EXPLORING CONSUMERS' EXPERIENCES IN ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH FOR HEALTH SUPPLEMENT PURCHASES

By

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Electronic word of mouth which is disseminated via Internet plays a vital role in substituting the power of advertisement. There are approximately 24.5 million of Internet and social media users in Malaysia. The enormous number of social media users makes it more apparent that social media has become a valuable platform to promote products and services. Extensive use of social media made people easily exposed to other users' daily activities, lifestyle as well as sharing of opinions and experience. Hence, the level of awareness on health and beauty among consumers in Malaysia becomes more prevalent. There is a variety of health and dietary supplements available in the market.

Among Asian countries, obesity and overweight rate are the highest in Malaysia with 64% of male and 65% of female population being either obese or overweight, ranked sixth in the Asia Pacific region as well as the top country within Southeast Asia for both obesity and diabetes (World Health Organization, 2019). Rapid urbanization in Malaysia resulting in rapid changes of dietary intakes including weight management supplement intakes. Information pertaining to weight management supplements have been extensively spread via social media. The supplement industry in Malaysia has been growing rapidly recently due to a paradigm shift in healthcare management and some factors were found to be influential to the purchase intention of these health supplements (Yeo et. al, 2022). The availability and sales of the weight management supplements in the market is increasing but the issue with obesity and overweight is still rising (Ghazali, et al, 2006). Hence the researcher wonders on the sources that influence consumers to trust the information disseminated via electronic word of mouth and purchased these health supplements. Social media has become a good platform of electronic word of mouth to advertise products and services since consumers trust information shared randomly by people more than advertisements (Bao and Chang, 2014). Thus, it is believed to be a great platform as behavioural change agent which affects consumers' reactions to products or services as well as creating opportunities to marketers (Kranzler, & Beakley, 2019).

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The purpose of this research was to explore the experience of weight management supplement consumers in trusting electronic word of mouth which made them decided to purchase. It also aimed to understand the process of how consumers made their decision before purchasing. This study was carried out through an in-depth exploration of some research questions. The questions were 1) What are the factors that influence consumers to trust the electronic word of mouth in the purchase of weight management supplements? 2) What sort of information on social media that influence consumers to trust the product?

In-depth interviews were essential in obtaining the experience of the consumers on this. This study involved a qualitative research methodology which applied descriptive phenomenology approach. Data was gathered from seven weight management supplement consumers who have volunteered to be interviewed. The data was obtained using in depth interview. The interview session lasted for around 30-90 minutes, was audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using a hands-on approach. Some other documents have also been used such as resources from the library, journals and logs. The trustworthiness of this research was done through members checking.

The findings reveal that electronic word of mouth plays as behaviour change agent. Emotion, personality, perception, culture, reference group, motivation and learning affects the level of trust among consumers. For future research, it is recommended that similar study could be expanded to another qualitative inquiry to gain comprehensive observation.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

MENEROKA PENGALAMAN PENGGUNA BERKENAAN SUMBER ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH DAN PEMBELIAN SUPPLEMEN KESIHATAN

Oleh

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Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) yang disebarkan di Internet memainkan peranan penting dalam menggantikan kuasa pengiklanan. Terdapat kira-kira 24.5 juta pengguna Internet dan media sosial di Malaysia. Bilangan pengguna media sosial yang begitu ramai menunjukkan bahawa media sosial menjadi platform yang bernilai untuk mempromosikan produk dan perkhidmatan. Penggunaan meluas media sosial membuatkan para pengguna lebih mudah terdedah kepada aktiviti harian dan gaya hidup pengguna lain serta perkongsian berbentuk pendapat dan pengalaman. Tahap kesedaran dalam aspek kesihatan dan kecantikan di kalangan pengguna di Malaysia semakin meluas. Terdapat pelbagai produk supplemen kesihatan dijual di pasaran.

Malaysia memiliki bilangan rakyat obesiti dan berlebihan berat badan yang tertinggi di negara Asia dengan 64% adalah lelaki manakala 65% adalah perempuan. Jika dibandingkan di negara Asia Pasifik, Malaysia terletak di tangga keenam tetapi teratas di kalangan negara Asia Tenggara (WHO, 2019). Kadar urbanisasi yang pantas di Malaysia mengakibatkan perubahan yang drastik dalam pengambilan makanan termasuklah kadar pengambilan supplemen kesihatan dalam penjagaan berat badan. Maklumat berkaitan dengan supplemen pengurusan berat badan telah tersebar secara meluas di media social. Industry supplemen di Malaysia sedang berkembang dengan pesat dan didapati beberapa factor yang mempengaruhi kepada niat pembelian supplemen ini (Yeo et. al, 2022). Kadar ketersediaan dan jualan produk supplemen kesihatan di Malaysia meningkat tetapi masalah berat badan dan obesiti masih tinggi (Ghazali et.al, 2006). Oleh yang demikian, penyelidik ingin melihat kepada sumber yang mempengaruhi pengguna dalam mempercayai maklumat yang dibarkan melalu electronic word of mouth (eWOM) dan kemudian memneli supplemen kesihatan ini. Media sosial adalah platform yang terbaik dalam mengiklankan produk dan perkhidmatan kerana pengguna lebih percaya dengan maklumat yang tersebar di media sosial berbanding pengiklanan (Bao dan Chang, 2014). Tambahan pula, media sosial

adalah platform terbaik sebagai ejen pengubah gelagat di mana ia mampu mempengaruhi tindakan pengguna dan mencipta peluang kepada pemasar (Kranzler dan Beakley, 2019).

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji pengalaman pengguna supplemen pengurusan berat badan dalam mempercayai sumber electronic eord of mouth (eWOM) yang akhirnya mempengaruhi dalam keputusan sebelum membuat pembelian. Ianya bertujuan untuk memahami proses bagaimana pengguna membuat keputusan pembelian. Kajian ini dijalankan dengan melakukan temuduga yang menjawab beberapa persoalan. Persoalannya adalah: 1) Apakah faktor yang mempengaruhi pengguna untuk mempercayai sumber maklumat elektronik yang tersebar dan mempengaruhi dalam keputusan pembelian supplemen? 2) Apakah maklumat di media sosial yang mempengaruhi pengguna untuk mempercayai produk berkenaan?

Temuduga mendalam telah dilakukan untuk mendapatkan maklumat berkenaan pengalaman pengguna berkaitan hal ini. Kajian ini melibatkan metodologi kualitatif yang mana khusus kepada teknik fenomenologi deskriptif. Data diperoleh daripada tujuh orang pengguna supplemen pengurusan berat badan yang sukarela untuk ditemuduga. Temuduga telah dijalankan antara 30 ke 90 minit, dirakam secara audio, ditranskripkan secara verbatim serta dianalisa secara manual. Dokumen atau sumber lain adalah sumber dari perpustakaan, jurnal dan buku catatan log. Kebolehpercayaan kajian telah dijalankan dengan pemeriksaan bersama ahli-ahli tertentu.

Keputusan daripada kajian ini mendapati sumber maklumat yang tersebar secara elektronik memainkan peranan penting sebagai ejen pengubah gelagat. Emosi, personaliti, persepsi, budaya, kumpulan rujukan, motivasi dan pengaruh pembelajaran dalam mempercayai tahap sesuatu maklumat. Untuk kajian di masa hadapan, ianya dicadangkan untuk kajian yang lebih kurang sama diperkembangkan lagi dengan menjalankan kajian kualitatif yang lain bagi mendapatkan pemerhatian dan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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Declaration by the Graduate Student

I hereby confirm that:
- this thesis is my original work;
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

eWOM   Electronic Word of Mouth

WOM   Word of Mouth

SM   Social Media

SNS   Social Networking Site

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

This chapter begins with an introduction to the background of the study including describing the phenomenon of word of mouth (WOM), electronic word of mouth (eWOM), trusting issue, the issue of obesity, the market of weight management supplement, problem statement, and motivation of the study, research aims, research questions, objectives and definition of important terms.

1.2   Background of the Study

> *"I'm unstoppable*
> *I'm a Porsche with no brakes*
> *I'm invincible*
> *I win every single game*
> *I'm so powerful*
> *I don't need batteries to play*
> *I'm so confident, I'm unstoppable today"*
>
> *"Sia, 2016"*

Wide use of Internet and technology make the word to be connected in a more convenient way. Information disseminated via electronic word of mouth (eWOM) seems unstoppable. The same thing goes to the obesity issue and the growth of weight management supplements market in Malaysia (Yeo et.al, 2022). Millions of Internet users are able to use eWOM to share their thoughts and influence others' decisions (Duan , Gy and Whinston, 2008). The revolution from curative practices to preventive management in healthcare is creating the supplements industry a crucial growth factor as the Internet widens the pool of resources, thus creating a generation of well-informed consumers (Yeo et.al,2022). The issue with obesity has been increasing since decades ago although numerous weight management supplements sales were reported to be unstoppably rising too. Obesity and overweight issue is increasing in Malaysia although weight management supplement market in the country is enormous and the information on the weight management supplements are everywhere on social media (Ghazali, et al, 2006).

In 2008, RM2 billion was spent on consumer health products which includes vitamins and dietary supplement and RM 1.13 billion were spent on merely weight management supplements. The amount increased to RM3.15 billion in 2012. These product purchases grew from RM589 million to RM725 million within five years representing a total value growth of over 23% (nutraingredients-asia.com). In 2017, the value sales of weight management supplements have increased by 1% where slimming teas had the strongest

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value growth of 7% in 2017. It is estimated that this weight management supplement sale to be increased in 2022 (Market Intelligence Report, 2018).

Despite the fact that the sale of weight management supplement has been growing consecutively, overweight and obesity issue in Malaysia is reported to be increasing. Malaysia is ranked most obese country in Southeast Asia, and sixth most obese in the Asia-Pacific (WHO, 2016). High percentage of obesity is resulted from a complex interaction between changes in the lifestyle which involves higher fat consumption and increasing physical inactivity and it may become severe if the population inherited metabolic predisposition to fatness (WHO, 2000).

Internet helps in getting the information, news or rumour spreads quickly in a blink of an eye. Information can be disseminated by some random acquaintances, friends, family members or social media influencers. Based on (Xiaofen and Yiling, 2009), the third most trusted advertising method is consumer's opinions posted via social media. Besides, Cherewich (2009) also discussed that 70% of consumers believed views which are posted online more than the conventional advertisements.

Consumers are able to engage in electronic word of mouth with the existence and extension of the Internet which has developed consumer's choices for collecting information by including other consumers' views posted on the Internet and provided them opportunities to offer their consumption related advice (Hennig-Thurau et. al, 2004). Due to the use of Internet, information spread is unstoppable since it is not controlled by news media and large businesses. Based on (Duan, Gu and Whinston, 2009), ones can share their thoughts and views with millions of Internet users and influence other's decisions through electronic word of mouth. Sometimes information spread are not necessarily true as how others are experiencing since views and opinions on certain products might differ based on individual's preferences (Bounie et. al, 2005).

The researcher wonders on the reasons which enticed consumers to trust the information via electronic word of mouth and purchased these weight management supplements although the effectiveness of these supplements seems doubtful. Some marketers shared misleading information of the weight management supplements they promoted, claiming that those products contain fat burning ingredients. Based on (Ruxton and Gardner, 2005) guidance on the benefits and protection of weight management supplements displayed were mostly unproven claims. No formal approval or clinical testing required for non-prescribed products and it is almost impossible to differentiate between the proven products and the ones which are false or misleading.

1.2.1   Overview of Word of Mouth (WOM)

Word of mouth (WOM) has gained its new dimension in the age of the Internet. The Internet has upgraded the form of communication by providing enormous space for consumers to share personal opinions and experiences. Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) allows people to disperse any positive or negative information on social

networking sites very easily (Verhagen et. al, 2013). Internet made the Information seems to spread much faster than people can even expect.

WOM has been discussed enormously since 1950's. One of the well-known researcher in word of mouth marketing defined WOM as a verbal form of interpersonal non-personal communication among acquaintances (Arndt, 1967). Furthermore, Word of Mouth (WOM) represents the interchange of information between people on products, services or companies (Gheorghe and Liao, 2012) . WOM leaves positive and negative impacts to business where positive WOM can be a substitute to advertisements while negative WOM may tarnish the reputation of the business. Unlike eWOM, Word of Mouth (WOM) functions limited to certain circle of friends and family since it does not involve the assistance of sophisticated techonology and Internet.

1.2.2 Evolution and Current Scenario of Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Globalization helps in the greater use of Internet and technology. These days, the sharing of information has been way easier since technology has been widely used. Uncontrollable information which is shared by certain individuals may leave to pleasant or horrendous impacts to individuals and organisations. Internet users tend to exaggerate things spreading information which are not necessarily true on social networking sites (Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi,2016). Since the access to information is way easier than years before, it is also easier for uses to be exposed to any information more than positive information in order to avoid undesirable regardless of whether it is true or false. A human brain outweighs negative information more than positive information in order to avoid undesirable situation in the future (Champux et. al, 2012). Consequently, human tends to believe bad news they receive from people around.

eWOM has also been discussed vastly since 2000. Both word of mouth and electronic word of mouth play important role in marketing. Lee, Noh & Kim (2013) stated that eWOM known as an online feedback mechanism that has been known as key factor affecting trust and online sales. It has been proven that eWOM has strong effects than WOM because the use of Internet made it faster and easier to spread information (Bambaeur-Sachse and Mangold,2011). It is a good source of information since it covers the advantages of the Internet, asynchronous mode of communication between potential strangers and achieving ability, to provide reach accessibility and persistence of messages that traditional WOM cannot achieve (Cheung, 2010). Furthermore, it is an Internet mediated written communication between current and potential customers (You, Vadakkepatt & Joshi, 2015).

Information on social media travels fast like wildfire. It is crucial for organizations or marketers to overlook on how eWOM works since information spreads rapidly. Information which is shared randomly or anonymously on social networking sites leaves huge impact not just to individuals but also organisations. Based on Lee and Youn (2009), there were some detrimental effects on sales due to the bad news or negative eWOM disseminated freely by random consumers on social networking sites. Besides, Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) also proven that negative eWOM can have detrimental effects on brand equity too (Bambaeur-Sachse &Mangold, 2011). In addition, the brand

switching behaviour of consumers has severely affected the earning capacity and competitive power of enterprises. Based on Liu and Jizhen (2005), profits have reduced by 25-50% because of the betrayal of consumers which was caused by the dissemination of negative information. The utilization of technology gadgets and devices has created an enormous viral marketing. eWOM is a word of mouth system that exists in virtual space in which messages are sent or received related to products or services and let consumers to share their experiences through communication on online boards (Lee, Noh & Kim, 2013).

In this era, the dissemination of information on social network such as Facebook, Twitter or even WhatsApp has created doubts towards consumption patters on certain goods. With the assistance of Internet based technology, interpersonal communication among consumers work much more effective in discussing on products or services (Lee, Noh and Kim, 2013). Information on products and services are freely disseminated using social network as most Internet users are exposed to social network, they tend to be exposed to any information disseminated by the circle of acquaintances.

1.2.3 Obesity and Weight Management Supplements
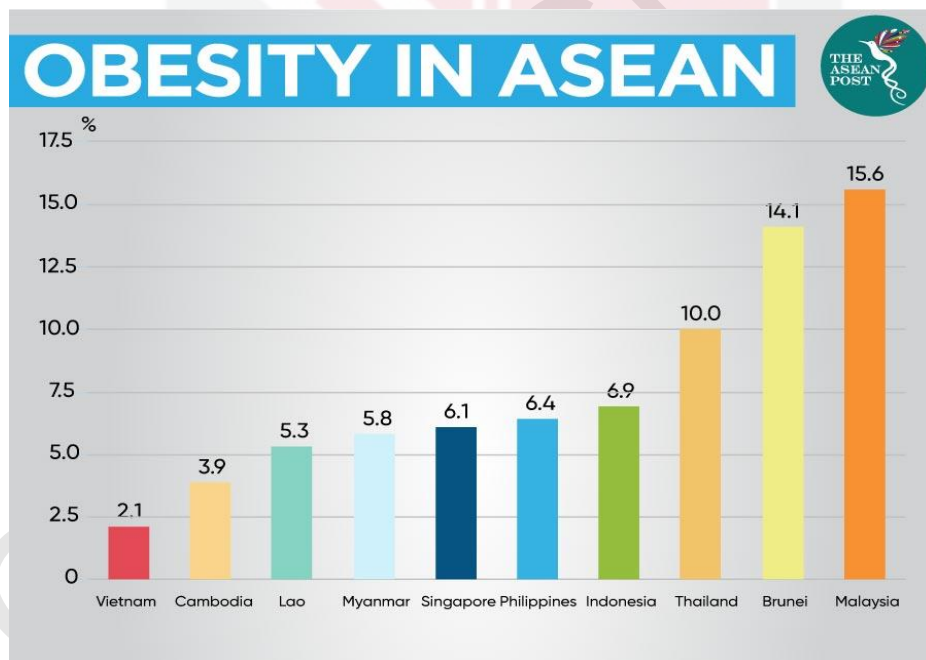

Figure 1 : Obesity on the Rise in ASEAN, World Population Review 2020

Among Asian countries, obesity and overweight rate is the highest in Malaysia with 64% of male and 65% of female population being either obese or overweight, ranked sixth in the Asia Pacific region as well as the top country within Southeast Asia for both obesity and diabetes (World Health Organization, 2019).

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Rapid urbanization affects to some changes of dietary intakes including the weight management supplement intakes. Information pertaining to weight management supplements have been extensively spread via social media. Apparently social media platform became an effective way to advertise products and services since consumers trust information shared randomly by people more than advertisements (Bao and Chang, 2014). Thus, it is believed to be a good platform as behavioural change agent which influences to how consumers react to products or services as well as creating opportunities to marketers (Kranzler, & Beakley, 2019).

Obesity and diabetes have been connected to serious Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease and hypertension. Thus, consumers in Malaysia are increasingly aware of such potential health issues related with eating habits and have become more proactive in searching for consumer health products to prevent such chronic diseases. The increase in consumption of health supplements can be tied to the greater awareness of health issues and the availability of more disposal income (World Health Organization, 2019).

Some of the reasons to weight gain are lack of physical activity and excessive food consumption (Schlosser, 2001; Schultze et al., 2005). Instead of going for behavioural changes to lose weight, some people who struggle with overweight and obesity issue seek for miracle-quick fix pills to shed pounds (Nestle, 2002). The awareness to go for weight management supplements were influenced by what has been shared by influential people on social media. People especially women tend to feel vulnerable about their own body image after seeing some sharing on social media and thus felt they need to look as slim and slender as the people who have shared those weight management supplements on social media.

1.3   Problem Statement

Contextual Gap

The evolution of technology and social media platforms make it easier for people to share information. In Malaysia, the percentage of Internet users in 2016 was 76.9% which 89.4% of them use smartphones as medium of surfing (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, 2017). Malaysians relied more on social media for news sharing with highest scores (29%) among other Asian countries (Newman et al., 2017) which 69% of Malaysian relied on social media for news information while 65% used smartphone to access the information (Newman et al., 2017).

Numerous research on electronic of mouth has been done. In regards with the impacts of eWOM, positive eWOM attracts new consumers and thus increases sales, whereas negative eWOM might hinder trust in a product that consumers want to purchase (Baek, Ahn, & Oh, 2014; Jung, 2013). Negative eWOM communication has damaging impact on purchase intention (Halim et al., 2014), causes detrimental effect of sales (Zhang,2015)

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A few elements were found to be the factors which influence to consumers' level of trust. Opinion leadership, information usefulness, tie strength, economic incentives, customer satisfaction, loyalty and brand attituted are some the factors which affect consumer' trust (Ismagilova et.al, 2018). Customers' trust relates to perception of an individual which influence the purchase intention of consumers (Kang and Johnson, 2013). Important factors which increase the level of trust towards eWOM is trust, honesty ones have and authenticity of the information (Konstantopoulou et.al, 2018).

Trust issues arise when negative emotions influence to non- recommendations and are expressed online influence to switching intentions among customers (Tuzofic, 2010). In addition, consumers who are less like likely to trust others have lower motivation to believe the information shared on social media due to the previous customers' experiences (Zhang, 2019).

Industrial Gap

This studies covers on exploring consumers experience in electronic word of mouth (eWOM) for health supplement purchases which relates very much with the weight management supplements. Looking at the statistics of overweight and obesity in Malaysia, the population in Malaysia was ranked the second highest in the number of overweight and obese people in the Southeast Asian region but the rate of increase was found to be the highest in the region (Hassan et.al, 2018). The supplement industry in Malaysia has been growing rapidly recently due to a paradigm shift in healthcare management and some factors were found to be influential to the purchase intention of health supplements (Yeo et. al, 2022).

The problem is that weight management supplements sales in the market is increasing but the issue with obesity and overweight is still rising (Ghazali, et al, 2006). The sale of health supplements has been growing consecutively, but obesity issue in Malaysia is reported to be increasing as Malaysia is ranked most obese country in Southeast Asia, and sixth most obese in the Asia-Pacific (WHO, 2016).

Vulnerable people especially women who have negative perception on their own body image have the tendency to be influenced by the sharing of information on these weight management supplements via eWOM including the ones shared by public figures and celebrity endorsers (Abd Malik et. al, 2019). These are insecure people who may find that there is something they could do to change themselves looking at their own friends, family or even social media influencers which they view on social media. One of the reasons that made these consumers are influenced by the sharing of information by these people on social media, including the social media infleuncers is because they feel insecure of themselves and thus feel the need to upgrade themselves into the figures they are viewing on social media.

The researcher is curious on the reasons which influence consumers to trust the information on weight management supplements shared via eWOM even though there is no empirical evidence proves that these supplements are really effective for weight loss. On the other hand, the researcher also wonders on the type of information on social

media that influence consumers to trust the information on weight management supplements shared via eWOM.

Consumers perceive that there are short cuts to lose weight than merely focusing on diet and workout. Public figures and social media influencers can be very persuasive and influential to their fans and followers. The love and admiration towards these public figures, social media influencers on even anyone whom they perceived to be successful in managing weight can be very convincing and trustworthy. Apparently all these relate with feelings and emotions. The feelings of excitement, curiosity, sadness and disappointment over themselves, or even anger are some of the elements may influence to consumers purchase decision. Emotional state of consumers may be important determinants of the consumers' purchase behaviour (Sherman, Mathur & Smith, 1997) and thus made consumers to trust what they have seen on social media.

Based on World Health Organization (WHO), obesity and overweight issue occurs not only in Malaysia but also in the whole wide world. The reasons to this are due to calorie surplus consumed but lack of physical activities. Some people have been putting effort on trying to lose weight naturally but some have also taken certain food supplements in order to help them to shed those pounds.
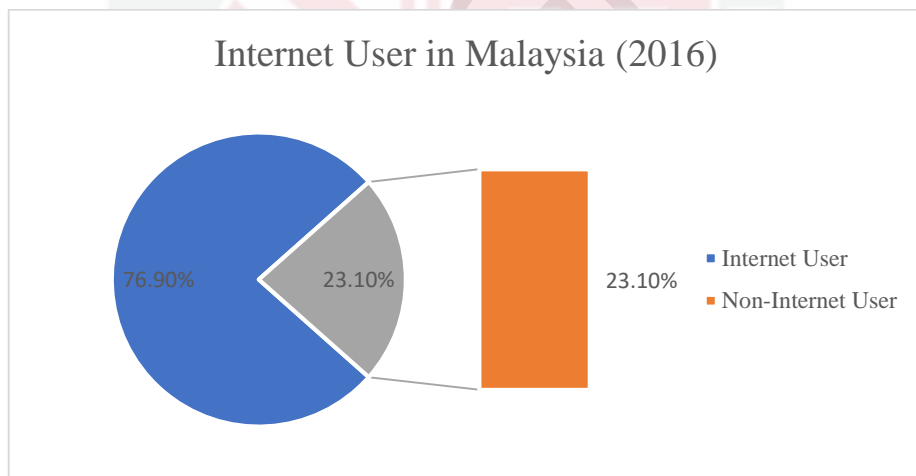
Figure 2 : Percentage of Internet Users in Malaysia
(Source: Malaysia Communication and Multimedia Commision Internet Users Survey 2017)

Based on Malaysia Communication and Multimedia Commision Internet User Survey Report (Commision, 2017), there were 76.9% of Internet Users in 2016, which was an increment from 24.1 million to 24.5 million users. As of September 2017, Facebook was found to be the most widely used social network in the world with approximately 2.06 billion active users (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commision Internet User Survey 2017) while WhatsApp obtains 1.3 billion active users monthly. One of the reasons for the highest number of Facebook user is the strong user engagement.

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Facebook allows its users to interact actively with one another in so many ways including sharing of information, commenting on posts, liking or even posting pictures and videos. In addition, the friendly user element makes Internet users are comfortable using the social networking site.
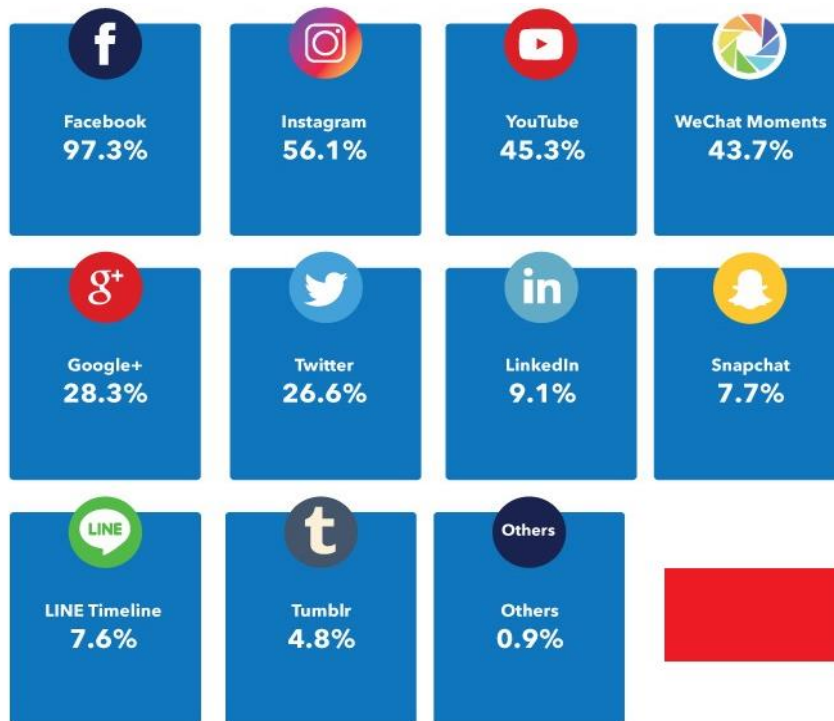
Figure 3 : The statistics on the use of social networking sites (SNS) in Malaysia
(Source: Malaysia Communication and Multimedia Commission, Internet Users Survey 2017)

In Malaysia, 80.0% of Internet users visited social media sites while Facebook has the highest number of account owners (97.3%) followed by We Chat moments, Instagram, YouTube, Google+, Twitter and Line Timeline (Malaysia Communication and Multimedia Commission, Internet Users Survey 2017). Based on the research by MCMC (2017), an Internet User spends average of around four hours per day on social media sites. By looking at the current statistics it reveals that the probability that information disseminated faster is high. The circumstances of spreading information seem hard to be controlled since all the information can be spread by as easy as just one click (Hennig and Thurau, 2004). 50% of companies do not know their existing and potential customers behaviour and usage pattern in social media (sprout social, 2016).

It is important to look at how eWOM influence consumers since 69% of Malaysians relied more on social media for news sharing with highest score compared to other Asian countries (Newman et. al, 2017). 51% of Malaysians use WhatsApp application to share

news which 80% of Facebook weekly and 54% use for news sharing (Newman et. al, 2017). The relevance of looking at social media platforms is because most information via eWOM is obtained through social media or social network. Vast information is obtained via eWOM which two of the most widely used are Facebook and Instagram.

Positive eWOM attracts new consumers and thus increase sales whereas negative eWOM might block trust in a product that consumers want to purchase (Baek, Ahn,Oh, 2014; Jung, 2013). However, eWOM communication has damaging impacts on purchase intention (Halim et. al, 2014), causes detrimental effect of sales (Zhang, 2015). Previous research has been done on consumer reactions (Pennigs et.al, 2002; Hofacker and Murphy, 2009; Paswan et.al, 2014) however the contexts which were covered were not related specifically to eWOM and explored to the phenomenological process of consumer reaction towards eWOM. Viral information spread on social networking sites hurt not just the brand but also the people or employees who are working with the company and this resulted by consumers' emotions and feelings towards particular events (Digest, 2014; Straitstimes, 2014). It is important for researcher to explore the experience of the consumers in trusting the information shared via ewom which influenced them to purchase those products.

Social media has been proven to play a vital role with improvements in nutrition behaviours, such as improved fruit and vegetable intake or decreased sugar-sweetened beverage consumption (Hsu et.al, 2018). In encouraging change in someone's health behaviour, individuals share their experiences on social media and friends may provide support, which could reinforce individuals' healthy identities (Merchant, 2014). The prevalent use of social media and mobile technologies encourages people in their effort to lose weight and prevent weight gain (Gina 2017, Anderson 2015, Duggan 2015; Perrin 2015; Smith & Zicjuhr 2011). The issue of obesity and overweight is still a rising issue in Malaysia although weight management supplement market in the country is huge and the information on the weight management supplements are all over on social media (Ghazali, et al, 2006).

Knowing how quick information via eWOM can be disseminated, it is deemed that information circulated is not necessarily true since it has not been validated by large businesses or news media. Numerous researches have been done on word of mouth and electronic of mouth but little has been done on how eWOM influences to the purchase of weight management supplements.

Theoretical gap

In regards with theories, a research on social cognitive theory and eWOM has found that personal outcome expectations and computer self efficacy positively affect the posting of negative behavior via eWOM which increases the effects of venting negative emotions (Yan, 2016), however the theory did not relate specifically to the experience consumers in trusting ewom which influenced them to purchase products.

Furthermore, Erkan and Evans (2016) have also shown that the influence of eWOM information on social media does not only depends on characteristics of eWOM such as

quality and credibility of information but also depends on the consumer behavior towards eWOM information however the issue was the underlying factors or reasons to the situation. This study is required in understanding further on the underlying meanings or process of consumer reactions towards eWOM. There has been research done on electronic word of mouth quantitatively and qualitatively, but lack of research has been done looking on the consumers' experience in electronic word of mouth on health supplement purchases.

Studies have shown that consumers are motivated to read and write eWOM for decision making and social benefits, and this certainly affects other consumers' purchase decision (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003). This research gives great contribution to the marketers in making them to better respond to target consumers in overcoming barriers to consumer choice. Researcher intends to discover the factors that influence consumers to trust eWOM which eventually made them convinced to go for the weight management supplements although there was very limited empirical evidence has shown on the effectiveness of these products. It aims to answer the research question 1: What are the factors that influence consumers to trust ewom in the purchase of weight management supplements? Research question 2: How consumers use their experience to build trust from the information on social media?

1.4   Operational Definitions

Trust

"Perception of an individual which influence the purchase intention of consumers" (Kang and Johnson, 2013)

Word of Mouth

"The exchange of information between traditional offline interpersonal information sources such as friends, family and acquaintances about products, services and companies " (Gherorge & Liao, 2012).

Electronic Word of Mouth

"The knowledge exchange consumers carry out online where this exchange has a direct relationship on customer loyalty, which in turn affects overall value of the company" (Wu & Wang, 2011).

Social Media

'Web 2.0 technologies or media which helps in interactive information, user created content and collaboration which is using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques" (Elefant, 2011).

Phenomenology

"Lived experience of a participant which focuses of the underlying meaning of individual's experience and involves the experience of perception, thought, memory, imagination, and emotion (Reiners, 2012).

Obesity

"Relates with people with excessive consumption of high-calorie foods and sedentary lifestyle, possess body mass index (BMI) over 30" (WHO, Severin et.at, 2018).

Overweight

"People who possess amount of excess body fat at which health risks to individuals increase, body mass index (BMI) over 25 "(WHO, 2018)

Health Supplements

"Food supplements that are characterized by natural and artificial products as well as concentrated with substances which contains nutritional or physiological value" (Sfodera et.al, 2020)

Weight Management Supplements

"Any form of tablets, capsules, soft gels, liquid, tea or powder that is available in pharmacies, supermarkets, health food stalls, clinics, direct selling or can be purchased online" (Ghazali et.al, 2006)

1.5 Research Aims

The general purpose of the study is to explore the experience of consumers in trusting electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and its influence in the decision to purchase weight management supplements. Seven participants involved in the in-depth interview which answered the questions pertaining to their experience and the factors that influence them to trust electronic word of mouth (eWOM) in the decision to purchase weight management supplements. Besides that, researcher aims to investigate the type of information the consumers find crucial in influencing them in the decision to purchase these supplements. There are two research questions;

Research question 1: What are the factors that influence consumers to trust ewom in the purchase of weight management supplements?

Research question 2: How consumers use their experience to build trust from the information on social media?

1.6   Motivation of the Study

1.6.1   Contribution of the Study to Practice

This research is beneficial for both theoretical and practical implications. It provides information for the government bodies and non-government bodies. Thus, this research is beneficial for policy makers or government in regulating the rules, regulation and policies of using Internet. The policies regulated by the policy makers intended to control and filter the information disseminated via Internet.

The enormous utilization of technology gadgets and Internet made consumers are exposed to huge amount of information from everywhere around the world. This research is useful for marketers to understand on how this phenomenon gives impacts to the consumption patterns in weight management supplements. Since this research emphasizes on different class of consumers, it is crucial for marketers to comprehend the purchasing trend by these people. This research is also valuable in facilitating the marketers to formulate their marketing strategies in approaching their target customers. The more marketers understand their consumer, the more effectively they can communicate and market to them (Plummer, 1974). It also aims to contribute in the body of knowledge especially in marketing, specializing in consumer behaviour, social media marketing and eWOM.

1.6.2   Contribution of the Study to Theory

This study is expected to contribute to current literature at different levels in terms of theoretical contribution. This study will be able to identify gaps in exploring the process behind to how consumers react to eWOM. This will help the academicians and practitioners to make valuable information on the existing issues.

1.7   Scope and Rationale of the Study

This research is conducted to explore the lived experience of consumers in trusting eWOM in the purchase of weight management supplements. The usage of weight loss products become more popular with the extensive advertisements on social media and influences from public figures and celebrities as their endorsement (Abd Malik et,al, 2019). Informants are social media users who have experiences purchasing weight management supplements influenced by eWOM and also active on Facebook or Instagram. The rationale on focusing on these two social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram) is because these two social networking sites have the highest number of visitors in Malaysia in 2016 with 97.3% and 56.5% correspondingly (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, 2017).

In obtaining the participants, the researcher composed a question box on Instagram story and also shared the question through Facebook status, asking her followers on whether any of them have experiences in purchasing and consuming weight management supplements in which were influenced by the information shared by eWOM. Ten followers responded that they have been influenced via eWOM and purchased those weight management supplements due to body weight issues but merely eight of them agreed to be interviewed.

In this study, in depth interview was used in answering the research question. Interviews helped in capturing the whole phenomenon of the study and thus helped in getting the data that researcher aims to obtain. These participants are currently residing in the area of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. The rationale of choosing participants in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor is because these two states have the highest number of Internet users where comparing to other states and region in Malaysia, 23.8% of Internet users are from Kuala Lumpur and Selangor (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, 2017). Since the researcher is residing in Klang Valley, this offers greater opportunity to collect data from the prospect participants.

The researcher targeted for participants aged between 20-49 years since these age groups are among the highest percentage of Internet Users with 53.6 % for 20-34 years and 24.7% for 35-49 years (Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission, 2017). Based on (Pillitteri, 2008) most weight loss products users are in the range age of 25-34 years. Researcher managed to collect data from participants from the age of 25- 36 years which most of them were women. Based on (Abd Malik et.al,2019), marketers of these weight loss products targeted vulnerable young women who feel insecure with their own body and they are easily influenced by social media. Hence the researcher aims to explore the trusting factors in eWOM which made them convinced to go for the supplements although there was very limited empirical evidence has shown on the effectiveness of these products.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

This research begun in 2015 where social media has been used tremendously. Presently consumers are widely exposed to vast information disseminated via the Internet. Social media facilitates marketers to spread words on products and services much faster and easier, and thus the information shared can be somehow subjective based on the perception and perspectives of the consumers. These platforms of social media give more opportunity to consumers to discuss their subjective opinions and share different experiences on products and services. This research is limited on exploring the consumers' experience on the purchase of weight management supplements which is influenced by eWOM, and thus the scope is limited to merely consumers who indirectly or directly became acquaintances to the researcher.

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In the sense of research design, this study is emphasizing on in-depth interview which focuses on the quality of the data rather than looking at the research from the quantitative perspective. As a social constructivist, it is crucial to explore this issue from the multidimensional perspective more than a single dimension. Researcher finds that it is better that thorough observation can be done in trying to understand better of the phenomena. Hence more time is needed for that. In depth interviews involved the researcher as the instrument. The researcher as a human being finds that it is undeniably possible that there were times she found it difficult to completely abstain from judging the views from the participants. Some emotions and judgements were somehow involved. The researcher managed to apply Husserlian bracketing (epoche) in abstaining herself from making any judgement on the issue but as a human being, some presumptions involved. Applying transcendental phenomenology reduction is essential in conducting this research since it helps in perceiving the phenomena to be fresh and more open (Moustakas, 1994).

The study also found that it is hard to find informants who are willing to share their experiences on this issue. There are enormous number of people who use social media and have experience with weight management supplements however the ones who came front to voluntarily engage in the interviews were somehow limited. Apparently there were prospect informants who admitted that they have experiences on this topic but for some reason they were too embarrassed to be interviewed and recorded.

In summary, there were some limitations in this study. Researcher hopes that by discovering these limitations, this may facilitate in the conduct of research in the future.

1.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides brief overview of the research. It presents the research problem, research aims, motivation of the study, scope and the rationale of the study as well as the limitation of the study.

The following chapter presents a review of literature relevant to this research and highlight the contextual gap as well as the theoretical gap. This chapter will provide a brief overview of the concept of word of mouth, electronic word of mouth and weight management supplements. It also covers the impact of eWOM to consumers and organisations, eWOM engagement and how eWOM influence to consumer reactions based on previous research. Supporting theories will also be highlighted and explained related to the context of this research.

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