide the fellow consumers with diversified aspects of information about quality, functions, strength and weaknesses to minimize risk of purchase.

The importance of consumer reviews has been emphasized in variety of preceding researches. In 2007, Etailing Group found out that 81 per cent of consumers use customer reviews to confirm their final section among other alternatives. Furthermore, over 60 per cent of respondents in the survey conducted by Opinion Research Corporation reported that their most preferred methods of information searching before purchase are through online reviews, blogs and feedback. According to Nielsen, 70 per cent of consumers trust opinions posted online. (Yayli, 2009)

The great development of blogs along with the emergence of bloggers and increasing demands for information search have enhanced the role of influential bloggers – who are also considered as “opinion leaders”. Key opinion leaders are defined as the experts within a specific product category and are likely to have influence on other people in their social system. Positioning the definition of “opinion leaders” in the context of eWOM and blog, it can refer to a powerful group of bloggers who are able to influence consumers’ purchase intention and attitude formation via word – of – mouth. Influential bloggers are explorative, innovative and knowledgeable in their own specialized fields, such as technology,

beauty, fashion, lifestyle, etc. (Stokburger-Sauer & Hoyer, 2009, 101; Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006, 28; Lyons & Henderson, 2005, 320) Furthermore, opinion leaders have been found to significantly affect the release and distribution of new products or service decision – making through different communication channels (Li et al., 2013, 43).

Influential bloggers are important because they can circulate information, influence decisions and boarden attention to their followers through their popularity over the social network. Their upper – level status and social prominence enable them to influence followers, enhance the community connection and encourage information exchange. Nowadays, the effect of influential bloggers is not only limited within the context of blog. Most blogging platforms allow users to directly share blog posts to other social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Therefore, their influences are not only limited within blogs but also spread out over other channels and reach a larger amount of followers.

2.2.3 *Beauty blogs*

Since the main concentration of this thesis placed on the purchase intention of blog readers in cosmetic products, it is essential to briefly present about beauty blogs and their importance as a source of information searching.

Over the time, perfection and beauty are things that human nature always want to pursue. Cosmetic has played such a big role in human's life since the ancient civilization as it gives support to change the way people's look, reveal the inner beauty and express themselves. Thanks to the rising consumer incomes and constantly changing lifestyle, cosmetic industry significantly contributes to the worldwide economy with the forcasted revenue up to \$265 billion by 2017 (Lucintel, 2012). The global cosmetics industry is broken down into 6 main categories: skincare, haircare, make-up, perfumes, hygiene products and oral cosmetics. Among those, skincare comprises the largest portion of 33.8 percent. (Statista, 2012). Within cosmetic industry, there are such enormous numbers of bloggers – who are treated as “beauty gurus” by readers, are experts in the field of make – up, product reviews and beauty tips. They are followed by thousands of readers and their information posted on

blogs are considered to be a trustworthy source of reference for other consumers. According to Charlesworth (2015, 131), approximately 6 per cent of bloggers focus on beauty areas.

Beauty blogs are the places where bloggers express their personal thoughts, opinions and feedbacks on using certain cosmetics or beauty – related products/services to their blog readers. In each post, bloggers could provide both functional benefits and emotional benefits related to that products. Functional benefits are based on product's attributes that provide functional utility to consumers, such as, even skin tone, minimize pores, remove blackhead, anti – aging, reduce wrinkles, etc. On the other hand, emotional benefits are those personal feelings that add richness and depth to the experience of owning a product, such as bring more confidence, attractiveness, etc. (MaRS, 2012) Both benefits are essential attributes to help consumers evaluate the real effectiveness of the products.

Cosmetics or beauty products are considered as products of feeling decision and high involvement. Therefore, external information rather than marketer – generated content, feedback and testimonials from trusted sources are beneficial for the consumers to gain more product knowledge and avoid unworthy purchases. A survey conducted among 1074 women has found out that 61% of respondents believe (that) familiar bloggers are the most helpful source providing beauty product advice and recommendation and 63% has made the purchases based on bloggers' recommendations. (Collins, 2010) Towards skincare products, even there are testers for consumers to try at store, it is impossible to obtain visible result at once. Therefore, detailed reviews from those former buyers would be helpful in evaluating the performance of a product. Especially when the value of a product is relatively high or it belongs to luxury/high – end brands, consumers even need more facts and motivations to convince their purchases. However, nowadays, since the cosmetics brands realize the huge influence and potential of beauty bloggers, there are many cosmetics brands collaborate with beauty bloggers by sending free gifts, new products for reviewing or photo uploading through sponsored posts, sponsoring bloggers' events, brand ambassadorship etc. "Beauty blogger" has become a source of income and many people do it as full – time or part – time jobs. (Get The Gloss, 2015)

Within this section, the author has gone in depth to explain the eWOM communication on blog through brief blog's history, role of influential bloggers and introduction about beauty

blogs. The next part covers the theoretical background of eWOM dimensions and antecedent, as well as the proposed research hypotheses.

2.3 eWOM dimensions and antecedent

As mentioned earlier, within the scope of this thesis, the author only focuses on three eWOM dimensions (valence, quality and quantity) and one eWOM antecedent (source credibility). Furthermore, the research hypotheses concerning the effect of those eWOM variables to consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention are also proposed.

2.3.1 eWOM valence

The valence is considered as one of the main dimensions of eWOM that has been studied intensively by many researchers. The valence of eWOM communication refers to how positive, negative or neutral the eWOM. The evaluative direction of eWOM could be negative, in which the weaknesses of the object are reviewed. Positive eWOM, on the other hand, mentions the good sides and contains positive attitude towards the objects. Last but not least, a neutral eWOM provides the reader with descriptive information and has no evaluative direction.

Many researches have shown and proved that valence of eWOM has a significant influence on consumer behaviours, which include purchase intention, product or service sales and brand attitude. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006, 345) found out that positive reviews and rating valence increased the book sales at Amazon.com and vice versa towards negative reviews. The study conducted by Dellarocas, et al., (2007, 24) indicated that eWOM valence and consumer attitude are closely related. The more positive opinions consumers are perceived, the higher the possibility of product adoption they have. However, the topic of whether positive eWOM or negative eWOM has more powerful impact receives a variety of controversial findings. Prior researchers have argued that negative information tends to have stronger influence and higher credibility than the positive ones (Herr et al., 1991, 459; Bone, 1995, 213; Lee & Koo, 2012, 1980).

In this thesis, only positive eWOM is studied. Positive eWOM occurs when positive endorsement and experiences about a product, service or brand are circulated (adapted from Buttle, 1998, 241). Many researchers have studied intensively and come to the conclusion that; although consumers have the tendency to focus and have more trust to negative eWOM, they demonstrate more interests for products which are more positively reviewed (Yang & Mai, 2010, 1055; Xue & Zhou, 2011, 55). Towards the study of the effect of positive eWOM to consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention, Lee et al. (2009, 2) and Doh & Hwang (2009, 193) indicated that immensely positive reviews increase brand attitude and have advantageous effect on brand attitude and purchase intention. A positive impact prevails when consumers consider positive eWOM more diagnostic than the negative. Moreover, the study of Google concluded that positive eWOM is more common than negative with 80% of online opinions are between four and five stars (López & Sicilia, 2014, 33). Therefore, consumers are easily exposed and influenced by positive reviews when search for more external information to convince their purchases. As a consequence, consumers will gain more favourable prospect towards brand when they process positive reviews that fit them (Park & Kim, 2008, 408).

Based on those intensively researches, the author proposes a hypothesis as stated below:

H1: The more positive the eWOM valence is, the more positive consumers' attitude towards the brand is.

2.3.2 eWOM quality

The second eWOM dimensions is discussed is eWOM quality, or information/message quality. It is defined as "the quality of the content of a consumer review from the perspective of information characteristics" (Park, et al., 2007, 107). Other researchers refer it as "the persuasive strength of arguments embedded in an informational message" (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006, 811).

There is no standard format for consumers to post and share their opinions over the Internet, however, there are generally two types of reviews. The first type refers to the

reviews that are subjective and base on individual feeling without reasoned arguments. In those reviews, consumers basically write descriptive general response and do not provide any statistics or detailed explanation to support the conclusion. In contrast, the second type of reviews is informative, specific, clear and contain statistically reasonings. Message receivers prefer to read and rank the effectiveness higher towards strongly understandable and objective reviews. This leads also to a more consumers' satisfaction, favorable attitude and purchase intention. (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984, 71; Park et al., 2007, 128)

Quality, or more specifically, eWOM quality is such a phenomenon that requires more distinct dimensions to closely approach. The conceptualization of information quality in eWOM varies greatly among different studies. In the study conducted by Delone and McLean (2003, 14), information quality is measured in terms of strength, comprehensiveness, accuracy, timeless and relevance. Meanwhile; credibility, objectivity, clarity and logic are validated in the research carried out by Park et al. (2007, 128) In this study, the author chooses to conceptualize the eWOM quality in terms of comprehensiveness, accuracy, timeliness and relevance. These measurements have been featured in the reserch by Teng et al. (2014, 748) and Cheung et al. (2008, 232). Comprehensiveness relates to the coherence, informativenss and thoroughness. The accuracy of message represents the receivers' perception whether it is correct or not. Timeliness concerns the degree of up-to-date state of the message. Relevance defines the helpfulness of the information to the consumers' need, satisfy their expectation and applicable. All those four dimensions are commonly used in defining the quality of information in eWOM.

The eWOM quality plays an important role as the determinant for the message receivers to evaluate the convincing power of the information. The eWOM quality has been found to intently affect the attitude of information receivers. Cheung et al.,(2009, 10) found out that in the circumstance when consumers perceive online reviews as valid, they will consequently develop a positive attitude towards the brand, product or service mentioned in these reviews. It also means that information is perceived as credible. On the other hand, negative attitude will be developed if consumers perceive the information as invalid. In the context of eWOM where communicators are anonymous on the Internet, consumers do not believe and get convinced by online reviews without doubt if they are not informative and

provide enough information. Good content quality additionally enhance the consumers' willingness to trust eWOM and persuasiveness. Therefore, persuasive reviews have a greater positive effect on consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention. (Ratchford et al., 2001, 8). Consumers' choice, attitude and purchase decision could be built on certain criteria that meet their needs and satisfy their curiosity. Information quality has been indicated to be the most predominant and influential determinant aspect of persuasive eWOM message in terms of generating positive attitudes. (Filieri, 2014, 1266)

Based on the previously mentioned literature and research, the author proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: The higher the quality of eWOM is, the more positive consumers' attitude towards the brand is.

2.3.3 eWOM quantity

The quantity of eWOM refers to the amount or the number of information published by consumers about a product a service. The quantity of eWOM is calculated differently due to the nature of different platforms. For instance, the quantity of eWOM is the amount of online consumer reviews about a particular product posted on brand's websites or online communities. However, it could also refer to how many bloggers write or talk about it over social media channels. Although there are differences in forms of eWOM, its volume represents the popularity of a product or brand.

Previous researches have focused their attention to review the quantity with the popularity effect. The number of eWOM is an important factor influencing consumers' evaluation of information and the recommended products because it represents the product's popularity. When consumers lack of knowledge on a product and its outcome, they frequently try to gather more information to reduce the uncertainty and eliminate risks. (Jeong & Koo, 2015, 7) More discussion and conversation regarding a product generate greater awareness among consumers and sales (Liu, 2006, 81). Consequently, a large amount of reviews will be beneficial for consumers to get familiar with the product and gain more comprehensive

understanding about its effectiveness or efficiency and quality. The importance of quantity is also mentioned in the study by (Chen et al., 2004, 726) with the findings that large number of eWOM quantity leads to greater consumer awareness, confidence and reduce the barrier to purchase.

The popularity effect of large volume of eWOM has been proved to influence the consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention. Park et al. (2007, 140) indicated that the consumers' purchase intention become greater along with the number of reviews. Considering the research Jalilvand and Samiei (2012, 604) regarding the tourism destination choice, it has been found that high volume of tourist reviews on a destination leads to the higher image and possibility of choosing the destination. According to Solomon et al. (2006, 140), the consumers' brand attitude is formed based on three components: affect (emotions and feelings toward an object), behavior (intention to do something with regard to an object) and cognition (the thoughts and beliefs towards an object). Since the greater the quantity of eWOM, the more likely consumers hear about it and perceive its benefits. The great volume of opinions also represents the number of prior consumers who have experience with the product consumption and usage. (López & Sicilia, 2014, 33) It is a well - grounded source of reference for the consumers to evaluate the real outcomes of the product, increase the brand awareness and strengthen their confidence in making purchase. Therefore, it could be concluded that a large quantity of eWOM has a positive effect towards the consumers' feelings and cognition, which encompass the brand attitude.

Based on those mentioned findings, the next hypothesis is proposed as follow:

H3: The larger the amount of eWOM, the more positive consumers' attitude towards the brand is.

2.3.4 Source credibility

Source credibility is the single antecedent of eWOM that is discussed in this thesis. It is believed to be a radical predictor of consumers' adoption of message in conventional

WOM. However, in the context of eWOM where information is written by anonymous sources, it is difficult to evaluate the credibility of the source. (Chatterjee, 2001, 130) Consumers can assess the credibility by analyzing the reviewer's web profiles, ratings from other consumers or based on each Website's ranking system.

Source credibility refers to the attitude towards the message source and the trust of message receiver towards the sender (Wu & Wang, 2011, 452). It is an essential determinant affecting the persuasion and communication effectiveness because if the source is perceived as credible, consumers will believe it. In another research, source credibility is defined as "the perceived ability and motivation of the message source to produce accurate and truthful information" (Li & Zhan, 2012, 243). The credibility of the source determines how it is perceived to be competent and trustworthy.

Source credibility is such a complex concept that has been conceptualized into several dimensions in a variety of literature. Birnbaum and Stegner (1979, 48) decomposed the concept into three constructs: expertise, bias and the judge's point of view. In later research conducted by McCroskey and Teven (1999, 90), source credibility is referenced as competence, trustworthiness and goodwill. However, these researches are put into the scenario of traditional WOM communication. Regarding the research context of thesis, the author chooses to focus on three dimensions: trustworthiness, expertness and source experience. This decomposition has been utilized in many contemporary researches in the context of eWOM. Although there are minor differences among researches, trustworthiness and expertness are the two most widely used dimensions. Trustworthiness is the intensity of confidence and assurance receivers have towards the source. Expertness determines how comprehensive knowledge that the source owner has gained regarding the product. Last but not least, source experience is the extent, as perceived by the eWOM receiver, to which the communicator is accustomed to the product based on his or her genuine usage. (Teng et al., 2014, 749)

The relationship between message source credibility and brand attitude has been discussed in many researches and studies. Ling and Liu (2008, 487) suggested that celebrity endorsement on a brand is considered as a high source credibility, and consequently, consumers form their own positive attitude towards the brand. In eWOM context, this

effect is similar since beauty bloggers (eWOM senders) play the role of celebrity. Furthermore, in the study conducted by Kiecker and Cowles (2001, 84), it has been concluded that if the eWOM source is perceived with high attraction or expertness, it has higher persuasiveness and credibility from the consumers' viewpoint. Message source credibility is considered to be an important factor influencing "the formation of brand attitude, brand trust and brand affection regardless of product types" (Wu & Wang, 2011, 465). Dated back to the early 50s and 80s, credible reference of information induce more positive perspective and behavioural responses than less or not credible sources (Cosenza et al., 2014, 75).

Based on those indicated findings, the author proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: The higher the credibility of the source is, the more likely positive attitude consumers have towards the product.

2.4 Consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention

In this section, the author goes in depth to explain separately the concepts of brand attitude, purchase intention and their relations to each other. Attitude has been a popular research topic in marketing because it is one determinant to predict consumer behavior. In deciding which brand to use, consumers typically select the one that is evaluated most favorably. Attitude is defined as a persistent evaluation, whether positive or negative towards people, things or goods through learning (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2007). Kotler and Keller stated that (2008, 483) stated that attitude includes "favorable or unfavorable evaluation, emotional feeling and behavioral tendency of consumers".

Brand attitude, generally, is the overall evaluation and continuous preference of consumers towards a particular brand (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980). The formation of brand attitude is based on the consumers' judgement about its prominent benefits or image. In order to interpret specifically the brand attitude, the traditional tricomponent model has been discussed in many studies. The model specifies that attitude consists of three components: cognitive, affective and conative components:

- Cognitive component: the knowledge or beliefs of consumers' that are formed after having experience or acquiring information.
- Affective component: a person's feelings or emotional reactions towards a brand.
- Conative component: a person's action or behavioral tendencies toward the attitude object.

(Engel et al., 1995, 364)

Purchase intention is the possibility of consumers in an attempt to purchase a product and their behavioral tendency after receiving advertising message (Dodds et al., 1991, 310). In another research conducted by Spears and Singh (2014, 56), purchase intention is defined as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand". Within the scope of this research, the author only discusses about the purchase intention whereas purchase decision is excluded. Product preference and purchase intention are not always identical with the actual purchase decision because other factors often come between, such as attitude of the others or unexpected situation (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010, 154).

Brand attitude and purchase intention are two distinct concepts. Whereas attitudes are summary evaluation, intentions represent the motivation to carry out a behavior. However, these two concepts are closely related to each other. An overwhelming number of studies have determined the positive relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention. The study conducted by Ghorban (2012, 33) confirmed that customer satisfaction positively influences the process of building positive brand attitude, which leads to purchase intention in electronic commodities. Consumers have a higher purchase intention towards a familiar brand or the brand they have much knowledge about it (Kamins & Marks, 1991). These cognitive and affective components also partly construct the consumers' brand attitude.

Wu and Lo (2009, 188) also verified that brand awareness has a remarkable influence on brand image, consequently affects brand attitude indirectly and causes impacts on consumer purchase intention towards extended products (products are under the parent brand name). In the standardized model about the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention developed by Spears and Singh (2014, 57), the statistically results have shown the significant influence between those variables. Positive feelings of consumers

about brand affect their brand attitude and make impact on intention to make purchase. More specifically towards luxury brands, the findings of Bian and Forsythe (2011, 1449) showed that brand attitude plays an important role to consumers' intention to purchase luxury products.

Based on those literature findings, the author proposes the last hypothesis as follows:

H5: The more positive the consumers' attitude towards the brand is, the higher purchase intention they have.

2.5 Summary of research hypotheses

Taking the role as the closing section for the theoretical framework of this research, the author summarizes the proposed hypotheses in line with the conceptual model. The main concentration of this research places on the effect of eWOM dimensions and antecedent to consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention.

Table 3. Summary of research hypotheses

H1: The more positive the eWOM valence is, the more positive consumers' attitude towards the brand is.
H2: The higher the quality of eWOM is, the more positive consumers' attitude towards the brand is.
H3: The larger the amount of eWOM, the more positive consumers' attitude towards the brand is.
H4: The higher the credibility of the source is, the more likely positive attitude consumers have towards the product.
H5: The more positive the consumers' attitude towards the brand is, the higher purchase intention they have.

The empirical part of this research starts from the following Chapter. The author discusses about the research design and methods, as well as research analysis and results.

3 RESEARCH DESIGNS AND METHODS

The empirical part of this research is covered in the Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. Prior to further analysis about data result, Chapter3 presents the main research designs and methods used in the study. This Chapter aims to provide on the process how data collection was conducted. Firstly, the author gives brief introductions about Vietnamese cosmetics market – the main target of this research and the case company The Body Shop Vietnam. Then, the process of questionnaire design, translation, pre – test, sampling and data collection are discussed sequently.

3.1 Introduction of the case company

3.1.1 Vietnamese cosmetic market introduction

According to Global Intelligence Alliance, Vietnam is ranked among top 10 potentially emerging markets for foreign investors (Global Intelligence Alliance, 2012). According to statistic, currently there are 430 cosmetic brands operating in the country with 90% are well – known foreign brands. The Vietnamses cosmetic market is highly dominated by large global cosmetic companies with multi – dimensional brands, such as L’oreal, Proter and Gamber, Unilever, Shiseido, etc. Only few Vietnamese brand names are visible in the market, such as Saigon cosmetics, My Hao, Thorakao, etc.

With the population of more than 90 million, Vietnam is such a potential and promising market for any economic sector, including cosmetics. The cosmetics market size is estimated at the value of EUR 130 million with annual growth rate of 30%. The largest players in the market are originally from the US, EU, Japan, Thailand and South Korea. (Yeomans, 2014) Vietnamese consumers spent EUR 80 million on beauty and skincare products in 2006 but only EUR 3 – 4 per capita. This level of spending is relatively lower than many neighbouring countries, such as Korea (EUR 40), Thailand (EUR 18), China (EUR 10), etc. (Beauty Cosmetics, 2014). However, with increasing income level and awareness

towards beauty, consumers' tastes and preferences for more sophisticated and luxurious products from high – end foreign brands are also increasing.

Cosmetics in Vietnam are distributed in almost every traditional and modern retail channels, such as drug stores, convenient stores, supermarkets, luxury departments, etc – which depend on the types of brands whether they are high – end, mid – end or low – end. However, in Vietnam, a large amount of cosmetics are also distributed through unauthorized or unofficial shops. They import cosmetics mainly through postal service from a foreign country and then sell them through online shops. Illegal and unofficial imports are estimated to comprise 60% of cosmetics sales in Vietnam (Beauty Cosmetics, 2014).

3.1.2 Case company

The chosen case company of this research is the cosmetic brand The Body Shop. It is a global brand founded in 1976 and was the first international cosmetics company to introduce fair trade cosmetics. In 2006, The Body Shop became a member of giant cosmetics group L'oreal after the acquisition. Currently, The Body Shop has more than 3000 stores in more than 60 countries. (The Body Shop, 2016)

In Vietnam, the brand is operated by the franchise The Body Shop (Vietnam) Company Limited, under the license by The Body Shop International plc. There are in total 20 stores across the country, mainly located in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city (the two biggest cities). Although the location is limited, the company offers online shopping opportunity for customers on their official Website. The products are delivered nationwide.

3.2 Questionnaire design

An online questionnaire consists of five main sections was created using Qualtrics software. The first section asks the respondents to provide background information about age, job, level of income, channel buying cosmetics and monthly money spending on skincare

products. In the end of this section, there is one conditional question in which the respondents are asked whether they read the product reviews from beauty bloggers before making purchase cosmetic products or not. If the answer is “Yes”, the respondents are diverted to the next section. If the answer is “No”, the survey is automatically closed because those respondents are not targeted.

In such a case that the answer “Yes” for the conditional question is selected, the respondents are moved to the second section. This section consists of four questions required by the case company The Body Shop. They ask the respondents their reading frequency towards beauty bloggers’ review and recommendation, which Vietnamese beauty blogs they often follow, their general trust and the channel they feel most interacted when following a beauty blogger. Since this section is additional, its analysis will be excluded from this research and reported in a separate report to the case Company.

Then, in the third section, the author also asks basic questions about behavior of reading blogs’ reviews before making purchase and the reading frequency.

The fourth section was devoted to explore eWOM variables: valence of information (praise eWOM), quality of information, quantity of information and source credibility. The fifth section consists of statement about consumer’s brand attitude. The last section is about consumers’ purchase intention.

The scale measurements of six variables were adapted from the scales formerly developed and certified by scholars in a variety of reliable academic journals. For example, Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences, Journal of Management Information System, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science. In the Table 4, the author summarizes the scales applied in the study together with authors of origins of journals. The chosen measurement scales were adapted to be appropriate for the research purpose and presented in the Appendix 1 of the thesis. 5 – point Likert-type scale with the ranging from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree.

Table 4. Measurement scales sources

Scale	Authors	Journal
General attitude to reading bloggers' reviews	Park & Lee (2008)	Electronic Commerce Research & Applications
Valence of information	Goyette, Ricard, Bergeron & Martincotte (2010)	Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences
Information quality	Wang & Strong (1996), Rieh (2002), Wixom & Todd (2005), Zhang & Watts (2008)	Journal of Management Information System, Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, Information System Research, Journal of the Association for Information Systems
Information quantity	Park & Lee (2008), Do – Hyung & Kim (2008)	Electronic Commerce Research & Applications
Source credibility	Wu & Shaffer (1987); Cheung, Luo, Sia & Chen (2009)	Journal of Applied Psychology, International Journal of Electronic Commerce
Consumers' attitude	Simpson, Horton & Brown (1996)	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science
Purchase intention	Putrevu & Lord (1994)	Journal of Advertising

3.3 Questionnaire translation

Since the main targeted respondents are Vietnamese and the source questionnaire is in English, translating question and associated instructions into Vietnamese is important. Back – translation is the method in which consists of source questionnaire – questionnaire that is to be translated and target questionnaire – the translated questionnaire. (Saunders, et al., 2009, 385) In this research, source questionnaire is in English and translated into Vietnamese by someone who is fluent in both languages and have translation experience. Later on, another person who is also fluent at both language is in charge of translating the questionnaire in Vietnamese back to English. The author is responsible in comparing the origi-

nal English questionnaire and the translated one to make sure the meanings of both versions are identical. The questionnaires in English and Vietnamese are attached at the appendix of the thesis.

3.4 Questionnaire pretest

Pretesting is defined as a method of examining that questions work as intended and are understood by targeted respondents (Hiltona, 2015). Therefore, in order to avoid misunderstanding and error, a pretest was conducted one week before the actual data collection. 20 randomly targeted respondents were chosen among the author's network. Participants are required to answer to the questionnaire via the link sent through social network Facebook. They were asked to respond to the survey questionnaire and point out any difficulty in understanding the questions, as well as propose for improvements. Since the survey was conducted in both Vietnamese and English, 20 pretesting participants were divided into two groups responding in both languages to ensure the accuracy of all versions.

The pretest process was taken during two days since the respondents were quite active and speedy to give instant feedbacks. Pretesting respondents claimed that the survey is easy to understand but a little bit lengthy. The author assumed the reason could be that they are not familiar with this type of survey. In the Vietnamese version, it is reported that there are few words with identical meaning in the section evaluating the quality of bloggers' reviews: The author carefully revised them and made necessary changes.

In the monthly average income question, the author was suggested to change the scale to the upper level by a current employee at an international cosmetic company in Vietnam. After revising and consulting other reliable sources, the author made changes to keep the information more updated.

In general, there are not many critical problems with the survey. The survey was official launched on 21st May 2016.

3.5 Sampling and data collection

The targeted research population is Vietnamese women aged from 16 to 35, having interest and need for cosmetic products. As the research is associated with the blog context, respondents are also frequent users of social networking sites and Internet, as well as familiar with the product information searching. The electronic survey was sent out and shared via social networking sites (Facebook and Instagram) through personal extended networks of the author. The author asked for support from the case Company – The Body Shop Vietnam in sharing the survey over its Facebook and Instagram. However, to assure the accuracy and independence of the results, the case Company refused to support. The survey was shared by a Vietnamese beauty blogger and a English – tutoring blogger.

The self-administered questionnaire using Qualtric software was developed in both English and Vietnamese version. Online survey format was used because it allows the author to collect data speedy, cheap and get easy access to data analysis. To encourage the respondents participate in the survey and improve the overall response rate, eleven (11) incentive awards will be distributed randomly to those who want to join the lottery by leaving their email addresses. Those awards are sponsored by The Body Shop Vietnam.

The data was collected from 21st May 2016 until 04th June 2012. The duration was two weeks. The survey was shared in the author's personal social networking sites (Facebook and Instagram), friends within the connection, a Vietnamese beauty blogger and a English tutoring blogger. A follow-up reminder to participate in the survey was posted in the author's Facebook weekly.

After two weeks of data collection, there were in total 436 responses. As mentioned earlier, there is a conditional question at the first section of the survey to classify valid responses. There were 362 responses with the answer “Yes” – comprising for 83 per cent of total number. 74 participants with the answer “No” (17%), which means that they are not eligible to answer the rest of the survey. Therefore, the valid responses are 362.

4 RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this Chapter, the author aims to analyze the data collection and report the results. Initially, the respondents' background information is illustrated to provide an overview about the research samples. It is followed by the creation of summated scale consisting the description of factor analysis and reliability analysis. Then, the author reports the hypotheses testing. The Chapter concludes with the summary of research results.

4.1 Respondents' background information

Among 362 respondents, there were 25 males (6,9%) and 337 women (93,1%) participating in the survey. The majority of age groups are 18 – 24 years old and 25 – 34 years old. This result is absolutely in accordance with the author's targeted research group. The summary of age group distribution is presented in the Figure 3.

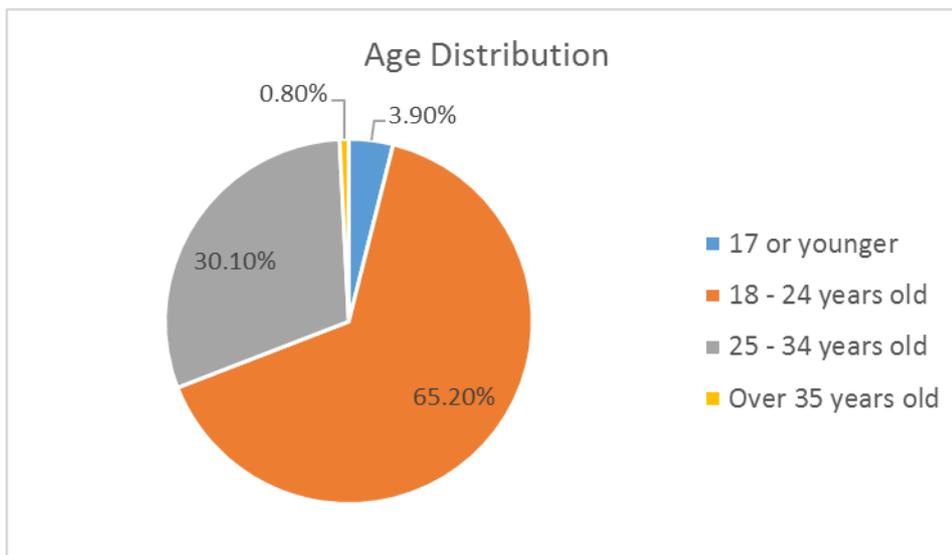


Figure 3. Age distribution of respondents

Considering the respondents' current professions, the categories "Full – time paid worker" and "Student" dominate the result with the percentage of 37% and 50% respectively, which can be seen in the Figure 4.

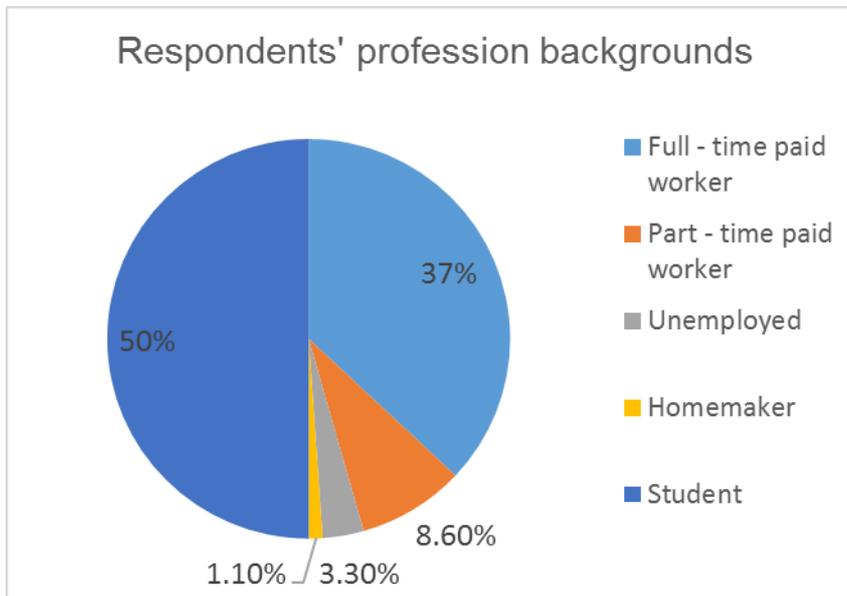


Figure 4. Profession backgrounds of respondents

Regarding the monthly average income, 139 respondents (represent for 38,4%) earn less than 2.999.999 VND. The other scales are distributed evenly with no significant difference.

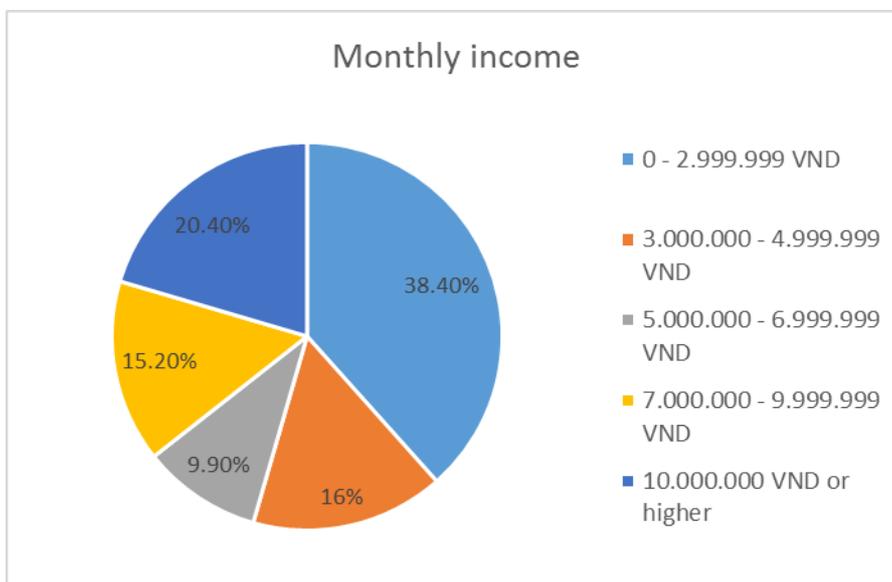


Figure 5. Monthly income of respondents

An important finding is related to the monthly spending on skincare products of respondents. According to statistics, Vietnamese women spend approximately 140.000 VND on cosmetics on monthly basis (Asia Plus Inc., 2015). In this research, it has been found that in average, consumers spend from 100.000 VND to 299.000 VND and other higher ranges also have considerate amount of respondents. The summary of this statistic is shown in the Figure 6.

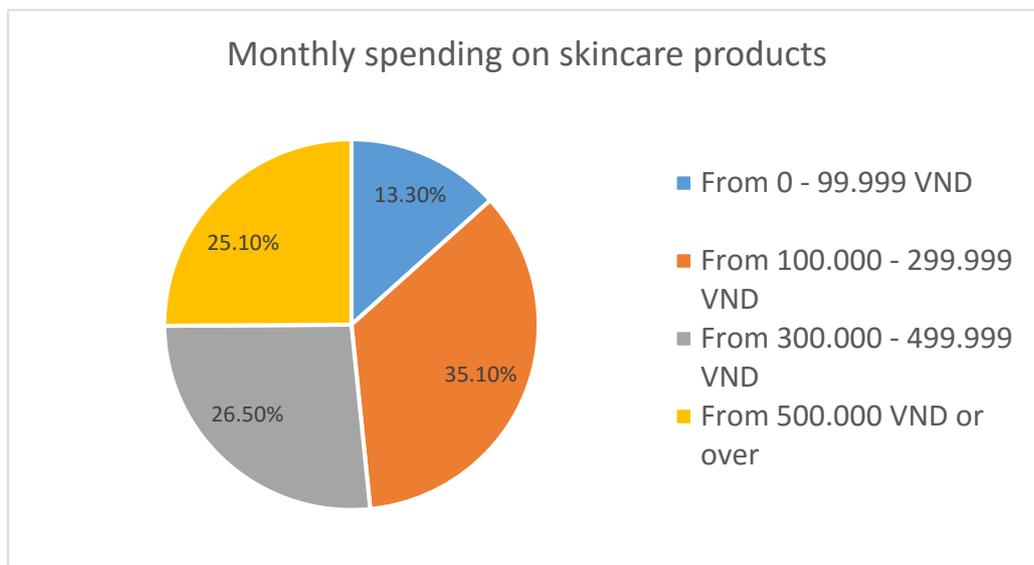


Figure 6. Monthly spending on skincare products

Regarding the consumers' preferred buying channels, statistics prove that they have the highest preference to make in – store purchase. In – store purchases allow consumers to test the products before buying, access to other complimentary services (consultancy, skin condition checking, membership rewards) and receive testers for other products. The second most popular channel is to buy from unofficial or unauthorized shops. This is typically common in Vietnam because most cosmetic brands' stores are only located in the most popular big cities: Hanoi, Danang and Ho Chi Minh City. Therefore, consumers in other regions have limited access to buy cosmetics. Moreover, unauthorized or unofficial shops offer lower price than official stores because products are imported through the delivery of friends or acquaintances. The summary of consumers' preferred buying channels is presented in the Figure 7.

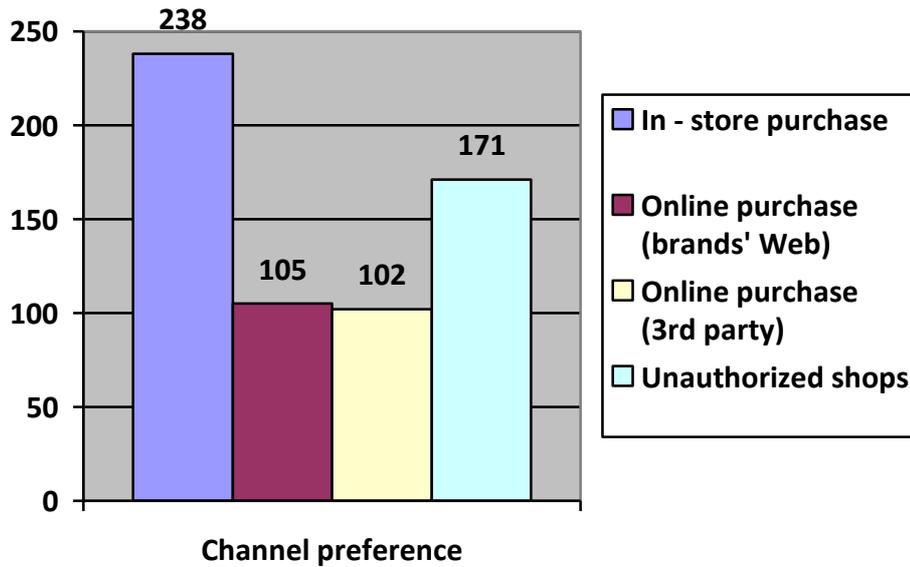


Figure 7. Respondent's preference towards buying channels

4.2 Creating summated scale

Summated scale is the method in which multiple variables that determine the same concept are combined into an individual variable with the attempt to decrease measurement and increase the reliability (Hair et al., 2010, 116). In order to create a summated scale, the items should be unidimensional, which means that they are strongly associated with each other and represent a single concept. In this research, the summated scales were created after the conduction of factor and reliability analyses. The scales are based on the statements featured in the questionnaire.

In this sub-chapter, the factor analysis applying the Maximum Likelihood extraction and VARIMAX rotation method is discussed initially. Later on, the reliability of measurement scales are evaluated.

4.2.1 *Factor analysis*

Factor analysis aims to “find a way to condense the information contained in a number of original variables into a smaller set of factors with a minimum loss of information” (Hair et al., 2010, 15). Factor analysis reduces the number of variables and groups those with similar characteristics together. Therefore, it is also used for data reduction. In this research, a cut – off value of 0,4 for factor loading is applied as a removal criterion for a variable from the measurement scale. The objective of factor analysis is to determine the number of factors and ensure the loadings of each variable on the factor. All items in each summated scale should be loading on a single factor.

In this research, altogether there are four independent variables and two dependent variables. In the beginning, a factor analysis combining multiple variables was performed, The result showed that scale measurements of each variable did not load on the correct factor. In such case, some scale reductions were made for those measuring the correlative concept but did not load in the same factor or did not load at all by applying Maximum Likelihood extraction and VARIMAX rotation method. As a result, the measurement variable “eWOM quantity” was reduced by one statement. Another factor analysis was performed with the refined scales. It was discovered that the scale statements were loading on the same correct factor when being analysed in a group of three. The first group consisted of three eWOM dimensions: valence, quality and quantity. The second group comprised the remaining variables: source credibility, brand attitude and purchase intention. The reliability analyses were conducted in the same categorization.

The final factor solutions for eWOM Valence, eWOM quality and eWOM quantity are explained in the Table 5.

Table 5. Final factor solutions for eWOM dimensions

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Valence1		0.712	
Valence2		0.639	
Valence3		0.620	
Valence4		0.713	
Valence5		0.676	
Valence6		0.783	
Quality1	0.521		
Quality2	0.512		
Quality3	0.619		
Quality4	0.793		
Quality5	0.654		
Quality6	0.679		
Quality7	0.732		
Quality8	0.564		
Quality9	0.745		
Quantity1			0.73
Quantity2			0.7
Quantity3			0.411
Eigenvalue	7.527	1.838	1.236
% of variance	41.818	10.211	6.867
Cumulative % of variance explained	41.818	52.029	58.896

The final factor solutions for variables – source credibility, consumers’ brand attitude and purchase intention are presented in the Table 6.

Table 6. Final factor solutions for eWOM antecedent, consumers brand attitude and purchase intention

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Credi1		0.771	
Credi2		0.658	
Credi3		0.771	
Credi4		0.847	
Credi5		0.521	
Brand1	0.665		
Brand2	0.692		
Brand3	0.873		
Brand4	0.643		
Brand5	0.579		
Intent1			0.785
Intent2			0.735
Intent3			0.749
Eigenvalue	6.317	1.952	0.804
% of variance	48.589	15.018	6.187
Cumulative % of variance explained	48.589	63.607	69.794

4.2.2 Reliability analysis

Within this sub – section, the author discusses about the validity and reliability of the research. The reliability analysis is an evaluation of consistency between multiple measurement scales of a variable. One of the most commonly measurements is Cronbach’s alpha. It was developed in 1951 by Lee Cronbach with the purpose to measure the internal consistency of a scale. Cronbach’s alpha ranges as a number between 0 to 1. (Tavakol &

Dennick, 2011, 53) Generally, the agreed upon lower limit for Cronbach's alpha is 0.7. However, in exploratory research, the level of 0.6 is acceptable (Churchill, 1996, 118).

In the Table 7, the Cronbach's α value, number of items, number of case and mean score of measurement scales are summarized.

Table 7. Reliability statistics

Scale	Cronbach's α	Number of items	Number of cases	Mean score
Valence	0.855	6	357	3.627
Quality	0.893	9	354	3.612
Quantity	0.754	3	353	3.681
Credibility	0.850	5	353	3.269
Brand attitude	0.891	5	352	3.723
Purchase Intention	0.837	3	352	3.761

The measurement scales for each variable in this research are based on and adapted from a variety of existing eWOM literature with high level of Cronbach's alpha. The reliability of all measurement scales exceed the minimum value of 0.6. Except for the measurement of quantity, all other variables have the value of Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.8.

4.3 Testing research hypotheses

The main objective of this sub – chapter is to report the research hypothesis testing using regression analysis and discuss about the results. In addition, in order to study the connections among variables, correlations matrixes were analyzed.

4.3.1 Correlation matrixes

The main purpose of correlation matrix is to test the connections and dependence between variables in the study. The result contains the correlation coefficients between each variable and the others. The value is determined by either a positive or negative numerical value varying from -1 to 1. The positive correlation indicates that if one variable increases, the other variables have a tendency to increase also. The vice versa applies to the negative correlation. (Statstutor, 2014)

The significant relationship between variables is determined by the significance level set at 0.05. If the correlation coefficient is above the set level, the relationship between variables are statistically significant. In the table 8 the correlations between eWOM dimensions are studied.

Table 8. Correlations between eWOM dimensions

	1	2	3
Quality	1		
Valence	0.583	1	
Quantity	0.523	0.389	1

As can be derived from the Table 8, all the variables have positive and significant correlation coefficients with each other. The highest value belongs to the relationship between va-

lence and quality. It means the more positive the reviews are, the higher quality consumers perceive.

Considering the three remaining variables, their relation is stated in the Table 9:

Table 9. Correlations between brand attitude, source credibility and purchase intention

	1	2	3
Brand Attitude	1		
Source credibility	0.562	1	
Purchase intention	0.755	0.373	1

Based on the above results, it can be concluded that brand attitude has a significantly positive correlations with the purchase intention. This finding also supports the assumption that the consumers' purchase intention is connected to their attitude towards brand.

4.3.2 Regression analyses

By conducting the multiple regression analysis, the proposed hypotheses will be tested to check whether they are rejected or accepted. This method is commonly used to study the relationship between a single dependent variable and multiple independent variables (which is also called as predictors). It aims to examine which and how the independent variables explain the variance in the dependent variable. Considering the context of this research, two separate regression analyses have been conducted. The first one, which analyzes the relationship between eWOM dimensions and antecedent and consumers' brand attitude, is the multiple regression analysis. The second analysis determines the relationship between the consumers' brand attitude and their purchase intention. It is considered as single regression analysis because only one dependent variable is expected to be related to one independent variable.

In order to interpret the regression analysis result comprehensively, many coefficients indicators are analyzed: B, Beta, t, Sig. and Tol. The B value determines to which extent the value of an independent variable contributes to the value a dependent variable – also known as initial regression coefficient. Beta stands for standardized regression coefficient. The t value determines how a variable differ significantly from the value of zero. Sig. measures the significance level of the variables. In this study, the value of significance should be under 0,05 to be significant. Tol. (tolerance) reflects the measure of collinearity and multicollinearity. (Hair et al., 1998, 146-148)

Table 10 presents the model summary of the first regression analysis. The dependent variable is “brand attitude” and independent variables are eWOM dimensions and antecedent.

Table 10. Model summary of the first regression analysis

Dependent variables	R	R2	Adj. R2	F	Sig.
Brand Attitude	0,757	0,574	0,569	116,782	0,000

The R Square describes the percentage of variance explained in regression model between the sum of squares of regression and total sum of squares. In this case, it means that the brand attitude is explained by 57,4% of all other independent variables. The first regression analysis determines the effect of eWOM dimensions and antecedent on consumers’ brand attitude. The result is presented in the Table 11.

Table 11. Regression coefficients for eWOM dimensions and antecedent

Independent variables	B	Beta	t	Sig.	Tol.	Hypoth.	Result
eWOM Valence	0,691	0,612	14,202	0,000	0,661	H1	Supported
eWOM Quality	- 0,049	-0,040	-0,679	0,498	0,352	H2	Rejected

eWOM Quantity	0,086	0,086	1,923	0,055	0,616	H3	Support- ed
Source Credibil- ity	0,218	0,210	3,901	0,000	0,424	H4	Support- ed

Hypotheses H1 – H3 discussed the effect of eWOM dimensions (valance, quality and quantity) and antecedent source credibility to consumers' brand attitude. It was hypothesized that all independent variables would have positive effect to the consumer' brand attitude. However, based on the above result, the H3 was rejected due to the level of significance are much larger than 0.05 and negative coefficient. In this research context, it means that the quality of online reviews written by beauty bloggers does not positively affect the consumers' brand attitude.

H1 and H4 have the highest level of significance and are strongly supported, which mean that valence and source credibility are strong predictors consumers' brand attitude. This result proves that positive reviews on blogs have large favorable influence towards consumers' perceived attitude. The same result applies to the eWOM antecedent "source credibility". If the consumers perceive bloggers' reviews as highly credible sources of information, they generate positive attitude towards the brand.

Considering the H3 with the relationship between the quantity of online reviews and consumers' brand attitude, it has the significance level at 0.055. Although the hypothesis is supported, it has the lowest value of B and Beta. These low value indicates that in comparison to other independent variables in the first regression analysis, quantity is least contributing predictor of consumers' brand attitude. Since the hypothesis is still supported, it could be concluded that the volume of online reviews has positive influence towards the consumers' attitude. The larger the amount of eWOM, the more positive consumers' attitude towards the brand is.

The second regression analysis tests the relationship between a independent variable – brand attitude and dependent variable – purchase intention. Its model summary is presented

in the Table 12. As can be seen from the table, the purchase intention is explained by 54,9% of the brand attitude variable and the whole model is significant.

Table 12. Model summary of the second regression analysis

Dependent variables	R	R2	Adj. R2	F	Sig.
Purchase Intention	0,734	0,539	0,538	409,685	0,000

The result of the regression analysis is discussed in the table 13. The result has shown a significant correlation between brand attitude and purchase intention and it can be concluded that brand attitude is a strong and reliable predictor of purchase intention. The independent variable explain 73,4% the variance of the dependent variable. H5 is strongly supported. It can be concluded that the higher the consumers' perceived attitude towards the brand, the higher their purchase intention. In the other words, it means that the brand could measure and affect the consumers' attitude, at the same time they could increase their consumers' purchase intention.

Table 13. Regression coefficients of brand attitude and purchase intention

Independent variable	B	Beta	T	Sig.	Tol.	Hypoth.	Result
Brand Attitude	0,836	0,734	20,241	0,000	1,000	H5	Supported

4.4 Summary of research results

The main purpose of this research is to study the effect of eWOM to consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention towards cosmetics products. Specifically, three eWOM dimensions (eWOM valence, eWOM quantity and eWOM quality) and one eWOM antecedent (source credibility) have been chosen to investigate.

The research involved an online questionnaire with 362 responses. The results from data collection were analyzed by SPSS and multiple regression analyses were chosen to test the

proposed hypotheses. In the figure 8, the author summarizes again the proposed research model.

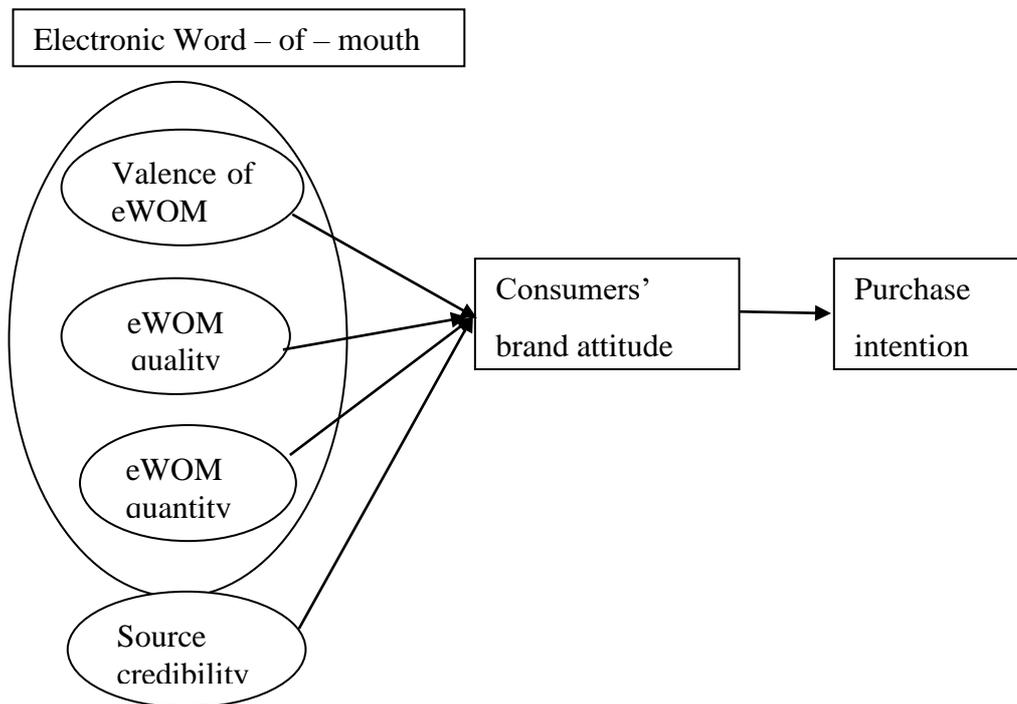


Figure 8. Proposed research model

The author suggested that there are positive relationships between eWOM variables and consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention. However, based on the results from regression analysis, only four hypotheses are accepted and one hypothesis is rejected. The summary of the results is presented in the table 14.

Table 14. Summary of research result

Hypothesis	Result
H1: The more positive the eWOM valence is, the more positive consumers' attitude towards the brand is.	Accepted
H2: The higher the quality of eWOM is, the more positive consumers' attitude towards the brand is.	Rejected
H3: The larger the amount of eWOM, the more positive consumers'	Accepted

attitude towards the brand is.	
H4: The higher the credibility of the source is, the more likely positive attitude consumers have towards the product.	Accepted
H5: The more positive the consumers' attitude towards the brand is, the higher purchase intention they have.	Accepted

Consumers' brand attitude plays the role as intermediate variable between eWOM and consumers purchase intention. The result has proved that eWOM valence, eWOM quantity and source credibility all have strong influence on consumers' brand attitude. Positive reviews and high volume of reviews positively enhance the consumers' perceived attitude towards the brand. Moreover, beauty bloggers' reviews and recommendations on their blogs are also considered as a credible source of information that influence the consumers' brand attitude.

The quality of online reviews and recommendations about cosmetics products from bloggers does not have any influence on consumers' brand attitude. Therefore, the H3 was rejected.

Considering the last hypothesis, the consumers' brand attitude is strongly correlated with the purchase intention. It means that if consumers have positive attitude towards the brand, it is likely that they have intention to purchase the brand's product.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research aims to examine the effect of electronic word-of-mouth to consumers purchase intention towards cosmetic products. The author chose to closely analyze three eWOM dimensions – which are eWOM valence, eWOM quantity and eWOM quality and one antecedent – which is source credibility. eWOM has been intensively studied in many academic researches but few of them place the target on consumers' purchase intention towards cosmetics. Furthermore, the nature of this research focuses on blogs as the contextual background.

In order to achieve this goal, the author explored the eWOM communication of blog readers with the case brand is the The Body Shop. The targeted respondents were Vietnamese women aged from 16 to 35, who have interest and need for cosmetic products. The empirical part of the research was performed by using quantitative research method. The data was collected via web – based questionnaire Qualtrics. Among 436 responses, 362 responses met the requirement of the research and valid for data analysis. The data was analyzed using the SPSS software.

The main purpose of this Chapter is to discuss about the main theoretical and managerial contribution of the study. Moreover, the reliability and validity of the research are measured. This will be followed by the limitations of the study and suggestion for future research is also presented.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

The traditional WOM has been intensively researched for many decades, however, eWOM is rather a contemporary topic that is still under – researched. In this study, the author focuses on eWOM dimensions and antecedent that have been examined in a variety of preceding researches, but not in cosmetics purchase and blog context. Therefore, the results of this study contribute significantly to the existing eWOM literature, specifically how eWOM affects the consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention towards cosmetics

products. In this Chapter, the author is going to discuss in depth the theoretical contribution of this research.

5.1.1 eWOM dimensions

The phenomenon of eWOM in this study is categorized into two sections: the eWOM dimensions and eWOM antecedents. The eWOM dimensions analyzed are: eWOM valence, eWOM quality and eWOM quantity.

Firstly, the findings of this research have reaffirmed the significant relationship between positive eWOM valence and consumers' brand attitude. Specifically, it means that more positive the eWOM valence is, the more positive consumers' attitude towards the brand is. These results are consistent with several previous studies concerning the effect of positive eWOM on consumers' attitude (Lee et al. 2009, 2; Doh & Hwang 2009, 193; Yang & Mai, 2010, 1055; Xue & Zhou, 2011, 55). Positive eWOM is paid more attention and has significantly positive impact on consumers' brand attitude.

Many researchers have agreed that the quality of eWOM has positive relationship with consumers' brand attitude (Cheung et al., 2009, 10; Ratchford et al., 2001, 8; Filieri, 2014, 1266). They argue that higher eWOM quality enhances the message persuasiveness and consequently affect the consumers' brand attitude. However, contrary to what has been hypothesized, the empirical finding of this research determined an opposite effect. The quality of eWOM has no impact on the consumers' brand attitude. This hypothesis was also rejected.

Considering the last dimension – eWOM quantity, it has been clearly proved that eWOM quantity positively influences the consumers' brand attitude. In detail, the larger the amount of eWOM, the more positive consumers' attitude towards the brand is. This finding is consistent with other previous researches conducted by Chen et al., 2004, 726; Park et al., 2007, 140; Jalilvand & Samiei 2012, 604; López & Sicilia, 2014, 33. Large amount of eWOM is perceived as popularity effect to enhance the consumers' confidence in making purchase, reduce uncertainty and eliminate risks.

5.1.2 *eWOM antecedent*

The single eWOM antecedent has been analyzed in this research is source credibility. Many other researchers have argued that if the message source is perceived as credible, consumers consequently form positive attitude towards brand. Source credibility is considered as an important factor affecting both the persuasion effectiveness and communication effectiveness. (Ling and Liu 2008, 487, Kiecker and Cowles 2001, 84; Wu & Wang, 2011, 465; Cosenza et al., 2014, 75) The result of the regression analysis showed the consistency between the proposed hypothesis and previous findings. The higher the credibility of the source is, the more likely positive attitude consumers have towards the product.

5.1.3 *Consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention*

There has been such an enormous number previous studies demonstrating the impact of consumers' brand attitude to purchase intention. Researchers stated that brand attitude and purchase intention are significantly related to each other. Positive brand attitude leads the consumers towards purchase intention (Ghorban 2012, 33; Wu & Lo 2009, 188; Spears & Singh 2014, 57; Bian and Forsythe 2011, 1449). The finding of this research is strongly consistent with those conclusions. Moreover, the result is specifically concentrated on cosmetics products.

In conclusion, this research has contributed and support significantly to the findings of previous studies. Except from the dimension eWOM quality, it does not have impact on consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention in cosmetic products. All other findings are consistent with the researches that have been intensively studied previously.

5.2 Managerial contributions

In addition to the theoretical contributions, several practical implementations could be derived from the findings of this research. This research is one of the pioneers studying about the impact of bloggers' reviews towards Vietnamese consumers purchase intention in cosmetic products.

Among 436 recorded responses, 362 respondents read beauty bloggers' reviews and recommendations before making cosmetic purchases. This means that consumers do have attention to bloggers' opinion and consider it as a source of external information. Furthermore, along with the increase in income, living standard and , consumers have the intention to spend more on skincare products. Previous studies argued that the average of cosmetics spending is EUR 3 – 4 on annual basis. However, in this study, the average spending has risen up to EUR 5 – 15 per month. Large percentage of consumers do spend much more, up to EUR 20 and more. This is a potential signal for every cosmetic company. Furthermore, consumers prefer to make in – store cosmetics purchase and at unauthorized shops. To attract and encourage more customers to brand's store, promotional campaign or additional services should be regularly implemented.

Regarding the importance of bloggers' reviews, the result has shown that they are somehow important when consumers intend to buy cosmetics. Positive reviews have a significantly importance towards the formation of positive brand attitude. The case brand could take advantage by sending product gifts to more beauty bloggers for reviewing products and share their reviews on social media channels. However, the most important thing is to continuously improve and enhance the products' quality and effectiveness. The more positive reviews circulated among bloggers, the more positive customers perceive about the brand. Hence, it is likely that there is an increase in consumers' purchase intention.

A remarkable finding of this research is that the quality of the reviews do not have effect on the consumers' brand attitude. It means that the comprehensiveness, accuracy, timeliness and relevance of the bloggers' reviews are not strongly important to consumers. The reason might be they only pay attention to the overall general evaluation instead of the de-

tails. However, the quantity of reviews influences the formation of consumers' brand attitude. The larger the number of reviews, the more popular the product is from the consumers' perspective.

Last but not least, the finding of this research has proved that consumers' brand attitude strongly affect their purchase intention. The brand should enhance and generate more positive attitude, interest and attention from the customers to influence their purchase intentions.

5.3 Reliability and validity of the research

The credibility of the research findings is determined in terms of reliability and validity. The research reliability refers to "the extent to which your data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings" (Saunders, et al., 2009, 156). In order to ensure the high level of reliability, the majority of measurement scales in the research was collected from previously developed and validated studies of top marketing journals. The Cronbach's alpha value of all scales are relatively high, ranging from 0,750 to 0,893. Furthermore, the questionnaire was also pretested to ensure that respondents have no difficulty in understanding each statement and there were no duplication. Since the survey was conducted both in English and Vietnamese, experienced translators did the back translation to assure there were no mistakes.

Research validity concerns to which extent "a scale or set of measures represents accurately the interests of particular concepts" (Hair, et al., 1998, 118). It is applied to how the findings truly represent both the phenomenon of research design and method. The validity of this research is retained by assessing a number of theories on eWOM antecedents and dimensions and choosing appropriate measurement scales from well – studied marketing journals. Furthermore, the questionnaire design, translation and pretesting also accurately represent the research phenomenon.

The validity of the research is also in the aspect of how its result can be generalized beyond the current study (University of California, 2016). This research was undertaken in the context of the brand The Body Shop (Vietnam) and random Vietnamese consumers who

are interested in cosmetics products. Therefore, this segment can be generalized to cosmetics consumers in general with the limited geographical location is Vietnam. The findings of this research are only appropriate in the context of cosmetics consumption.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although the results of this research have both theoretical and managerial contributions, there are many limitations should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the questionnaire was shared among social networks, therefore, there is no statistics on respond rate. This might affect the persuading and statistical power of the research. Furthermore, this survey was taken on a large sample scale with the aim to represent the Vietnamese consumers, however, the amount of responses (362 responses) is modest in comparison to the whole population of Vietnam. The future research is suggested to conduct the survey in a larger scale to have more in – depth and accurate results.

The research scope of this thesis is limited to only blog platform, whereas eWOM nowadays is available on many other social channels such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc. Moreover, traditional communication WOM, which is also very influential and common, is excluded from this research. Future research might proceed further to compare the influence of eWOM and traditional WOM to consumers' purchase intention towards cosmetic consumption.

As mentioned earlier, the quantitative research methodology was chosen to conduct the study. It is also another drawback that limits the accuracy and application of the result. Further research could include also the qualitative methodology, such as in – depth person – to – person interview or practical experiments to bring more evident outcomes regarding the influences of eWOM to consumers' purchase intention. In addition, this research phenomenon only took into consideration three eWOM dimensions and one eWOM antecedents. The research area can be extended to negative eWOM valence, tie strength, reviewer characteristics, reader characteristics, etc.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Measurement scale items

Behavior of reading blogs' reviews before making cosmetics purchase

1. When I intend to buy a cosmetic product, I always read bloggers' reviews and recommendations
2. When I intend to buy a cosmetic product, the bloggers' reviews/recommendations are helpful for my decision making
3. When I intend to buy a cosmetic product, the bloggers' reviews/recommendations make me confident in the purchase
4. If I don't read the bloggers' reviews when I intend to buy a cosmetic product, I worry about my decision

eWOM valence

1. The skincare products of The Body Shop are positively mentioned and reviewed
2. I read more positive reviews about skincare products of The Body Shop
3. The reviews of The Body Shop skincare products tend to be great in detail
4. The skincare products of The Body Shop are praised by a large amount of customers
5. I was influenced more by positive reviews about skincare products of The Body Shop
6. The skincare products of The Body Shop are highly recommended

eWOM quality

1. Bloggers' reviews are informative
2. Bloggers' reviews satisfy my need
3. Bloggers' reviews are accurate
4. Bloggers' reviews are reliable
5. Bloggers' reviews are up – to – date
6. Bloggers' reviews are applicable
7. Bloggers' reviews are convincing

8. Bloggers' reviews are clear and understandable

9. Bloggers' reviews are helpful

eWOM quantity

1. The large number of bloggers' reviews infers that the product is popular

2. The large number of bloggers' reviews infers that the product has good sales

3. The large number of positive reviews infers that the product has good reputation

4. The large number of positive reviews infers that the product is good

Source credibility

1. Bloggers who wrote the reviews are knowledgeable in evaluating the quality of products

2. Bloggers who wrote the reviews are experts in evaluating the quality of products

3. Bloggers who wrote the reviews are reliable

4. Bloggers who wrote the reviews are honest

5. Bloggers who wrote the reviews have prior experience with the product

Consumers' brand attitude

1. I think the skincare products of the Body Shop have high quality

2. I think the skincare products of The Body Shop are appealing

3. I think the skincare products of the The Body Shop are value for money

4. I personally like the brand "The Body Shop"

5. I think the skincare products of The Body Shop are suitable for me

Consumers' purchase intention

1. It is very likely that I will buy the skincare products of The Body Shop

2. I will purchase from The Body Shop on the next time when I need a skincare product

3. I will definitely try the skincare products of The Body Shop

Appendix 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Correlations

		Valence	Quality	Quantity	Credi	BrandAtt	Intent
Valence	Pearson Correlation	1	,563**	,436**	,485**	,729**	,607**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	357	354	353	353	352	352
Quality	Pearson Correlation	,563**	1	,597**	,749**	,514**	,432**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	354	354	353	353	352	352
Quantity	Pearson Correlation	,436**	,597**	1	,531**	,441**	,333**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000		,000	,000	,000
	N	353	353	353	353	352	352
Credi	Pearson Correlation	,485**	,749**	,531**	1	,523**	,389**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000		,000	,000
	N	353	353	353	353	352	352
BrandAtt	Pearson Correlation	,729**	,514**	,441**	,523**	1	,734**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000		,000
	N	352	352	352	352	352	352
Intent	Pearson Correlation	,607**	,432**	,333**	,389**	,734**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	N	352	352	352	352	352	352

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).