UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

THE INFLUENCE OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH IN INTERNET MEDIATED SOCIAL WEBSITES ON CONSUMER'S PURCHASE INTENTION IN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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FEM 2015 11

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By

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

THE INFLUENCE OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH IN INTERNET MEDIATED SOCIAL WEBSITES ON CONSUMER'S PURCHASE INTENTION

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March 2015

Chair   :   **Syuhaily Osman, PhD**
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Internet and technology have transformed Word of Mouth (WOM) into eWOM which its impact may be different from traditional WOM. Since Internet gets people connected, the eWOM is distributed to a vast audience at an extraordinary speed. In addition, with the increase use of social website (ie. Facebook) , the consumers has tendency to share their feelings, knowledge and experiences within this social network. Thus, eWOM can reach to a huge number of consumers. For the study, Facebook is used as a research platform. There are possibilities of eWOM to influence purchase intention due to its large number of active users while the self-peceived knowledge can influence the decision-making process.

Hospitality industry from the context of Malaysia was selected for this study. So, consumers with knowledge of this industry might have more control in their decision making rather to depend on the eWOM in their decision making process. For the study, the eWOM dimensions are applied to determine the purchase intention of consumers in the hospitality industry. The proposed research framework includes six dimensions namely obtain-buying related information, learn to consume a product or services, social orientation, perceived usefulness, perceived benefit, and trust, and mediated variables as perceived knowledge and finally purchase intention.

Data indicated that most of the respondents were female; the age mean is 29.80 years old with majority monthly income between RM2001 to RM3000. Majority, they agree that eWOM help them to thoughout their decision making process thus induce the purchase intention even some of them are not sure either they have the self-perceived knowledge or they don't. Trust was identified to be the main dimensions that have strong significant relationship with purchase intention. The other dimensions such as learn to consume

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product or services and perceived benefit are found to have a significant contribution towards the purchase intention scores. Using hierarchical multiple regression analysis, self-perceived knowledge was found to be significant as it partially mediate the relationship between eWOM and the consumer's purchase intention.

The results derived from this study showed that there is a significant relationship between eWOM's dimensions and purchase intention. Web designers and marketers can benefit from this data by understanding the behavior of the consumers as they interact between each other. They can use this as an opportunity and to be aware of any possible threat.

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Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia bagi memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Sarjana Sains

PENGARUH SEBARAN ELEKTRONIK DI LAMAN SOSIAL KE ATAS NIAT PEMBELIAN PENGGUNA DI DALAM INDUSTRI HOSPITALITI

Oleh

NUR SURYANTTIE BINTI SHAMSUDDIN

Mac 2015

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Internet dan teknologi telah merubah buah mulut "*Word of Mouth*" (WOM) kepada sebaran elektronik "*Word of Mouth (eWOM)*" dan kesan ke atas pengguna juga berbeza jika dibandingkan antara kedua-dua buah mulut ini. Oleh kerana Internet membolehkan pengguna berhubung sesama mereka, maka sebaran elektronik ini dapat disebarkan kepada umum dengan kelajuan yang pantas. Selain itu, sebaran elektronik ini akan dapat mencapai ramai pengguna-pengguna di Internet. Bagi kajian ini, Facebook telah digunakan sebagai platfom kajian. Terdapat kemungkinan dimana sebaran elektronik mampu untuk mempengaruhi niat pembelian (*purchase intention*) seseorang pengguna keranar jumlah pengguna Facebook yang sangat ramai serta aktif, di samping pengetahuan diri *(self perceived knowledge)* yang akan mampu mempengaruhi pennguna dalam proses mereka untuk membuat sebarang keputusan.

Industri hospitaliti dalam konteks Malaysia telah dipilih bagi kajian ini. Justeru, pengguna dengan pengetahuan industri ini akan mampu mengawal keputusan mereka berbanding hanya bergantung kepada sebaran elektronik semata-mata dalam mereka membuat keputusan.

Data menunjukkan kebanyakan responden adalah wanita, purata umur 29.8 tahun, dan berpendapatan antara RM2001 ke RM3000. Mereka bersetuju bahawa sebaran elektronik membantu di dalam proses mereka membuat keputusan yang mendorong niat pembelian walaupun ada sesetengah pengguna berasa tidak pasti sama ada mereka mempunyai pengetahuan diri berkenaan hospitaliti industri atau tidak. Dimensi 'kepercayaan' (*trust*) dikenalpasti sebagai dimensi utama yang mempunyai hubungan yang kukuh dengan niat pembelian. Dimensi lain seperti 'belajar untuk menggunakan sesuatu produk ataupun perkhidmatan' (*learn to consume product or services*) dan 'manfaat yang dilihat' (*perceived benefit*), turut mempunyai hubungan yang

signifikan kepada niat pembelian. Melalui analisis 'hirarki regresi berganda' (*multiple regression analysis*), pengetahuan diri didapati signifikan kerana sebahagiannya mempengaruhi hubugan sebaran elektronik dan niat pembelian pengguna.

Keputusan kajian menunjukkan terdapat hubungan yang signifikan di antara dimensi-dimensi sebaran elektronik dan niat pembelian. Pereka laman sesawang dan peniaga akan mendapat faedah daripada data yang dikumpul ini apabila mereka dapat memahami cara dan sikap pelanggan apabila berhubung sesama mereka. Mereka boleh menggunakan data ini untuk mencipta peluang dalam strategi pemasaran mereka atau gunakan ia sebagai salah satu peluang untuk mengenali sebarang ancaman dalam pemasaran.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 10 March 2015 to conduct the final examination of Nur Suryanttie binti Shamsuddin on her thesis entitled "Influence of Electronic Word of Mouth in Internet-Mediated Social Websites on Consumer's Purchase Intention in Hospitality Industry" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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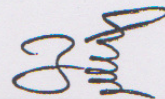**Sarjit Singh a/l Darshan Singh, PhD**
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Declaration by Members of Supervisory Committee

This is to confirm that:
- the research conducted and the writing of the thesis was under our supervision;
- supervision responsibilities as stated in the Universiti Putra alaysia (Graduate Studies) Rules 2003 9Revision 2012-2013) are adhered to.

Signature:_____
Name of Chairman of Supervisory Committee: **Syuhaily Osman, PhD**

Signature: _____
Name of Member of Supervisory Committee: **Laily Hj. Paim, Prof. Phd**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

WOM   Word of mouth
eWOM   Electronic word of mouth
SPSS   Statistical Package for Social Sciences

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0   Background of the Study

1.0.1   Words of Mouth

Nowadays, the way how consumers interact and communicate has changed significantly with the emergence of technology and Internet. Worldwide, consumers use the Internet as a platform to express and share their experiences, knowledge, recommendations and comments either positive or negative with others.

The consumers are very knowledgeable and mindful of their rights as a consumer besides being aware of what they should get and how they should be treated from the respective business organization, particularly on product and services (Salzman, 2010). Therefore, they tend to share their feelings and experiences with others.

This shared information process is basically known as word of mouth (WOM). WOM is known to be very powerful tool or process of inducing consumer's purchase intention toward certain product or services (Brown and Reingen, 1987; Allsop, Bassett and Hoskins, 2007; Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008). Positive or negative WOM can directly influence consumer's purchase intention. The Internet is currently evolving with the web 2.0 media apps. Hence, the consumers/users can interact with each other in the mentioned application or better known as social media.

1.0.2   Electronic Words of Mouth (eWOM)

Then, WOM revolves into electronic word of mouth (eWOM) with the advent of the Internet. eWOM is a process when consumers spread information about products or services to other consumers. The eWOM form a basic transfer of information, depending on consumer's perceptions, experience and sources (Chaiken and Eagly, 1976). However, the actual impact of the process is varying for each consumer (Cheung *et. al.*, 2008).

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Consumers may also interact among themselves about certain products and services that they used and experienced. eWOM can take in various settings (Cheung *et. al.*, 2008). It enables the words to reach out to a larger audience compared to traditional WOM which the setting is usually one to one interaction and limited to only those who known to themselves or within their surroundings. eWOM actually encourages the consumers to share their opinions and comments on products and services with huge number of audiences via their connections which can be their added friend or acquaintances (friends of friends).

Furthermore, when the Internet becomes the communication medium, it will wholly alter the communication space owing to its essential attribute such as 24 hour connectivity, pervasiveness, global availability, interactivity and one-to-one interaction (Shukla and Singh, 2012). The combination of the characteristic of Internet and eWOM revolutionize the traditional type of WOM into something powerful and advance. Dye (2001) also agreed that technological innovations such as the Internet allow consumers to spread words more quickly as compared to conventional recommendation sources.

Consumers may be exposed to electronic eWOM easily with the unlimited access to the Internet plus the availability of wireless fidelity or also known as Wi-Fi. It can be through websites, blogs, chat-rooms or email (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler 2004). This eWOM may be beneficial to marketers when the consumer shares positive WOM. This will indirectly amplify the original marketing message and could possibly encourage other consumer to try or to choose those products and services. However, negative feedback may also have its impact on the consumer's behavior as well, which could be unfavorable to the marketers.

According to Sparks and Browning (2011), some of the articulations on the Internet may be neutral, however, these eWOM written on the social websites is usually caused by the deviation from the norm which emerged in disconfirmation of expectations which is likely to be either good or bad.

1.0.3 Facebook

Internet and technology have transformed WOM into eWOM which its impact may be different from traditional WOM. Since Internet gets people connected, the eWOM can be distributed to a vast audience at an extraordinary speed. According to Osterveer (2011), consumers increasingly use the web to express

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and disseminate knowledge, experience and opinions. With the increase use of social website and consumer's tendency to share their feelings, knowledge and experiences within this network, there is also a potential possibility whereby consumer may also seek opinions from the online platform to assist in their decision-making process.

Facebook is one of these social websites, and it will be used as a platform for this study. Facebook is the platform for the study due to its popularity and trendy social networking site. It is available in a multitude of people with a valid email address. Facebook is totally free and requires the user to be over than 13 years of age with by having a valid email address. Facebook website had experienced exponential growth in membership year by year and still continues to be so. It offers interactive ways for people to interact and communicate with family, friends and acquaintances, but did not neglect the importance of privacy and security for their members (Acquisti and Gross, 2006).

As stated by www.ebizmba.com, Facebook ranked number one among others social website on April 2014. As stated in www.newsarawaktribune.com, for the year 2013, Malaysia ranked 8th in Asia and 21st in the world with most registered Facebook users with a total number of 13.3 million or 45.5% of the population of Facebook users.

According to www.techcrunch.com, Facebook grew to 1.15 billion monthly active users in the second quarter of 2013 compared to first quarter with 1.11 billion, 669 million daily active users from 665 million. As of March 2014, Facebook revealed that they have 1 billion mobile monthly active users. In addition, they reported the social website growth is mostly from Asia. This explains that Malaysia is one of the contributors to this massive number of growth of the Facebook user's statistic. The number of users on Facebook website is still increasing at a very quick pace in Asia. Asia stood at 8.38% daily active users increase from 167 million to 181 million, while, monthly active users increase from 319 million to 339 million.

As reported in www.statisticbrain.com, users spent 700 billion minutes on Facebook every month, with 20 minutes average time spent on Facebook per visit. Most of the users have an average total of 130 friends per Facebook user. This indicates that, user at least have 130 added friends on their Facebook account. On average, there are a total of 80 numbers of pages, groups, and events for each user.

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Interestingly, every 20 minutes on Facebook, there are a total of 1 million links are shared, 2 million friends are requested and 3 million messages are sent. This website also recorded that total of 70 billion pieces of content are shared every month. This number showed that there is a high tendency that Facebook's members share their comments, recommendations, knowledge or experience to their friends and acquaintances in regard to their knowledge and experience of the hospitality services.

Facebook website can create greater and more powerful influence for consumer's purchase intention once they are exposed to eWOM. Since Facebook allows interaction and communication within the website, users are not restricted to post any status update on their thoughts or experiences with any product or services within their network, those updates can be read and comment by their friends and acquaintances.

As reported in www.sociallystacked.com, there are a total of 1.13 trillion of Facebook 'like' since its launch and 4.5 billion average number of daily Facebook 'like'. Therefore, with the unique feature of the Facebook website, users can 'like' and 'comment' or 'share' the status updates, pictures or videos of their friends and acquaintances. With this impressive and interesting statistic of the Facebook website, it serves as a potential platform for this study.

1.0.4 eWOM on Purchase Intention

Svensson (2011) states that eWOM effectiveness in influencing consumer's brand perceptions and decision making process has long been known because it is consumer-generated rather than firm-generated. This proven that people in only trust those who are consumers too compared to marketers who will only provide information to their own favorable light.

In study conducted by Fan and Miao (2012), eWOM was found to have a significant effect on purchase intention for both male and female respondents. This supported by Themba and Mulala (2013) in which their study also resulted that respondents who engaged with eWOM will significantly influence their purchase decision. These can further explain that eWOM may have a higher possibility to induce consumer's purchase intention toward any brand, product or services.

The impact of eWOM can reach to a huge number of consumers, especially with the advancement of technology and Internet. Cheung *et al.* (2008) stated that eWOM have potential impact on retailers since these online articulations are easily accessible and influence the consumer's consumption decision. Furthermore, in ACNielson (2007) survey, it was found that most consumers perceived that eWOM as trustworthy as the brand websites.

Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2008) stated that interpersonal influence and eWOM ranked as the most important source when a consumer is making a purchase decision. Due to this, when eWOM becomes digital, large-scale, anonymous and ephemeral nature of the Internet, it shall induce new ways of capturing, analyzing and interpreting it by the other consumers in their decision making process. Dye (2001) also stated that for some reason, people like to share their belief, attitudes and experiences with one another. For example, where did they go, which hotel they stayed, which restaurant they dine in and others.

1.0.5   eWOM on Hospitality Industry

In relation to the hospitality industry, the consumer have experienced several types of "hospitality eWOM" which could be categorized in synchronous, such as instant messaging, and asynchronous, such as email and blogs. One of the most typical examples of eWOM is the website tripadvisor.com, the largest site for unbiased travel reviews which gives you the real stories about hotels, attractions, and restaurants around the world. The unbiased reviews are updated daily by real travellers.

Another interesting hospitality example relates to "Yours is a Very Bad Hotel", by Farmer and Atchison (2001), a PowerPoint presentation that discussed what its creators considered to have been a poor lodging experience at a Houston DoubleTree hotel property. Per Shea, Enghagen and Khullar (2004), Farmer and Atchison never intended their presentation to be made public, but through the power of electronic communications, the presentation was passed along in rapid fashion until it had spread among business travelers and academics worldwide, generated in excess of 4,000 email responses to Farmer and Atchison, and created an untold amount of negative 'buzz' for both the property and the chain.

Recent research in the tourism area has demonstrated the influence of both positive and negative eWOM upon tourism products, in studies across a broad

range of nations. Among these, Morgan, Pritchard, and Piggott's (2003) New Zealand based research noted that negative WOM can have an overwhelming impact upon a destination's image, as dissatisfied visitors spread unflattering comments related to their experiences. Crick's (2003) Caribbean study similarly warned that when locals display hostile feelings towards tourists, the result is negative WOM and a likely downturn in the industry.

Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride (2002) studied Wales tourism marketing, and noted the potential of WOM as an effective tool for spreading the 'visit Wales' message through the Welsh diaspora. In a USA based study, Litvin, Blose and Laird (2004) noted that tourists' restaurant selections were predominantly influenced by the WOM recommendations of opinion leaders, with surprisingly few decisions based on the influences of more formal media. These authors suggested that restaurant marketers seeking the tourist trade shift their emphasis from traditional marketing channels (advertising and public relations) to non-traditional interpersonal marketing strategies.

Considered as intangible goods, hospitality product offerings can only be evaluated after the consumption, elevating the importance of eWOM. Secondly, considering the fact that hospitality industry is highly seasonal and perishable, hotels are exposed to great stress. eWOM could possibly leverage the low season stress. Thirdly, hospitality industry is intensely competitive, indicating that the promotion of word of mouth influence may provide important competitive advantage for early adopters. (Stephen, Ronald and Bing, 2008). The example of said industries with the evidences indicates the importance of eWOM to hospitality industry.

Due to the unique characteristic of hospitality product and services which are totally different from other physical goods, it may increase consumer's perceived financial, social and safety risk. These products are intangible *(service cannot be perceived by human senses)*, inseparability of production and consumption *(production and consumption are simultaneous)*, heterogeneity of quality *(variation in quality)* and perishability *(unused service capacity cannot be stored for future use)* (de Chernatoy and Sehal-Horn, 2003; Kayaman and Arasli, 2007). With this distinctive characteristic that the hospitality product and services have, exposure to eWOM may have high possibility that it may influence the consumer's purchase intention.

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1.1 Problem Statement

WOM has been an important research topic for over fifty years (Martin and Lueg, 2013). But still, much is yet to be understood about eWOM especially in the hospitality industry. The available study on eWOM and deep research on its impact, variables, factors, behaviours and others are still limited among the researchers. Hence, eWOM can be an important study to the industry like hospitality not only to the marketer but also to the consumer. Several past studies have proven that eWOM has a significant effect on consumer behaviour. Such as in tourism (Litvin et al., 2008), online travel information (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), destination image (Jalilvand, Samiei, Dini & Manzari, 2012), and travel blogs (Chen, Shang & Li, 2014).

Nowadays, short vacation has become a travel trend among consumers. This can be seen from the lure flash sales from airlines and hospitality marketers. Furthermore, with the advent of smartphones, the booking over this advanced gadget for weekend is increasing especially during flash sales (Zachariah, 2015). They usually will plan their vacation prior to travelling. Due to this, they will have tendency to seek for opinions online and evaluation of others to assist in their decision making process (Brannigan and de Jager 2003; Koehn 2003; Urban, Sultan, and Qualls 2000). This is because they are unfamiliar with the places they want to go, and by searching for eWOM will help to reduce their risk of purchase. They do not rely on the information provided by the companies because marketers tend to provide information that presents themselves in a favourable way (Koslow, 2000).

Will eWOM be effective because it is consumer generated rather than firm generated? This is because consumers need to deal with the challenge of choosing which eWOM that is useful and credible in the middle of over-whelming amount of eWOM in the internet (Willemsen, 2013). With the advancement of Internet and technology, eWOM are able to reach a huge number of people at an extraordinary speed. Due to this, eWOM has become very powerful and it can be a tool or threat to the marketers.

However, consumers need to differentiate between more or less useful and more or less credible one's eWOM is (Willemsen, 2013). And this is where self-perceived knowledge will play its role in this process. Will their purchase intention affected as they are exposed to eWOM when they have this self-perceived knowledge about hospitality product and services?

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In Facebook, there are no limitation for consumers to express their thought, feelings and experiences. Because of this, eWOM in Facebook can become popular, usable, and spread very fast. Facebook is the most popular social websites among active users worldwide, as well as in Malaysia. It is trendy and always update it current features to suit the current trend. Facebook have options for consumers to express their feeling or thought. It can be either status update, photos, videos or even website link.   Due to this familiarity and their likable features by the consumers, this platform can become a suitable means for consumers to seek for opinions.

Because of, the importance of eWOM in inducing consumer purchase intention, and because consumers are knowledgeable nowadays, this study needs to be conducted to better comprehend their perceptions of eWOM towards their purchase intention with consideration of their existing self-perceived knowledge.

1.2   Research Questions

1.   What is the Facebook usage pattern among the respondents?
2.   What is the perception of consumers towards the eWOM and its dimensions, self-perceived knowledge and purchase intention?
3.   Is there an association between eWOM and its dimension with consumer's purchase intention in hospitality industry?
4.   What is the main dimension that influences consumer's purchase intention?
5.   To what extent did consumer's self-perceived knowledge mediates the relationship between eWOM and consumer's purchase intention?

1.3   Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will bring a better understanding with the regard to the eWOM influence towards consumer's purchase intention with consideration of self-perceived knowledge in Kuala Lumpur. This study applies the framework of eWOM dimensions in the context of purchase intention. The self-perceived knowledge is applied as a mediating variable that can affect the relationship of eWOM communication and consumer's reaction. The output of this study may determine the main contributor and factors that explain purchase intention of the consumer.

This study also benefits the social website moderators to better comprehend their member's behavior as they interact and communicate with each other

within their connections. They also can use this information to enrich their current website either for their members or if they want to promote their website to organizations to create an online community platform so that they can directly interact and communicate with their customers both present and future in regards to their product or services. Which this will attract marketers to use this platform to generate and increase their profit. Thus, this may mutually benefit to both moderators and marketers.

For marketers, this study will allow them to be aware with the opportunities and threats that eWOM can bring to their businesses. For the hospitality industry, this is crucial since consumer tends to search for information and opinion needed if they want to travel to unknown state or country since such product and services are intangible and risky. Besides, consumers tend to consume others opinions due to this nature of hospitality product and services. In addition, eWOM may have a positive or negative effect on their businesses. The marketers can have a better strategy in their prospect market, especially on how to tackle their existing customer as well to attract more future customer. Hence, marketers will be able to retain a new customer.

As a consumer, this is important in their daily lives. Consumers have their own needs and tastes and it is developed by their environment such as their family, culture or religion. This study will help them to have a better understanding of their own behavior especially on how they make their decision prior to the purchase with any available information about the products or services (self-perceived knowledge). This is essential since decision making process for purchase occur almost every day for some of the consumers. With the extra knowledge on how they can come up with certain decision, this can be very helpful in better understanding on why they are behaving in certain ways. Some consumers take the information from the eWOM with a thoughtful consideration, however there are few of them who use simple cues from the information for them to make a certain decisions. In this study, they will know that having self-perceived knowledge can change their perspective of how they see these eWOM in the websites and they will understand why they are behaving in certain ways.

1.4   Research Objectives

The general objective of this research is to study influence of eWOM in Internet mediated social websites on consumer`s purchase intention in hospitality industry.

Therefore, the specific research objectives of this study are:
1.   To identify the Facebook usage pattern among the respondents.
2.   To determine the perception of consumers towards eWOM and its dimension, self-perceived knowledge and purchase intention in this study.
3.   To examine the relationship between eWOM and its dimension that influences consumer's purchase intention in the Malaysian hospitality industry.
4.   To determine the main dimension that influences consumer's purchase intention.
5.   To examine the mediating effect of self-perceived knowledge of the relationship between eWOM and consumer's purchase intention.

1.5   Research Hypotheses

H1   There is a significant relationship between eWOM and consumer's purchase intention.

        H1a   There is a significant relationship between 'obtaining buying-related information' and consumer's purchase intention.

        H1b   There is a significant relationship between 'learn to consume a product/services' and consumer's purchase intention.

        H1c   There is a significant relationship between 'social orientation through information' and consumer's purchase intention.

        H1d   There is a significant relationship between 'perceived usefulness' and consumer's purchase intention.

        H1e   There is a significant relationship between 'perceived benefit' and consumer's purchase intention.

        H1f   There is a significant relationship between 'trust' and consumer's purchase intention.

H2   The eWOMs' dimensions which include obtaining buying-related information, learn to consume a product/services, social orientation through information, perceived usefulness, perceived benefit and trust will significantly influence the consumer's purchase intention.

H3   The consumer's self-perceived knowledge will significantly mediate the relationship between eWOM and consumer's purchase intention.

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1.6   Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of this current research:
There is limitation in the generalizability of the results to other population in other states of Malaysia since this study only focuses on respondent in Kuala Lumpur only. They are selected for this study because they are notorious for its hectic and busy lifestyle. Due to this reason, the residence may have higher probability that they will go out and escape from all these and enjoy a change of scenery.

This study uses only Facebook as a platform for investigation regardless of other social website such as Twitter, Blogspot and others which might limit the generalizability of the results to other user population of social websites.

Finally, this study employed purchase intention instead purchase decision as an outcome variable because it is assumed that eWOM can easily trigger intention rather than decision to really purchase or vice versa. Since the current study did not directly measure the respondents' purchase decision, the discrepancy between purchase intention and purchase decision may have limited the validity of findings.

1.7   Definition of Terms

Below is the definition of terms used in this study. First eWOM will be defined accordingly to it conceptual definition as well as operational, followed by its dimensions individually. Then, self-perceived knowledge and finally purchase intention.

1.7.1   Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Conceptual
Electronic word-of-mouth (eWoM) can be defined as the usage of internet based technology to communicate informally to consumers about characteristics of particular goods (Litvin et al., 2008). It comprised of any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product or company which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions (Henning-Thurau, *et al.*, 2004).

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Operational
When someone posts and share a comment, experience or recommendation regarding a hospitality product or services on the Facebook and available for others to see and share.

Obtain-buying related information

Conceptual
A process of getting opinions and information about specific product among consumers. Consumers enter into the online community of past purchasers in order for them to obtain information from the past-purchasers and for them to make the decision of purchase (Sparks and Browning, 2011).

Operational
Input from other consumer in the Facebook which involves consumer's experience with the hospitality product or services and a formalized evaluation of the said product or services.

Learn to consume product or services

Conceptual
A product-involvement motivations and a high degree of relevance for individual's specific consumption. Consumers desire to learn and improve their skills or expertise about product and brand usage (Oreg & Nov, 2008).

Operational
Attain appropriate evaluation in regard to hospitality product or services for his or her consumption via Facebook website.

Social orientation through information

Conceptual
Consumers determine their social orientation dimension as to their social position. (Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2003).

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Operational

In this study, social orientation through information is how consumer perceived about others expectation if they were to perform the purchase behaviour. They wanted to know that they are not the only one who think of the product or services in a certain way.

Perceived usefulness

Conceptual

A degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance. It also a consumer's perception that by using new technology will enhance one's performance (Cheung *et al*., 2008).

Operational

Respondents' perceptions of eWOM in Facebook regarding the outcome of the experience from any hospitality product or services to be useful for them in assisting their decision making process thus induce their purchase intention. Example, the eWOM provides them with appropriate photos (since Facebook website allows photo sharing) about the hotels that they want to go, so, consumers may have some ideas of how the hotel look like as the get there to search for their accommodation.

Perceived benefit

Conceptual

The outcomes associated with integration that is valued by individuals. It is also a consumer's belief about the extent of their betterment, which they received from the online articulations from the social website.

Operational

Desired benefits that people believe are derived directly or indirectly from the Facebook's eWOM on any hospitality product or services. Example will be, eWOM help to reduce save time and reduce risk of purchase.

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Trust

Conceptual
Behavioral of that individual based on their belief about the characteristics of another person (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995). It refers to the degree of faith and confidence that one's have with the online articulation in the social websites.

Operational
Belief to the person who spread eWOM throughout the Facebook website and knowing either the eWOM is credible or not for them to adopt.

1.7.2 Self-Perceived Knowledge

Conceptual
One's self assessment or feeling of knowing the information needed to evaluate brands in a product class (Park, Gardner and Thukral, 1988). The self-perceived knowledge can serve as a motivation to process the eWOM in the social website with more careful and thoughtful consideration. The self-perceived knowledge can affect the efficiency of the eWOM in the social website. When consumers have self-perceived knowledge they probably have their own evaluation rather than totally reckon on the eWOM.

Operational
Self-perceived knowledge in this study is a combination of consumer preexisting attitudes, knowledge and experiences about hospitality product or services.

1.7.3 Purchase Intention

Conceptual
Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) define intention as a person's subjective probability dimension that connects that particular person to a particular behavior ("We have defined intention as a person's location on a subjective probability dimension involving a relation between himself and some action. A behavioral intension, therefore, refers to a person's subjective probability that the will perform some

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behavior.)For purchase intention, it is defined as a consumer's conscious plan or intention to make an effort to purchase a product (Spears & Singh, 2004).

Operational
In this study, purchase intention is defined as the intent of a consumer to purchase any product or services in the hospitality industry with the consideration of their existing self-perceived knowledge about the hospitality product and services.

1.8   Chapter Summary

WOM has evolved into eWOM and the impact it shall have on current and future consumers is very powerful.   With the advent of technology, eWOM has become a very powerful tool especially for marketers. Facebook has been used as a platform for this study. This website allows creating and sharing information such as feelings, knowledge or experiences can be done via status updates, photos, videos or even internet website link. eWOM has the ability to reach vast number of audiences compared to traditional eWOM.   In hospitality industry, their product offerings can only be evaluated after the consumption. With this distinctive characteristic that they have, exposure to the eWOM may have induced their purchase intention. Total of five research questions and research objectives plus three hypotheses has been constructed for this study. There are several limitations in this study. First is generalizability of the results to other population instead of Kuala Lumpur. Second is the use of single website (Facebook) for this study and finally, this study employed purchase intention instead of purchase decision as an outcome variable.

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