

**EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF CONSUMER-TO-
CONSUMER EWOM SOURCE CREDIBILITY ON
BRAND AWARENESS, PURCHASE INTENTION,
EWOM INTENTION, AND EWOM BEHAVIOR IN
FACEBOOK**

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Discipline Marketing
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ABSTRACT

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Title of thesis Examining the influence of consumer-to-consumer eWOM source credibility on brand awareness, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior in Facebook	
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The rapid growth of new technology has created room for different social media platforms and social networks. As a consequence, consumers have become very active in different online communities. Thus, they have been absorbing a new role as content creators, which means that they are sharing valuable information regarding products and services with each other through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Consumers are also relying on these networks more than ever before, which raises questions regarding the credibility of eWOM. Just recently, researchers have become more interested in investigating the credibility of eWOM in social media, because eWOM, in general, has been acknowledged to have a significant impact on consumer behavior, such as purchase behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether consumer-to-consumer eWOM is considered to be credible in an online community that is maintained by consumers, and further create a more thorough understanding what is the role of perceived eWOM credibility on brand awareness and consumer behavior such as purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior.</p> <p>This study is quantitative research, and the data was collected by a questionnaire. The measures for the questionnaire were formulated according to previous studies and theory. The data was collected in a Facebook group called "Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapselle". A total of 151 persons participated in the questionnaire.</p> <p>The findings of this study show that consumer-to-consumer eWOM source was perceived as credible, and the main factors affecting the credibility of a source were trustworthiness and expertise. Findings further revealed that perceived eWOM source credibility affected positively brand awareness, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior. The findings of this study give companies valuable information about the power of eWOM in online communities maintained by consumers, suggesting them to include the eWOM as a part of their marketing communications strategy. This would help them to enhance</p>	

the company image and brand awareness, improve the products and services to meet customers' needs, and boost customer acquisition which also impacts sales.

Keywords

electronic word-of-mouth, social media, social networking sites, eWOM credibility, eWOM source credibility, brand awareness, consumer behavior

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä Henriikka Krasila	
Työn nimi Tutkimus kuluttajien välisen sähköisen suusanallisen viestinnän (eWOM) lähteen uskottavuuden vaikutuksista bränditietoisuuteen, ostoaikeeseen, eWOM aikeeseen ja eWOM käyttäytymiseen Facebookissa.	
Oppiaine Markkinointi	Työn laji Pro gradu -tutkielma
Aika (pvm.) 05/2021	Sivumäärä 51 + liite
<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Teknologian nopea kehitys on luonut tilaa uusille sosiaalisen median alustoille ja sosiaalisille verkostoille. Tämän seurauksena kuluttajista on tullut yhä aktiivisempia erilaisissa online-yhteisöissä. Toisin sanoen, he ovat omaksuneet uuden roolin sisällöntuottajina, mikä tarkoittaa sitä, että he jakavat arvokasta tietoa toistensa kanssa eri tuotteista ja palveluista sähköisen suusanallisen viestinnän (eWOM) kautta. Kuluttajat myös tukeutuvat näihin verkostoihin enemmän kuin koskaan ennen, joka herättää kysymyksiä eWOM:n uskottavuuteen liittyen. Vasta hiljattain tutkijat ovat alkaneet kiinnostua eWOM:n uskottavuudesta sosiaalisessa mediassa, koska eWOM:lla yleisesti, on tunnistettu olevan merkittävä vaikutus kuluttajakäyttäytymiseen, kuten ostokäyttäytymiseen. Näin ollen, tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, koetaanko kuluttajien välinen eWOM uskottavana sellaisissa online-yhteisöissä, jotka ovat kuluttajien ylläpitämiä, ja edelleen luoda syvällisempi ymmärrys siitä, kuinka koettu eWOM:n uskottavuus vaikuttaa bränditietoisuuteen ja kuluttajien käyttäytymiseen kuten ostoaikeeseen, eWOM aikeeseen ja eWOM käyttäytymiseen.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus on määrällinen tutkimus, jonka aineisto kerättiin kyselyn avulla. Kysymyspatteristot muodostettiin aiemman tutkimuksen ja teorian pohjalta. Kysely toteutettiin Facebook ryhmässä nimeltä "Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapselle". Yhteensä 151 henkilöä osallistui kyselyyn.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella kuluttajien välisen eWOM lähde koettiin uskottavana, ja pääasialliset uskottavuuteen vaikuttavat tekijät olivat luotettavuus ja asiantuntijuus. Tulokset paljastivat myös, että koettu eWOM:n lähdeuskottavuus vaikutti positiivisesti bränditietoisuuteen, ostoaikeeseen, eWOM aikeeseen ja eWOM käyttäytymiseen. Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset antavat yrityksille arvokasta tietoa eWOM:n voimasta kuluttajien ylläpitämissä online-yhteisöissä, ehdottaen, että yritykset sisällyttäisivät eWOM:n osaksi markkinointiviestintästrategiaansa. Tämä auttaisi heitä parantamaan yrityskuvaa ja bränditietoisuutta, kohentamaan tuotteita ja palveluita vastaamaan paremmin asiakkaiden tarpeita sekä tehostamaan asiakashankintaa, joka vaikuttaa myyntiin.</p>	
Avainsanat	

eWOM, sosiaalinen media, eWOM uskottavuus, eWOM lähdeuskottavuus, bränditietoisuus, kuluttajakäyttäytyminen

Säilytyspaikka Jyväskylän yliopiston kirjasto

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1 INTRODUCTION

The use of the Internet has been growing a lot in the past decade. In the year 2019, 90 % of Finnish people at the age of 16–89 were using the Internet several times during the day (Tilastokeskus 1, 2019). Finnish citizens use the Internet usually for taking care of daily business, searching for information, or communicating with other people (Tilastokeskus 2, 2019). At the same time, the use of social media keeps on growing. According to Zha, Yang, Yan, Liu, Huang (2018), social media consist of different applications on the Internet where people can create and share content themselves. According to Mangold & Faulds (2009), social media can be also viewed through different categories. One of these categories is *social networking sites (SNSs)*, such as Facebook, which is known to be one of the most popular SNSs in the whole world (Tien, Amaya Rivas, Ying-Kai, 2019). In Finland, people use an average of two to three social media channels actively, and women use more different channels than men. Also, a total of 55 % of Finnish citizens are using Facebook daily. (Tilastokeskus 2, 2019.)

The much-spoken Web2.0 has been forcing e-commerce to absorb different social media platforms and online communities where people can share their knowledge about different products by using electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Hajli, 2018). According to Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, Gremler (2004), eWOM can be defined as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customer about a company or product, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet”. Online communities, on the other hand, includes for instance brand communities which consist of consumers who share a common interest toward a certain brand in their communications with each other (Yeh, & Choi, 2011). The online communities can be either business-to-consumer (B2C) or consumer-to-consumer (C2C) driven sites (Tien et al., 2019).

Consumers have become very active in these communities. They are for example seeking information as well as sharing their own evaluations about some products or services by creating and sharing content themselves. (Chu & Kim, 2011.) Additionally, as the amount of spent time on different social media channels has been increased, consumers have been gradually absorbing the role of an active participant. Therefore, the power of marketing has changed more from brands to consumers. (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, Füller, 2013.)

As the power of marketing has been changing more toward a consumer, it can create challenges for companies’ marketing communication practices. In other words, companies need to consider the fact that consumers rely on their social media networks nowadays more than before when making decisions (Hutter et al., 2013). Another thing to consider is that the content shared between consumers in C2C online communities is considered more credible (Tien et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important for companies to understand the role of eWOM source credibility on consumer behavior on a deeper level in order to benefit better from these communities.

1.1 Research background

eWOM is known to be an effective instrument of marketing communication strategy because it provides consumers information about products and services (Yeh & Choi, 2011). In other words, when planning on purchasing, consumers use the Internet to seek information on certain products or services. Because consumers tend to rely on eWOM as a kind of a backup for their purchase intentions, it becomes important for them to evaluate the credibility of recommendations made by other consumers. (Lis, 2013.) According to Lis (2013), the credibility of eWOM consists of informational determinants such as *expertise*, *trustworthiness*, and *homophily*, as well as normative determinants such as *normative influence*. The relationship between eWOM and purchase intention has long been acknowledged as it has been in the interest of the previous studies. However, the aspect of eWOM source credibility on consumer behavior such as purchase intention has remained scarce when the focus of the previous studies has been mainly on the impact of source credibility on a message receiver (Ismagilova, Slade, Rana, Dwivedi, 2020). Therefore, this study focuses more on the aspect of eWOM source credibility on consumer behavior such as purchase intention.

In social networks, there are both B2C and C2C driven sites. Nowadays, companies invest a lot in B2C-driven SNS pages because they are trying to get more active users and engage them in their social networking sites (Tien et al., 2019). Also, SNSs and online communities offer an effective way for companies to interact with consumers and create relationships with them (Chu & Kim, 2011). This has been acknowledged because many of the previous studies have been researching the aspect of eWOM in online brand communities that are maintained by the companies (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlström, 2012). However, C2C driven platforms have been found more powerful, and the content of such platforms has higher credibility than the ones maintained by the companies (Tien et al., 2019; Barreda et al., 2015). Thereby, this study intends to understand eWOM and source credibility aspects in C2C driven social networking sites where the community is created by the consumers instead of a company.

SNS and online communities can also affect brand awareness. Thus, brands consist of brand elements, such as name, logo, symbol, package design, or a combination of these. When consumers face these elements continuously in different online communities, they end up recognizing a brand. (Langaro, Rita, de Fátima Salgueiro, 2018.) However, as the companies have been trying to create brand awareness in SNSs, they have not got the best out of it because they are still focusing mainly on one-way interactions even when SNS offers a possibility for two-way interaction (Barreda, Bilgihal, Nusair, Okumus, 2015). For some reason, the connection between social media operations and consumers' experience of the products and brands as well as its impact on consumer behavior, such as purchase intention has got little attention among the researchers. (Hutter et al., 2013.) Also, the previous studies regarding for example

the connection between eWOM and purchase intention have been studied in the context of blogs, shopping websites, or discussion forums instead of social media (Erkan & Evans, 2018). Therefore, this study aims to create a more thorough understanding on what is the role of C2C eWOM in the social media context on brand awareness and purchase intention.

Usually, consumers are seeking information from different SNSs because the recommendations making by acquaintances are considered more credible. Some of the eWOM source credibility determinants such as social homophily and trustworthiness have been recognized in the previous literature to influence consumer eWOM behavior. (Chu & Kim, 2011.) Even when consumers are nowadays very active in different online communities, the understanding about what drives them to spread eWOM and what affects their eWOM behavior has remained scarce. The few existing studies regarding consumer's eWOM behavior have been underlining the aspects of expenses and utility to a consumer. (Cheung & Lee, 2012.) Therefore, this study aims to create a better understanding on what is the role of perceived eWOM source credibility on eWOM intention and eWOM behavior.

1.2 Research objectives and questions

The main objective of this study is to create a more thorough understanding of what is the role of source credibility in C2C interactions on brand awareness and consumer behavior in the context of social media. In other words, is the C2C eWOM in social media considered credible, and does it affect consumer's purchase intention, brand awareness, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior. The social media channel used in this research is Facebook, and the group that is chosen for this study is "Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapselle", which is entirely maintained by consumers. This study is executed as quantitative research and aims to get a deeper understanding of the relationships between different variables of constructs. Based on this, the following research questions were formulated:

Main research question:

- Is consumer-to-consumer electronic word-of-mouth considered to be credible in online communities maintained by consumers on Facebook?

Sub-research questions:

- How does the credibility of consumer-to-consumer electronic word-of-mouth affect brand awareness in the context of social media?
- How does the credibility of consumer-to-consumer electronic word-of-mouth affect consumer behavior, such as purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior in the context of social media?

1.3 Research structure

The present research includes five chapters. The first one introduces the purpose of this study and the motives behind it. Also, the research questions, as well as objectives, are presented in this chapter. Chapter two is focusing on the theoretical framework of this study by presenting first the key concepts and continuing then toward the hypothesis's development and structural model creation. Chapter three continues to explain the methodology behind the study and discusses more the methods and data collection process that are used in this study as well as how the data is analyzed. The fourth chapter provides the results of this study by starting with the background information, continuing then toward a measurement model testing, and afterward a structural model testing. In chapter four, the alternative research model is also tested. Finally, chapter five discusses the theoretical and managerial conclusions as well as the reliability and validity of this study. Also, the limitations of this study as well as the future research are discussed in this chapter. The structure of the research in question is presented in FIGURE 1 below.

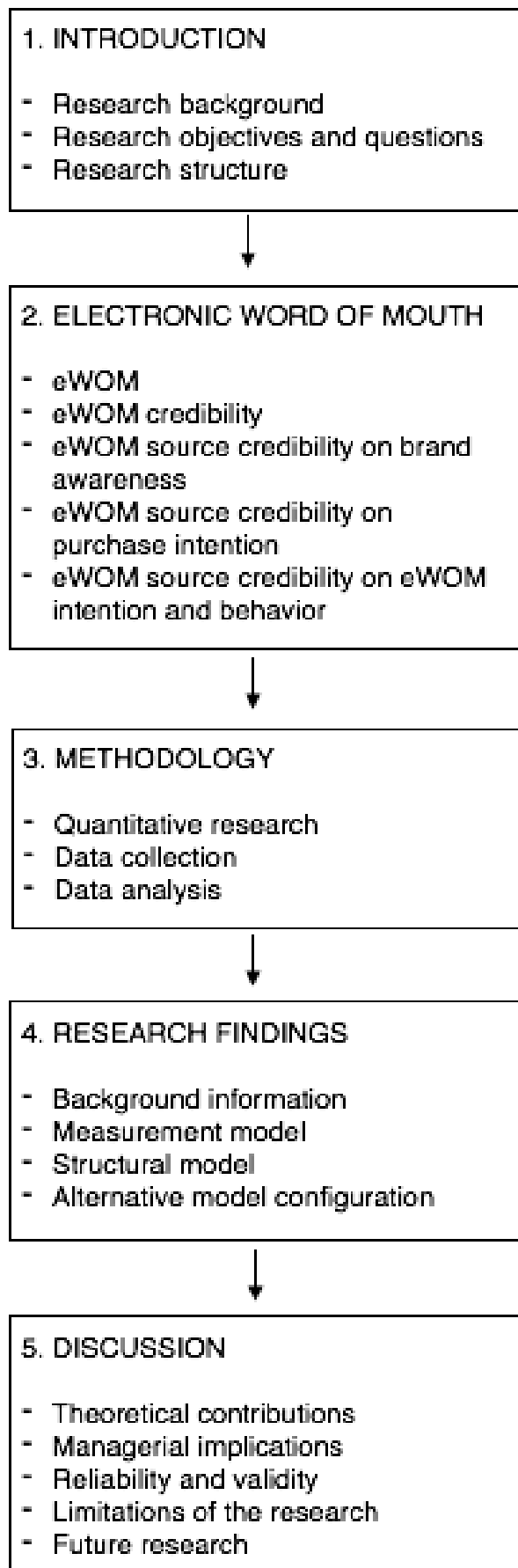


FIGURE 1 Research structure

2 ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH

In this chapter, the theoretical background of this study is presented. In other words, this chapter starts by describing the main concepts of eWOM and social media as well as SNSs. After this, the main focus is on eWOM credibility and the connections between eWOM source credibility, brand awareness, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior. This chapter includes also the hypotheses development. Finally, the research model that is tested in this study, is presented.

2.1 eWOM

Even though traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) communication has long been acknowledged, the definition has been varied a lot (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014). WOM can be defined as an interaction among consumers about specific brands, products, or services with the purpose of inform others. It is typical for WOM not to have a direct connection to a company while expanding the information. Gradually, the traditional WOM has been changing toward electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) interaction alongside the advanced technology and the Internet (Lis & Neßler, 2014). The most used definition of eWOM is provided by Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, Gremler (2004), who defines it as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customer about a company or product, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet”.

eWOM has been absorbing many names in previous studies. These are, for example, *word-of-mouse* and *online word of mouth*. These names describe the ongoing growth of Internet users as well as the purpose of finding information online through friends, acquaintances as well as strangers. It is also typical for eWOM not to have any commercial intentions while spreading the information. (Verma & Yadav 2021.) As this study focuses on eWOM, more recent definitions have been collected from the previous studies and summed up in TABLE 1 below.

As can be seen from TABLE 1, a feature in common for all these definitions is that eWOM involves consumers who share and exchange information and experiences regarding brands, products, and services with other consumers online and worldwide. Thus, a commercial intention does not exist in this information sharing. Just recently, the definition has been developed from the wide environment of the Internet toward a more specific environment of social media and different SNSs such as Facebook, where the information is shared. Therefore, eWOM has been starting to absorb the idea of social eWOM. Additionally, new technology is also exploited in eWOM communications. All in

all, TABLE 1 gives the impression that eWOM is still considered as one of the most efficient advertising tools of marketing communications.

TABLE 1 eWOM definitions

Author(s)	Definition
Xu (2014, p.136).	".. encouraging consumers to share their product reviews with others. These reviews and comments shared by other online consumers are called the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).."
Farías (2017, p.852).	"Word-of-mouth (WOM) occurring on the Internet is generally referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). On social networking sites (SNSs), eWOM plays an essential role in changing consumer attitudes and behaviours towards products, brands, and firms.."
Moran & Muzellec (2017, p.149).	"The emergence of SNS and microblogs has greatly increased the ability of consumers to come together in groups of friends or strangers to discuss brands, share updates, offer advice, and relive experiences through what is now referred to as electronic WOM (eWOM)."
Kudeshia & Kumar (2017, p.313).	"..the growth and popularity of social media tools have extended consumers' options for gathering product information, providing them with varied ways to offer their own consumption-related recommendations by engaging in eWOM.."
Chu & Kim (2018, pp.1-2).	"Simply defined, eWOM involves the behaviour of exchanging marketing information among consumers in online environments or via new technologies (e.g. mobile communication)."
Hajli (2018, p.801).	"..is a virtual communication between consumers in an online context.."
Hussain, Guangju, Jafar, Ilyas, Mustafa & Jianzhou (2018, p.23).	"Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is an advertisement tool to share viewpoints with each other because of customer's awareness regarding products.."
Ismagilova, Slade, Rana & Dwivedi (2020, p.1203).	"..the dynamic and ongoing information exchange process between potential, actual, or former consumers regarding a product, service, brand, or company, which is available to a multitude of individuals and institutions via the Internet.."
Ali, Hussin & Dahlan (2020, p.439).	"The social web has empowered consumers to generate content that reaches a large audience. This generated content is alluded to as Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)."
Babic Rosario, de Valck & Sotgiu (2020, p.425).	"eWOM is consumer-generated, consumption-related communication that employs digital tools and is directed primarily to other consumers."

The traditional WOM and eWOM differ from each other in multiple ways. One of the biggest differences is the number of consumers that can be reached. In other words, the traditional WOM reaches the closest people, such as family and friends, whereas with eWOM it is possible to reach an enormous amount of people because the information can be shared limitlessly in the online

environment. Another difference is related to the identity of a message sender. In other words, the traditional WOM refers to face-to-face interactions, where the message is sent personally to another consumer, whereas with eWOM, the message sender can remain unknown. (Kim, Kandampully, Bilgihan, 2018.) It is also typical for eWOM to have the message in written form, and it is usually stored, which makes it possible to find again by searching a specific topic. It can be concluded, that eWOM is in multiple ways a more impactful way to communicate with other consumers when comparing to traditional WOM. (Lis & Neßler, 2014.)

With the development of social media and social SNSs, eWOM has been shifting toward a social eWOM (sWOM). This means that consumers use several different communities in SNSs to interact with each other all over the world. This makes it easy for consumers to seek knowledge about specific products or services, as well as write evaluations themselves. (Hajli, 2018.) According to Balaji, Khong, Chong, (2016), sWOM differs in some ways from eWOM. For example, sWOM occurs in social media platforms when eWOM occurs in other online forms. It is also typical for sWOM to be non-simultaneous, which means that non-verbal communication does not exist, and consumers cannot conclude anything, for example, from the tone of the voice. However, there is a higher social risk involved in sWOM than in eWOM, and the relationship between the message sender and recipient is usually a combination of strong and weak ties. Ties are usually strong when the relationship between a message sender and a message recipient is close enough. Usually, strong ties occur among the friends and family members, and thereby an emotional backup is available for decisions. Weak ties, on the other hand, refer to more distant relationships, such as co-workers, but still, make the process of information search easier. (Chu & Kim, 2011.)

According to Kudeshia & Kumar (2017), eWOM can also be categorized into four different groups by the meaning and use of different platforms. The first one is *specialized eWOM*, which means that consumers write their estimation of a specific product or service to webpages that aren't for selling purposes, such as rating forums. The second group is *affiliated with eWOM*, which means that consumers write their assessments of products and services to the webpages related to retail, such as Amazon. The third group is *social eWOM*, which means that consumers share information about certain brands, products, or services on different SNSs. The fourth group is *miscellaneous eWOM*, which differs from the previous one in that the information is shared on other social media platforms like blogs. This study focuses more on the aspect of social eWOM as the research is done on Facebook, which is one of the most popular SNSs in the whole world (Tien et al., 2019).

2.1.1 Social media and SNSs

The development of social media has created an opportunity for consumers to communicate with each other through a variety of different platforms. It has also changed people's roles in a way that they are both consumers and content

creators at the same time. The content that is created for different social media channels has become a significant source of information that consumers can rely on. It is also known to affect consumers' decision-making. (Pour & Lotfiyan, 2020.) According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content".

There are several ways to categorize social media. According to Mangold & Faulds (2009), social media channels can be categorized into several groups. Examples of these are *social networking sites (SNSs)* such as Facebook, *business networking sites* such as LinkedIn, and *creativity work-sharing sites* such as Youtube. On the other hand, according to Kudeshia & Kumar (2017), social media can be also divided into different orientations. These are *network-oriented social media*, which refers to interactions between colleagues, family members, and friends through different SNSs such as Facebook. The second group is *collaboration-based media*, which makes general knowledge easier to spread, for example, through blogs, webinars, or chats. The third group is *entertainment-based media*, which refers, for example, to digital games and is more for avocation purposes but where the interaction among consumers is still possible. Because social media as a construct is so wide, this study focuses on SNSs and precisely on Facebook.

One of the most used definitions for SNSs belongs to Boyd & Ellison (2007), who defines it "as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system." Based on this definition, the first SNSs could be identified at the end of the 1990s when SixDegrees.com was established, accompanying afterward, for example, by Friendster, LastFM, Youtube, and Facebook. Thus, the growth of SNSs has been fast, and thereby it has become a worldwide phenomenon. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007.) Each SNSs have different features and target groups, and therefore they reach different groups of consumers. For example, on Twitter, it is possible to follow totally strangers when MySpace offers possibilities to meet new people. Facebook, on the other hand, is usually used to communicate with friends and family members, that one has strong ties. (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017.)

As it was stated in the introduction part of this paper, Tien et al. (2019) defined Facebook to be one of the biggest social networking sites in the whole world. Because it reaches such a wide audience, it is one of the most important marketing communication channels of a company. This is also why many companies have brand pages in SNSs. (Pasternak, Veloutsou, Morgan-Thomas, 2017.) Because of the enormous audience that Facebook and Twitter have, they have become one of the most studied SNSs among the researchers (e.g., Balaji et al. 2016; Teng, Khong, Goh, Chong, 2014.) The previous research regarding SNSs has been focusing more on the aspects of social interactions, ties, influence, and identity on behalf of the consumers and SNSs as a tool of marketing communications on behalf of the companies (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017).

2.1.2 eWOM in SNSs

The development of different SNSs allows consumers to use eWOM to share their knowledge and information about specific brands, products, or services (Erkan & Evans, 2018). Because it is possible to spread the content to a wide audience of both familiar and unfamiliar consumers, the different SNSs have been considered to be powerful for eWOM (Chu & Kim, 2011). Because the information on SNSs is mostly created by consumers and is based on their knowledge and evaluations of products and services, other consumers consider it more beneficial. Because SNS makes it possible for consumers to interact with people they are already familiar with, the information is sought rather from different SNSs instead of other platforms. (Erkan & Evans, 2018.)

One of the most commonly known research about the motives that make consumers share and participate in eWOM in consumer-driven platforms is provided by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004). They recognized five main categories that motivate consumers to spread eWOM. The first one is *the focus-related utility*, which means that consumers spread eWOM about products and services if the information brings more value to the community. The second one is *the consumption utility*, which means that consumers can benefit from other consumers' evaluations of a product or a service if they ask for a piece of back-up information in the online community because it might motivate others to comment on the post. The third one is *the approval utility*, which means that consumers are pleased with the information shared in SNSs. In other words, they are more likely to publicly commend the support for the group. The fourth one is *the moderator-related utility*, which means that behind the consumer interaction, there might be a moderator that can ease different operations, such as reclamations. The fifth one is *the homeostasis utility*, which means that consumers are constantly aiming toward a harmonized life. In other words, if consumers are disappointed at some product or service, they try to return the harmony by adducing positive feelings in their comments, which on the other hand might reduce negative ones. (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004.)

In addition to consumers' interaction with other consumers in SNSs, they can interact with companies as well (Pour & Lotfiyan, 2020). Also, companies have started to see the potential that interacting with consumers might create. In other words, they create consumers the possibility to interact with them in exchange for an opportunity to get valuable feedback and new customers. Thus, companies have started to see the value of eWOM for their marketing communication strategy. (Ali et al., 2020.) However, according to previous studies, the content that consumers create in different SNSs is considered more credible than the one companies create. Thus, when the eWOM is occurring between consumers, the source of it is considered more trustworthy. (Chen & Xie, 2008.)

The previous studies have been proved that engaging in eWOM on different SNSs has an impact, for example, on the behavior and attitudes of consumers (e.g., Xiao, Louisa, Simeng, Ying, 2014; Abedi, Ghorbanzadeh, Rahehagh, 2019), as well as their purchase intention

(e.g., Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Tien et al., 2019), and product sales (e.g., Babić Rosario, Sotgiu, De Valck, Bijmolt, 2016).

2.2 eWOM credibility

The credibility of eWOM is quite a wide construct. It can be viewed through different features that are influencing one another. These features are related to the source, message as well as recipient. (Kapoor, Jayasimha, Sadh, 2020.) The source credibility occurs when the message receiver can count on the information of a message sender (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Message credibility, on the other hand, occurs when the message receiver considers the message itself as credible (Kapoor et al., 2020). According to Kapoor et al. (2020), the determinants of message credibility are *message structure, language intensity, the inclusion of evidence, and message attractiveness*.

The most known models that define the features of source credibility are the source models. These models include *the source-credibility model* and *the source-attractiveness model*. (Ohanian, 1990.) According to Lis (2013), the source-credibility model assumes that the information coming from a credible source usually has an impact on consumers' attitudes and views about certain things. There are two components that lead toward source credibility. These are *expertness* and *trustworthiness*, which were discovered in the research by Hovland et al. in 1953. (Ohanian, 1990.) Expertness means the capability of a message sender to make adept arguments (Kapoor et al., 2020), whereas trustworthiness refers to the sincerity and objectiveness of a message sender (Lis, 2013). After the source-credibility model, McGuire discovered the source-attractiveness model in 1985 (Ohanian, 1990). This model proposes that the message sender's attractiveness has an impact on how the message receiver experiences the effectiveness of a message. Social attractiveness can be compared to social homophily in which the source is considered credible if it reminds the other person enough. All in all, the factors influencing source credibility are *expertise, trustworthiness, and social homophily*. (Lis, 2013.)

However, the source models don't pay attention to the side of normative influence. In other words, the normative factors are also influencing eWOM credibility alongside the informational ones (Lis, 2013). This idea goes hand in hand with *the dual-process theory*, which is one of the recognized theories about how the received information impacts people (Cheung, Luo, Sia, Chen, 2009). Informational factors are based on reality and the consumer's perception of the information that arises during the interaction between other consumers, whereas normative factors tell how other consumers impact the message recipient and how the information is evaluated. (Cheung et al., 2009; Lis, 2013.)

According to Cheung et al. (2009), two types of normative factors exist. The first one is *recommendation consistency*, which means the conformability of eWOM messages that consumers make about similar products and services in

SNSs. The second one is *recommendation rating*, which tells other consumers' opinions about products or services through the ratings they give. Thus, the recommendation rating is a result of all the individual ratings. In the online environment, consumers can estimate the content for example based on the usefulness or quality of the information. Thus, if a product has a positive rating, the message receivers are more likely to consider it more credible than the negative one. (Cheung et al., 2009; Lis, 2013.)

Additionally, the pressure of a group has a normative influence. According to Chu & Kim (2011), this means that consumers are easily adapting to other consumer's expectations, which may lead to a change in attitudes, values, or norms. Also, if most of the group members agree with each other, the level of disagreement remains lower. Additionally, it is easier for consumers to trust other group members as a source of information if they are lacking knowledge of a certain product or service. In such case, then the opinion of a group gains more credibility than the opinion of an individual. This also diminishes the level of uncertainty of an individual. (Lis, 2013.)

Alongside the dual-process theory, other well-known theories explain how the received information is affecting peoples. Examples of these are *the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)*, *the Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM)* as well as *the Information Adoption Theory (IAM)*, which combines the ELM and *the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)* (Cheung et al., 2009; Tien et al., 2019.) However, these models for evaluating source credibility are quite antiquated. Thus, the development of social media and different SNSs have been causing worry about the suitability of these models to evaluate the source credibility. Also, as eWOM has created opportunities for consumers to communicate with other familiar or unfamiliar consumers in social networks, there has been incoherence in how these interactions impact the evaluation of eWOM. (Kapoor et al., 2020.)

Just lately, researchers have become interested in the credibility aspect of the content that is created in different social media channels as well as how consumers evaluate it and what are the factors behind it (O'Reilly, & Marx, 2011). Some of the previous studies (e.g., Ismagilova et al., 2020) have been studying the source credibility factors as individual dimensions that explain directly consumer behavior such as purchase intention whereas in other studies (e.g., Lis 2013; Tien et al., 2019) the source credibility factors have been researched as explaining factors for source credibility. In the light of the theory, expertise, trustworthiness, and social homophily are the features that define source credibility. Therefore, this study focuses to examine these features as explaining factors for source credibility, and further investigate how perceived eWOM credibility affects brand awareness and consumer behavior in the context of social media.

2.2.1 Expertise

Based on the source-credibility model, the expertness, or expertise of a source, is one of the remarkable components that impact credibility. Also, based on the

dual-process theory, expertise can be considered one of the informational factors that impact credibility. (Lis, 2013.) According to Hussain, Ahmed, Jafar, Rabnawaz, Jianzhou (2017), the concept of expertise consists of consumer's experiences, adept arguments, and information as well as how beneficial these are in the opinion of other consumers. Thus, the information that comes from experts is more genuine and thereby has an impact on the recipient's attitudes.

The expertise of a source impacts also the level of uncertainty of consumers (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Thus, whenever consumers are uncertain, they tend to rely on the information of a higher level of experience and knowledge (Tien et al., 2019). When evaluating the source expertise, the consumer can, for example, consider how often reviews are posted in the community, how does the content seem, and how long has the message sender been a member of the community (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Additionally, the comments made by other consumers are considered more convincing compared to the comments of some companies (Hussain et al., 2017). Previous studies have been recognized the influence of a higher level of expertness on the persuasiveness and the credibility of a message on other consumers (e.g., Lis, 2013; Tien et al., 2019; Teng et al., 2014). The assumption is that source expertise is based on knowledge and experience, which makes it more credible and therefore the experts should be able to assure the message recipient with their arguments (Lis, 2013). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Message sender's high level of expertise has a positive impact on perceived eWOM credibility.

2.2.2 Trustworthiness

According to the source-credibility model, trustworthiness is yet another important component that affects eWOM source credibility. Also, based on the dual-process theory, it is one of the informational factors impacting credibility as well. (Lis, 2013.) According to Ismagilova et al. (2020) and Lis (2013), the source of a message and the message itself are recognized as trustworthy "if the statement is judged valid, honest, and to the point". Trustworthiness and trust are sometimes handled as the same construct (Ohanian, 1990). However, trustworthiness is based more on the cognitive side, whereas trust is based more on the behavior of a consumer, where consumer's attitude toward other consumers is more trustful. (Lis, 2013.)

With eWOM, consumers are now able to communicate their experiences and views on certain products and services anonymously through SNSs. This means that they need to evaluate the trustworthiness of a message and the sender before approving the information spread in different SNSs. (Ismagilova et al., 2020.) However, because of the nature of eWOM, the message of the sender cannot be evaluated directly as trustworthy. Thereby, consumers use alternative ways to evaluate trustworthiness. These can be the level of objectivity and coherence of both content and information. Thus, objectivity and honesty play an

important role when evaluating the trustworthiness because it determines whether the message sender is considered as credible. (Lis, 2013.) To conclude, the more trustworthy the message sender, the more credible is also the source (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Based on this, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Message sender's high level of trustworthiness has a positive impact on perceived eWOM credibility.

2.2.3 Social homophily

As for the source-attractiveness model, attractiveness is also one of the components that affects eWOM source credibility. The attractiveness of a message sender seems to depend on the similarity to the message receiver. (Reichelt, Sievert, Jacob, 2014.) According to Teng et al. (2014), source attractiveness consists of three components. These are *familiarity*, *likeability*, and *similarity*. Familiarity refers to convenience when communicating with other consumers, whereas likeability means that there is some sort of attachment between the consumers based, for example, on personal features. Similarity, on the other hand, means that there are similarities between the consumers. (Teng et al., 2014.) Social attractiveness refers usually to *social homophily* (Lis, 2013), which refers to these similarities between the message sender and the message recipient (Chu & Kim, 2011). According to Ismagilova et al. (2020), these similarities can be based on *demographical features* such as gender, age, and educational level or *perceived features* such as values and beliefs.

Even when eWOM in SNSs differs from the traditional face-to-face interaction, consumers are still able to make conclusions about other consumers by checking and evaluating the user profiles as well as the contents of eWOM messages (Ismagilova et al., 2020). However, in the previous studies, it has been acknowledged that similarities in perceived features are, in fact, more important than demographical features. In other words, consumers appreciate the same kind of beliefs and values that they have themselves. This influences positively on social homophily and eWOM source credibility. (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Lis, 2013). Thus, consumers tend to interact with other consumers who have similar features by exchanging information with each other. This makes the information changing process more fluent and easier in a way. (Chu & Kim, 2011.) Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: A higher level of social homophily between the message sender and the message receiver has a positive impact on perceived eWOM credibility.

2.3 eWOM source credibility on brand awareness

Brand awareness together with the brand image is the base of brand knowledge (Keller, Aperia, Georgson, 2011, p.58). In other words, brand knowledge is based on consumers' memory about different associations related to certain brands (Langaro & de Fátima Salgueiro, 2018). According to Keller et al. (2011 p.58), the base for brand awareness and brand image is in consumers' memory. Thus, brand awareness defines how well they can recognize and remember a certain brand through its elements under varying circumstances whereas the brand image is more about how consumers perceive a brand through the brand-related associations they have in their minds.

Thus, brand awareness is created when consumers are recognizing the brand through its different elements, such as name, logo, or package by facing them continuously (Largano & de Fátima Salgueiro 2018). According to Keller et al. (2011, p. 60), brand awareness consists of *brand recognition* and *brand recall*. Brand recognition arises when consumers can remember the brand from its elements whereas brand recall refers to the memory and whether consumers can remember certain brands by the clues they are facing (Largano & de Fátima Salgueiro, 2018; Keller et al., 2011, p.60).

With the development of SNSs, consumers have become an active part of the marketing communication process. In other words, consumers aren't just consuming the brand's products and services, but they are also sharing their experiences and evaluations about them as well as creating new content. When consumers have positive experiences with certain brands, they become more faithful toward them. This means that consumers tend to share their knowledge easily through eWOM with a positive tone in the conversations. Thus, they are continuously creating brand awareness without even noticing it. (Hutter et al., 2013.)

For some reason, the impact of eWOM credibility in SNSs on brand awareness has gained little attention among the researchers. Barreda et al. (2015) examined how virtual environment and rewards, as well as system and information qualities, affect brand awareness and WOM of consumers in the travel industry. They found out that among other factors, information quality which consists of credible, honest, and updated information, influenced positively on brand awareness. Thus, it has been acknowledged that eWOM interaction in SNSs affects positively brand awareness especially in long-term. (Barreda et al., 2015.) Additionally, as the C2C sponsored pages in SNSs have been recognized as more powerful and the eWOM created by other consumers more credible (Tien et al., 2019; Barreda et al., 2015.), the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Perceived eWOM credibility of Facebook group members increase brand awareness of consumers.

2.3.1 Brand awareness on purchase intention

Brand awareness has been acknowledged to have an important role in consumer decision-making (Keller et al., 2011, p.60). According to Hutter et al. (2013), the hierarchy of effects (HOE) models is describing the process of consumer decision-making on a more mental level. This means that consumers are processing marketing communication knowledge through three steps, which are *cognitive step*, *affective step*, and *conative step*. The cognitive step refers to the thinking process when the affective step refers to the feelings that are arising toward the product or service, and the conative step, on the other hand, activates consumers to perform. One of the most known HOE models is *the AIDA model*, which includes the steps of *awareness*, *interests*, *desire*, and *action*. Brand awareness is related to the first step of these models because consumers start their decision-making by first gaining awareness about the brand and its products and services. (Hutter et al., 2013.)

According to Keller et al. (2011, pp.60-61), three reasons have been acknowledged to have an essential impact on consumer decision-making. The first reason is *learning advantages*, which means that in order to build brand image, it is essential to generate brand connections to consumer's memory. In other words, companies need to succeed in creating the brand elements in a way that consumers can remember and recognize them. The second reason is *consideration advantages*, which means that if consumers are aware of a brand, it will most likely be a part of their consideration set. In other words, the brand is considered a good choice to purchase among the few other well-selected brands. The third reason is *choice advantages*, which means that brand awareness can influence the decisions about brands that are chosen for consideration set even if there aren't any other associations concerning it. (Keller et al., 2011, pp.60-61.)

Most of the previous studies have been focusing mainly on examining the influence of brand communities on consumer's brand awareness and purchase intentions. For example, Hutter et al. (2013) examined how eWOM interactions in the Facebook fan page of a car manufacturer, MINI, impact eWOM activities, brand awareness, and consumer's intention to purchase. They also investigated whether the created annoyance influenced these. They found out that consumer's eWOM interactions and engagement in a specific fan page affected positively brand awareness and thereby impacted also consumer's purchase intention, as well as eWOM activities.

2.4 eWOM source credibility on purchase intention

Consumer's purchase intention has always had a central role in the field of marketing. According to Kunja & Gvrk (2018), consumer purchase intention can be defined as "the process through which the consumer's beliefs or assumptions lead to the intention to purchase". The relationship between purchase intention

and behavior, though, is very tight. In other words, an intention to buy a product or service usually forecasts the actual purchase behavior. (Kunja & Gvrk, 2018.)

Consumers are nowadays more eager to find information and reviews about products and services before making any decisions to purchase (Matute, Polo-Redondo, Utrillas, 2016). The ongoing development of different SNSs has made it possible for consumers to exchange information through social eWOM. Because the information shared in SNSs is often connected to various brands, it probably affects consumers' purchase intention. In fact, many of the previous studies has been acknowledged the connection between eWOM and purchase intention. (Erkan & Evans, 2016.) However, instead of social media and different SNSs, many of these studies have been researched this connection on other platforms such as discussion forums (e.g., Lee, Shi, Cheung, Lim, Sia, 2011) and blogs (e.g., Lin, Lu, Wu, 2012).

Consumers are considering eWOM more credible because it can be done anonymously (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Additionally, the eWOM in SNSs created by other consumers is considered more credible (Tien et al., 2019). Some of the previous studies have been acknowledged also the connection between eWOM source credibility and consumer purchase intention. For example, Zhang, Zhao, Cheung, Lee (2014) investigated in their study, whether the reviews that are done online about certain restaurants would impact consumers' decision-making process. They found out that source credibility, in fact, was a significant component that impacts directly on consumer's purchase intention. Also, Ismagilova et al. (2020) investigated in their study the influence of all three informational factors of source credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, and social homophily) separately on consumer purchase intention. They found out that the relationships between source credibility factors and consumer purchase intention were truly significant. Additionally, the eWOM credibility impacts also eWOM adoption, which, on the other hand, is connected to purchase intention (Lis, 2013). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: Perceived eWOM credibility of Facebook group members have a positive impact on consumer purchase intention.

2.5 eWOM source credibility on eWOM intention and behavior

The phenomenon of eWOM has gained huge attention among researchers in the past decade. However, the aspect of consumer's intention to spread eWOM on different SNSs has remained slight. (Cheung & Lee, 2012.) In addition to the previously explained motives behind consumer's eWOM intention by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), the more recent study concerning this matter is provided by Cheung & Lee (2012). They indicated that based on the previous theories, four variables affect consumers' intention to share eWOM. The first one is *the egoistic motivation*, which means that the only purpose in spreading eWOM is to

benefit from it oneself. The second one is *collective motivation*, which means that the information is shared in online communities to benefit all other group members. The third one is *altruistic motivation* which means that the information is shared to benefit others more than the one that is sharing the information. The fourth one is *principlistic motivation*, which means that the aim of sharing the information is to maintain the moral aspect, such as justice. They found out in their study that three main factors are affecting consumers' eWOM intention. These are *reputation*, which refers to egoistic motivation, *sense of belonging*, which refers to collective motivation, and *enjoyment of helping others*, which, on the other hand, refers to altruistic motivation. (Cheung & Lee, 2012.)

EWOM behavior is always considering consumers' rational view. This means that the behavior is always highlighting the aspects of expenses and utility to a consumer. (Cheung & Lee, 2012.) According to Chu & Kim (2011), there are three behavioral standpoints concerning eWOM in different SNSs. These are *opinion seeking*, *opinion giving*, and *opinion passing*. Thus, consumers that are actively seeking opinions are relying more on others in their decision-making regarding product purchasing, whereas consumers that are actively giving opinions may impact powerfully on other consumers' opinions. Online passing behavior, on the other hand, means that information is easier to find when consumers are actively spreading it. However, with eWOM in different SNSs, it is possible to adopt many of these standpoints at the same time. Thereby, consumer's behavior and role in SNSs can impact significantly, for example, brand engagement. (Chu & Kim, 2011.)

The previous studies have been shown how the eWOM behavior of male and female consumers differs from one another. Thus, women are engaging more in eWOM on SNSs, which means that they create and post content on different SNSs as well as comment on other consumer's posts. Also, women tend to suggest products and services to other consumers. All in all, it seems that women are more interested in creating and maintaining their social relationships with others as well as gaining information from different networks when men tend to look for information on a general level. (Krasnova, Veltri, Eling, Buxmann, 2017.) Also, Mishra, Maheswarappa, Maity, Samu (2018) investigated in their study, for example, the meaning of peers, and gender in adolescent's eWOM behavior. They found out that both the normative and informative impact of peers affected the eWOM behavior of adolescents. In other words, the normative impact occurs when consumers are ready to behave by the standards of online communities, whereas the informative impact occurs when there are enough trust and faith toward the information that impacts the behavior. Thus, male adolescents' eWOM behavior was influenced by the norms of peers whereas female adolescents' eWOM behavior was influenced by the credibility of shared knowledge. (Mishra et al., 2018.)

Sharing the information can be considered as a part of a "public-good" phenomenon. This means that consumers are willing to share information that can benefit all other group members through eWOM interactions. Especially if consumers are considering themselves as experts regarding certain products or services, they are sharing the information without any hesitation and vice versa.

(Cheung & Lee, 2012.) The previous studies have been also recognized the connection between eWOM behavior and some of the source credibility features such as social homophily and trustworthiness (Chu & Kim, 2011). Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H6: Perceived eWOM credibility of Facebook group member has a positive impact on eWOM intention.

H7: Perceived eWOM credibility of Facebook group member has a positive impact on eWOM behavior.

2.6 Research model

The research model and the hypotheses of this study have been formulated according to the theoretical literature explained previously in this chapter. This research model consists of eight constructs. Expertise, trustworthiness, and social homophily are based on the theoretical framework of the source models that are affecting eWOM source credibility. The hypotheses concerning the impact of eWOM source credibility on brand awareness, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior are also developed based on the previous research. The research model of this study can be seen in FIGURE 2 below.

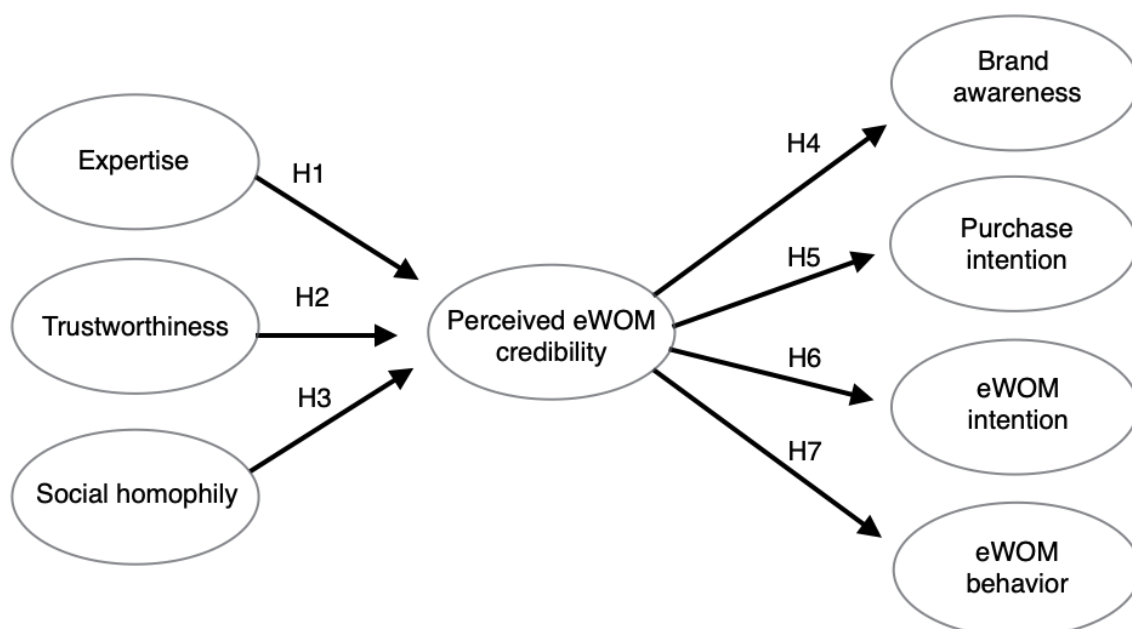


FIGURE 2 Research model

In TABLE 2 below, all the developed hypotheses of this study are summed up, and the main supporting references for each of them are presented. Based on this research model and the hypotheses, the questionnaire can be created.

TABLE 2 Summary of the hypotheses

Hypotheses	Main supporting references
H1: Expertise on perceived eWOM credibility	Lis (2013); Tien et al. (2019); Ismagilova et al. (2020)
H2: Trustworthiness on perceived eWOM credibility	Lis (2013); Ismagilova et al. (2020)
H3: Social homophily on perceived eWOM credibility	Lis (2013); Reichelt et al. (2014); Ismagilova et al. (2020)
H4: Perceived eWOM credibility on brand awareness	Hutter et al. (2013); Barreda et al. (2015); Largano & de Fátima Salgueiro (2018)
H5: Perceived eWOM credibility on purchase intention	Lis (2013); Zhang et al. (2014); Erkan & Evans (2016); Ismagilova (2020)
H6: Perceived eWOM credibility on eWOM intention	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004); Cheung & Lee (2012)
H7: Perceived eWOM credibility on eWOM behavior	Chu & Kim (2011); Cheung & Lee (2012); Krasnova et al. (2017); Mishra et al. (2018)

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter takes a closer look into the methodology behind this research. First, the chosen method and its suitability for this study are discussed, continuing then toward a data collection process. Next, the Facebook group that is chosen for this research is described continuing then toward the questionnaire and how it has been formulated. The final step in this chapter is to go through the data analysis process.

3.1 Quantitative research

Research design leads the research process itself in the direction that is wanted. The research design should be chosen in a way that it would be as effective as possible and create valuable information in the terms of research itself. (Hair et al. 2015, p.153.) It is necessary to acknowledge that there is a difference between research methodology and research methods. The methodology refers to the philosophy that is behind the whole research process whereas the method refers to a tool by which the research is conducted. (Adams, Khan, Raeside 2014, p.5.)

This study is conducted by using a quantitative research method. The philosophy behind quantitative research relies on an ontological assumption of objectiveness. In other words, the world is viewed through objects that are measurable and testable. The assumption is that when the same object is measured again, the results would be the same. (O’Gorman & MacIntosh 2014, p.56.) It is also typical for quantitative research to have a positivist epistemological approach in which the focus is more on facts that can be measured and hypotheses that are created and tested afterward. (O’Gorman & MacIntosh 2014, pp.59-60.)

The purpose of this study is to examine the connections between different variables of constructs as Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2008, p.25) also writes to be a typical thing to do in quantitative research. Quantitative research also relies heavily on deductive reasoning, which is a logical process that advances from the general aspect to a more detailed one (Adams et al. 2014 p.9; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, p.25). Thus, in this study, the process starts with a theory and hypotheses development and continues then to data collection and data analyses. After testing the hypotheses, it is possible to tell whether there is a connection between different variables or not. (O’Gorman & MacIntosh 2014, p.156).

Thus, quantitative research aims for objectivity, which leads to the assumption that the researcher is both distant and impartial. For example, in questionnaires, the purpose of a researcher is to operate behind the actual data collection process, because this makes it possible for them not to have too significant a role in the process. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, p.23.) After all, there are many advantages to use a quantitative approach. For example, the data is fast

to collect, the answers are comparable, and the nature of data is in numbers. (O’Gorman & MacIntosh 2014, p.156.)

3.2 Data collection

The nature and objectives of the research determine the type and amount of data that needs to be gathered for the study. Usually, quantitative research needs a large amount of data that can be gathered for example by a questionnaire. The development of digital technology has made the data collection process much faster and cost-effective. (Hair et al. 2015, pp.194-195.) Among the researchers, quantitative data collection is often called survey research (Hair et al. 2015, p.208). In a survey, the data is usually collected in written form for example with questionnaires or in oral form with interviews. (O’Gorman & MacIntosh 2014, p.165). Usually, quantitative data is collected by questionnaires or observations and can include everything from beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes to lifestyle and background information (Hair et al. 2015, p.208). Because this study is survey research, the data is gathered by a questionnaire.

According to Hair et al. (2015, 208), there are three ways of collecting data in survey research. These are *the self-completion method* which refers mostly to Internet-based surveys such as mail surveys, *interviewer completed method* which refers to a direct interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee, and *observation method* which on the other hand is collected for example by a click-through behavior that consumers do on the Internet. In this study, the survey data is collected through a self-completion method. In other words, the data is collected by a structured questionnaire that is done by Webropol 3.0. The questionnaire is executed in a Facebook group called “Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapsille”.

Next, a researcher needs to select a sampling technique. In other words, sampling needs to be considered in a way that has a similar characteristic to the whole target population. (Adams et al. 2014, pp.72-73.) According to Adams et al. (2014, pp.72-73), two different sampling techniques exist. These are *probability sampling* in which every individual of a population has the same opportunity to be chosen as a part of a sample and *non-probability sampling* in which the selection of members is based more on an opinion of a researcher. Probability sampling is usually used in quantitative research. Thus, the sample is selected randomly which confirms the objectivity. Also, the findings can be generalized with a certain level of accuracy. It can be also guaranteed that the sample is represented well. (Hair et al. 2015, pp.171; 175.)

However, in this study, the data is collected with non-probability sampling and more specific with convenience sampling. In other words, the sample is collected in a way that would provide the most relevant information for the research and people are most likely to be ready to participate in this study (Hair et al., 2015, p.183). Thus, in this study, the questionnaire is targeted at a specific Facebook group that would be most likely to provide the information needed.

3.2.1 Facebook group under study

In this study, the research is executed in a Facebook group called "Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapsille". This group was established in January 2020 and has over 10.000 followers in October 2020. People can access this group with the approval of the moderators after first answering a few questions. The idea of this group is to provide information about kid's shoes that follows official recommendations that can be found on the website of "Terveyskirjasto".

This group is created by consumers and therefore the eWOM can be considered as volunteered. Certain brands fulfill the criteria of recommended shoes and the conversations are mostly about them. In other words, people are asking, sharing opinions and recommendations as well as helping other consumers in this group. Thus, this group is only for conversations and recommendations, which means that all kinds of selling and buying are forbidden. This group suits well for this study because it is very active, and it is meant only for the conversations that are done by the consumers voluntarily. Further, this group is also suitable for examining the source credibility aspect in C2C eWOM, because the group consists of consumers instead of professionals who would have competence to justify their knowledge about health concerns regarding kid's feet or recommendations regarding kid's shoes.

3.2.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed in a way that the structure of the questions would be as short as possible and as clear as possible because this might help people to have the energy to answer the questions as it doesn't take too long. When designing the questionnaire, it is necessary to consider that the questions are relevant in the terms of research and give the information that is valuable and important for further analysis. (O'Gorman & MacIntosh 2014, p. 167) With this in mind, the questions for this questionnaire were formulated based on prior research. The questionnaire with the constructs and measures can be found in APPENDIX 1.

The questions regarding expertise and trustworthiness were formulated based on the previous research of Lis (2013), and social homophily was based both on the research of Lis (2013) and Chu & Kim (2011). The questions regarding eWOM credibility were formulated according to the previous studies of Cheung et al. (2009) and Lis (2013). The questions regarding brand awareness, on the other hand, were formulated based on the previous research of Hutter et al. (2013) and Langaro et al. (2018), whereas the questions regarding purchase intention were formulated based on the research of Prendercast et al. (2010), Hutter et al. (2013), and Tien et al. (2019). The questions regarding eWOM intention were formulated according to the previous study of Cheung & Lee (2012), whereas the questions regarding eWOM behavior were formulated according to the research of Chu & Kim (2011) and Lee & Choi (2019). All these constructs were measured through a seven-point Likert scale, where

1=totally disagree and 7=totally agree. Demographical and background questions regarding respondents' gender, age, and time that respondents spent in the Facebook group "Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapselle" in a week were asked at the end of the questionnaire.

The questions were translated from English into Finnish. The questionnaire was pretested by two persons. Based on the pre-testing, some of the original words were altered in order for them to be more understandable. The questionnaire included a total of 35 questions. The questionnaire began with a letter to inform all the respondents about the purpose of the study and about the raffle to which everyone who answered the questionnaire was able to participate if wanted.

The survey was executed at the beginning of January 2021 by using Webropol 3.0 online survey software. The link to the questionnaire was published in the Facebook group called "Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapselle". This questionnaire was open between the 5th and 10th of January. During that time, the questionnaire was opened 332 times and a total of 151 responses was received. This means that the response rate to the questionnaire was 45,5 %. Because the response rate is under 50%, it needs to be taken under consideration when results are generalized to be concerned the whole population.

3.3 Data analysis

The data that was collected by Webropol 3.0 software was then transferred to the IBM SPSS Statistic 24 software. There the data was checked in case that there were any missing values or defective answers. However, in this case, all the questions in the questionnaire were mandatory, which means that there were not any missing values or defective answers. Next, the variables were given names to match the corresponding factor names that were drawn from the theoretical background of this study. For the background information, the SPSS Statistic 24 software was used to do some basic statistical analysis like frequencies and how the percentages were distributed for each item. Afterward, the data were transferred into SmartPLS 3.3.3 software for further analysis.

The research model and the developed hypotheses of this study were tested by SmartPLS 3.3.3 software. This software is good when doing partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). It as a method is strongly based on the theory and the collected data. The use of PLS-SEM has become a more and more common method to use in analyzing the data. It makes it possible for researchers to evaluate the causal relationships between different variables as well as with different constructs. It is also very good for exploratory and confirmatory research in situations where researchers need to analyze models that are complex and includes several constructs and variables. (Yeo, Goh & Rezaei, 2017; Sarstedt & Ringle, 2017.) Also, according to Sarstedt & Ringle (2017), some sort of flexibility exists what comes to data requirements and

relationship determination of variables and constructs. With this in mind, the confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with PLS-SEM by using SmartPLS 3.3.3 software.

4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings of the research are presented. First, the background information and a profile of the respondents are presented. Next, the measurement model of this study is evaluated forwarding then with a structural model evaluation. At the end of this chapter, the alternative model configuration is presented starting also with measurement model evaluation and afterward continuing toward a structural model evaluation.

4.1 Background information

In table 3 below, the background information of the respondents is presented. A total of 151 respondents answered a questionnaire that was executed in the Facebook group “Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapselle”. As it was assumed, most of the respondents in this study were females 145 (96.0 %). Only 2 of the respondents were males (1.3 %), and 4 (2.6 %) didn’t want to tell their gender. What comes to age, the majority of the respondents (66.2 %) were between 25 and 34 years old. The second major age group was 35-44 (29.1 %), and the third one was 20-24 (4.6 %). The majority of the respondents (65.6 %) spent time under one hour in a week in the Facebook group under study, 28.5 % spent time 1-2 hours, 4.6 % spent 3-4 hours, and 1.3 % 5 hours or more.

TABLE 3 Background information

	N.	%
Gender		
Female	145	96
Male	2	1.3
Don't want to tell	4	2.6
Total	151	100
Age		
20-24	7	4.6
25-34	100	66.2
35-44	44	29.1
Total	151	100
Spent time in a week		
Under 1 h	99	65.6
1-2 h	43	28.5
3-4h	7	4.6
5 h or more	2	1.3
Total	151	100

4.2 Measurement model

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed by partial least square structural equation modeling with the SmartPLS 3.3.3 software. In this study, a two-step method was used suggested by Anderson & Gerbin (1988), starting with the examination of the measurement model, reliability and validity, forwarding with a structural model evaluation and hypotheses testing. According to Anderson & Gerbin (1988), the purpose of confirmatory factor analysis is to define the relationships between factors and variables which leads toward a more thorough examination of constructs. At this point, a total of five items (TRUST1, SOHO 1-3, and BEHAV1) were removed from the analysis because of the low loadings.

The reliability of the measurement model was evaluated through the factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha values, and Composite Reliability. The reliability of an individual variable can be evaluated through the factor loadings. The factor loadings of each item should be above .70 to reach the level of satisfaction (Sarstedt & Ringle, 2017). All factor loadings in this study are above .70, which indicates that they achieved the level of satisfaction.

Next, the internal consistency reliability was measured through the values of Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability. In general, Cronbach's Alpha values are lower than values of composite reliability. However, the values of both measures should be between .70 and .95 to express satisfactory levels of reliability. The values above .95 indicate that the items are too similar or irrelevant for the measurement model. (Sarstedt & Ringle, 2017.) In this study, all the values of both reliability measures are above .07 but below .95, which indicates that the reliability is good and reaches the level of satisfaction.

T-values, on the other hand, indicate the statistical significance of each item. It was measured using bootstrapping. T-values should be above 1.96 to be statistically significant (Hair et al. 2015, p.447). All the t-values of each item in this study are above 1.96 which indicates that all the items are statistically significant. The measures concerning the reliability of a measurement model are presented in TABLE 4 below.

TABLE 4 Factor loadings, t-values, Cronbach's Alphas, and composite reliability

FACTOR	ITEM	FACTOR LOADINGS	T- VALUES	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	COMPOSITE RELIABILITY
Expertise	EXPERT 1	.766	16.90	.871	.907
	EXPERT 2	.799	23.21		
	EXPERT 3	.755	16.17		
	EXPERT 4	.853	33.24		
	EXPERT 5	.886	45.75		
Trustworthiness	TRUST 2	.882	40.61	.796	.880
	TRUST 3	.819	26.12		
	TRUST 4	.824	17.10		
Social homophily	SOHO 4	.837	17.38	.873	.921
	SOHO 5	.915	54.74		
	SOHO 6	.922	44.42		
eWOM credibility	CRED1	.822	24.60	.807	.886
	CRED 2	.868	33.86		
	CRED 3	.858	38.59		
Brand awareness	BA 1	.857	23.91	.855	.901
	BA 2	.822	15.33		
	BA 3	.848	15.64		
	BA 4	.803	15.53		
Purchase intention	PI 1	.863	25.01	.913	.936
	PI 2	.910	27.39		
	PI 3	.949	55.41		
	PI 4	.866	12.05		
	PI 5	.711	10.38		
eWOM intention	INT 1	.917	45.49	.905	.940
	INT 2	.929	50.55		
	INT 3	.903	42.77		
eWOM behavior	BEHAV 2	.741	7.91	.805	.862
	BEHAV 3	.766	10.62		
	BEHAV 4	.895	35.93		
	BEHAV 5	.711	6.58		

After this, the convergent validity of the measurement model was examined with average variance extracted (AVE) values. According to Sarstedt & Ringle (2017), the AVE value should be a minimum of .50 for the construct to explain at least half of the variance of its variables averagely. If this is the case, then less than half of the variance is derived from a measurement error. All the AVE values of this study are above .50, indicating that the convergent validity of the measurement model is achieved.

The last thing to do when evaluating the measurement model is to evaluate the discriminant validity of the constructs. Discriminant validity tells if the constructs correlate too much with each other (Sarstedt & Ringle, 2017). This was measured through a Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of AVE should be above the correlation between the factors to tell that discriminant validity exists (Yeo et al., 2017). As can be seen from TABLE 5 below, all the squared AVE values of this study reached the level of acceptability which indicates that the discriminant validity is also achieved.

TABLE 5 Average variance extracted (AVE), square root of AVEs, correlations

	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Brand awareness	.694	.833							
Expertise	.662	.294	.813						
Purchase intention	.746	.473	.351	.863					
Social homophily	.796	.347	.554	.413	.892				
Trustworthiness	.709	.273	.718	.302	.390	.842			
eWOM behavior	.611	.428	.526	.407	.501	.366	.781		
eWOM credibility	.722	.324	.749	.315	.470	.789	.379	.850	
eWOM intention	.839	.514	.439	.405	.487	.326	.770	.374	.916

Note: The diagonals refer to the square root of AVE and off-diagonals refers to the correlation.

4.3 Structural model

After ensuring the reliability of the measurement model, the next step is to evaluate the structural model (Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams, Hair, 2014). The hypotheses developed in chapter 2 were tested with SmartPLS 3.3.3 by calculating the PLS algorithm using a path weighting scheme and maximum iterations of 300. Also, the bootstrapping was calculated with 500 subsamples. These tests gave the values of *path coefficients* (β), *effect sizes* (f^2), and *the coefficient of determinations* (R^2). Additionally, the blindfolding test was also calculated with an omission distance of 7 to get the values of *cross-validated redundancy measures* (Q^2).

4.3.1 Direct effect

First, the direct effects were evaluated by starting with the evaluation of R^2 values. These values refer to the predictive accuracy of the model and are measuring the variance of all independent variables that are linked to dependent variables. The values of R^2 vary between 0 and 1. Thus, higher values indicate better predictive accuracy of the model. Usually, the criteria of substantial (.75), moderate (.50), and weak (.25) have been used when evaluating the R^2 values. However, these scales have been debated. In other words, when evaluating the R^2 values, similar studies should be examined. (Sarstedt et al., 2014.) For example, in the previous studies concerning eWOM credibility on consumer behavior, the R^2 values around .10 have been considered acceptable (Tien et al., 2019). In this study, expertise, trustworthiness, and social homophily are explaining over half (69.9 %) of the variance in eWOM credibility, 10.5 % of the variance in brand awareness, 9.9 % of the variance in purchase intention, 14,4 % of the variance in eWOM behavior, and 14 % of the variance in eWOM intention. The f^2 value, on the other hand, measures the impact of predictive constructs to an R^2 value of

a dependent variable. The criteria of small ($>.02$), medium ($>.15$), and large ($>.35$) have been used to estimate the effect sizes. (Hair et al., 2018.)

The other measure for predictive accuracy is Q^2 . This measure is based on the blindfolding method, which combines both the predictive and original values of the variables. Differences between these values indicate a higher value of Q^2 . In general, values higher than 0 are acceptable, meaning that a structural model achieves predictive accuracy. In a more detailed level, the scale of small (0), medium (.25), and large (.50) have been used when evaluating the Q^2 values. (Hair et al., 2018.) In this study, the Q^2 values of brand awareness, purchase intention, eWOM behavior, and eWOM intention are above 0, indicating small predictive relevance, and eWOM credibility above .25, indicating medium predictive relevance. All in all, the predictive accuracy of this research model is at an acceptable level.

Lastly, the path coefficients (β) were evaluated. Path coefficients measure the significance of different relationships of constructs. It was measured using the bootstrapping method. The values of path coefficients should vary between -1 and +1, indicating that the values close to +1 stand for a strong positive relationship between the variables, whereas the values close to -1 stand for a strong negative relationship between the variables. (Sarstedt et al., 2014.) TABLE 6 below presents the direct effects model with the values of path coefficients, effect sizes, coefficient of determination, and cross-validated redundancy.

TABLE 6 Direct effects model

	β	f^2	Decision
H1: Expertise \rightarrow Perceived eWOM credibility	.329***	.141	Supported
H2: Trustworthiness \rightarrow perceived eWOM credibility	.519***	.429	Supported
H3: Social homophily \rightarrow Perceived eWOM credibility	.085 ^{ns}	.016	Not supported
H4: Perceived eWOM credibility \rightarrow brand awareness	.324***	.117	Supported
H5: Perceived eWOM credibility \rightarrow purchase intention	.315***	.110	Supported
H6: Perceived eWOM credibility \rightarrow eWOM intention	.374***	.162	Supported
H7: Perceived eWOM credibility \rightarrow eWOM behavior	.379***	.167	Supported
	R²	Q²	
Brand awareness	.105	.058	
Purchase intention	.099	.066	
EWOM behavior	.143	.070	
EWOM credibility	.696	.487	
EWOM intention	.140	.112	

Notes: *** $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; ns - not significant.

As presented in TABLE 6, expertise and trustworthiness have a strong positive relationship with eWOM source credibility, the trustworthiness to be the strongest one ($\beta = 0.519$, $f^2 = 0.429$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, H1 and H2 are supported. Social homophily, on the other hand, had a weak path coefficient ($\beta = 0.085$, t-value 1.45), indicating that the relationship with eWOM source credibility is not

supported. Thus, H3 is not supported. eWOM source credibility had a strong positive relationship with brand awareness, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior. The strongest relationships eWOM source credibility has with both eWOM behavior ($\beta = 0.379$, $p < 0.01$), and eWOM intention ($\beta = 0.374$, $p < 0.01$), thereby providing support for all H4, H5, H6, and H7. FIGURE 3 below presents the research model with the path coefficients and t-values for direct effects.

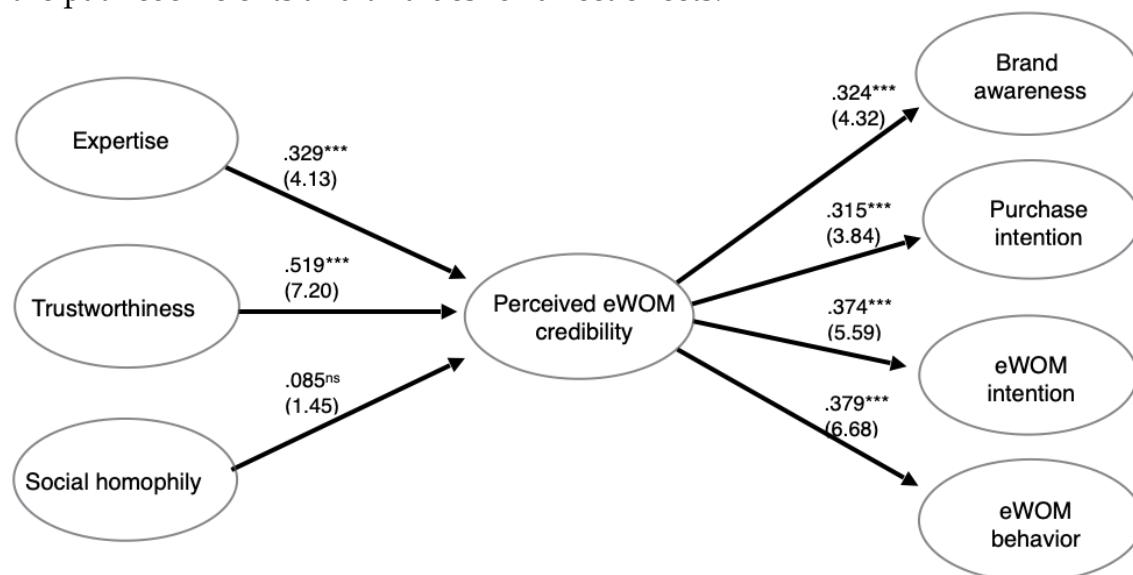


FIGURE 3 Research model with path coefficients and t-values

4.3.2 Total Effects

The measure of total effects sums the direct effects and indirect effects between different constructs. This makes the examination of the structural model more encompassing. (Sarstedt & Ringle, 2017.) In this study expertise, social homophily, and trustworthiness had also indirect effects on brand awareness, purchase intention, eWOM behavior, as well as eWOM intention. TABLE 7 below presents the path coefficients of the total effects. As can be seen from the table, the path coefficients of expertise and trustworthiness were significant. However, the significance of those is not as strong as it is regarding eWOM source credibility. Therefore, it is better if brand awareness, purchase intention, eWOM behavior, and eWOM intention are explained through eWOM source credibility. Social homophily remains to have path coefficients that are not significant.

TABLE 7 Total effects

	BA	PI	BEHAV	CRED	INT
Expertise	.106***	.104***	.125***	.329***	.123***
Social homophily	.028 ^{ns}	.027 ^{ns}	.032 ^{ns}	.085 ^{ns}	.032 ^{ns}
Trustworthiness	.168***	.163***	.197***	.519***	.194***
eWOM credibility	.324***	.315***	.379***		.374***

Notes: *** $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; ns - not significant.

4.4 Alternative model configuration

After evaluating both models of the study, researchers might be interested in comparing and testing different model configurations that are related to different theories (Hair et al., 2018). In this study, the main focus has been investigating specifically the impact of eWOM source credibility on brand awareness, purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior on Facebook. As it was presented in section 2.3, and in the results, eWOM credibility influences positively on brand awareness. Also, in previous studies, it has been acknowledged that brand awareness impacts positively on purchase intention (e.g., Hutter et al., 2013). Additionally, previous studies have been shown that different motives drive people to share their experiences for example about products they have been purchased. This indicates that there is a connection between purchase intention and eWOM intention as well as purchase intention and eWOM behavior (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Cheung & Lee, 2012). As the present study includes all these constructs, the interest was also testing the following research model in FIGURE 4:

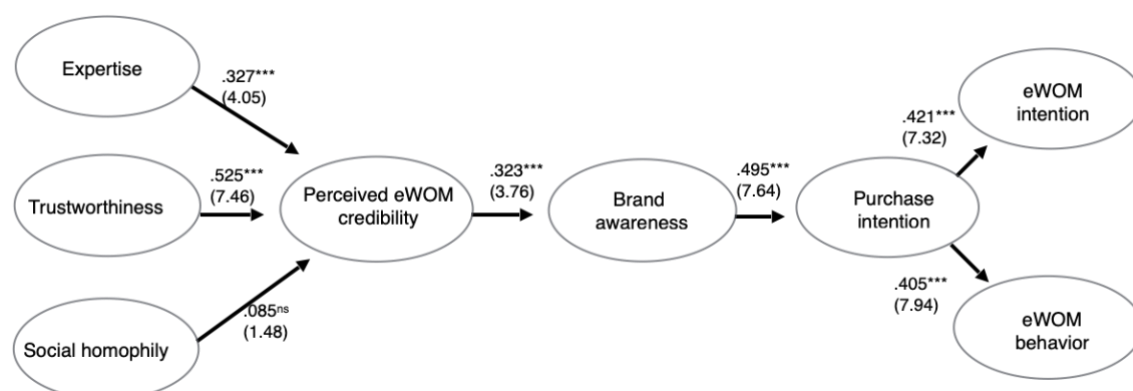


FIGURE 4 A model configuration with the path coefficients and t-values

4.4.1 Measurement model

Also, in this model configuration, all factor loadings of different items are above .70, which means that they reach the level of satisfaction. Besides, all Cronbach's alpha values and composite reliability values are between .70 and .95, which also refers to the level of satisfaction. Thus, the reliability of the measures is good. Lastly, all the t-values of this model are above 1.96 which means that all the individual items are statistically significant for the constructs. The measures concerning the reliability of a measurement model are presented in TABLE 8 below.

TABLE 8 Factor loadings, t-values, Cronbach's Alphas, and composite reliability of a model configuration

FACTOR	ITEM	FACTOR LOADINGS	T-VALUES	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	COMPOSITE RELIABILITY
Expertise	EXPERT 1	.766	17.44	.871	.907
	EXPERT 2	.799	23.06		
	EXPERT 3	.754	15.45		
	EXPERT 4	.853	36.65		
	EXPERT 5	.886	50.29		
Trustworthiness	TRUST 2	.882	41.51	.796	.880
	TRUST 3	.819	27.16		
	TRUST 4	.825	17.50		
Social homophily	SOHO 4	.836	16.97	.873	.921
	SOHO 5	.915	55.44		
	SOHO 6	.922	44.10		
eWOM credibility	CRED1	.808	20.66	.807	.886
	CRED 2	.872	36.67		
	CRED 3	.868	46.59		
Brand awareness	BA 1	.865	43.65	.855	.899
	BA 2	.796	16.97		
	BA 3	.849	25.70		
	BA 4	.813	25.46		
Purchase intention	PI 1	.837	16.81	.913	.936
	PI 2	.922	58.04		
	PI 3	.945	78.53		
	PI 4	.848	10.17		
	PI 5	.751	14.50		
eWOM intention	INT 1	.942	106.58	.905	.940
	INT 2	.933	67.95		
	INT 3	.872	30.62		
eWOM behavior	BEHAV 2	.897	47.30	.849	.906
	BEHAV 4	.812	18.88		
	BEHAV 5	.899	42.50		

As noted in section 4.2, all the AVE values should be a minimum of .50 for the construct to explain at least half of the variance of its variables averagely. As can be seen from TABLE 9 below, all the AVE values of the model configuration are above .50, indicating that the convergent validity of this measurement model is also achieved. Also, the discriminant validity was measured through the Fornell-Larcker criterion. TABLE 9 below presents also that all the square roots of AVE values are exceeding the correlation between the

factors, which indicates that they are at an acceptable level. Thus, the model configuration also achieves discriminant validity.

TABLE 9 Average variance extracted (AVE), square root of AVEs, correlations of a model configuration

	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Brand awareness	.691	.831							
Expertise	.662	.300	.813						
Purchase intention	.746	.495	.350	.864					
Social homophily	.796	.348	.554	.413	.892				
Trustworthiness	.710	.276	.718	.299	.391	.842			
eWOM behavior	.757	.530	.413	.405	.480	.233	.870		
eWOM credibility	.721	.323	.750	.308	.471	.792	.278	.849	
eWOM intention	.840	.510	.431	.421	.492	.325	.854	.362	.916

Note: The diagonals refer to the square root of AVE and off-diagonals refers to the correlation.

4.4.2 Structural model

The structural model evaluation was again started with evaluating the R^2 values. In this model configuration, expertise, trustworthiness, and social homophily are explaining 70.1 % of the variance in eWOM credibility, 10.4 % of the variance in brand awareness, 24.5 % of the variance in purchase intention, 16.4 % of the variance in eWOM behavior, and 17.7 % of the variance in eWOM intention. Also, the Q^2 values were measured. In this model configuration, the brand awareness, purchase intention, eWOM behavior, and eWOM intention are above 0, indicating small predictive relevance, and eWOM credibility clearly above .25, indicating medium predictive relevance. Thus, the predictive accuracy of the model configuration is at an acceptable level. The direct effects of a model configuration with path coefficients, effect sizes, coefficient of determination, and cross-validated redundancy are presented in TABLE 10 below.

TABLE 10 Direct effects of a model configuration

	β	f^2	Decision
Expertise → perceived eWOM source credibility	.327***	.142	Supported
Trustworthiness → perceived eWOM source credibility	.525***	.429	Supported
Social homophily → perceived eWOM source credibility	.085 ^{ns}	.017	Not supported
Perceived eWOM source credibility → brand awareness	.323***	.117	Supported

Brand awareness → purchase intention	.495***	.325	Supported
Purchase intention → eWOM intention	.421***	.215	Supported
Purchase intention → eWOM behavior	.405***	.196	Supported
	R²	Q²	
Brand awareness	.104	.059	
Purchase intention	.245	.174	
eWOM behavior	.164	.115	
eWOM credibility	.701	.488	
eWOM intention	.177	.140	

Notes: *** $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; ns - not significant.

The path coefficients were evaluated next. As can be seen from TABLE 10 below, expertise ($\beta=0.327$, $f^2=0.142$, $p<0.01$) and trustworthiness ($\beta=0.525$, $f^2=0.429$, $p<0.01$) have a strong positive relationship with eWOM credibility. Social homophily, on the other hand, has a weak path coefficient ($\beta=0.085$, $t=1.48$), which indicates that the relationship between it and eWOM source credibility is not statistically significant. Thus, the relationship is not supported. EWOM source credibility has a strong relationship with brand awareness ($\beta=0.323$, $f^2=0.117$, $p<0.01$), indicating support for the relationship. Brand awareness, on the other hand, has a strong relationship with purchase intention ($\beta=0.495$, $f^2=0.325$, $p<0.01$), indicating support for the relationship. Purchase intention had also strong relationships with both eWOM intention ($\beta=0.421$, $f^2=0.215$, $p<0.01$) and eWOM behavior ($\beta=0.405$, $f^2=0.196$, $p<0.01$), giving support for the relationships. FIGURE 4 at the beginning of section 4.4 presents the research model with the path coefficients and t-values for direct effects.

Next, the total effects were evaluated which can be seen from TABLE 11 below. In the model configuration expertise, social homophily, and trustworthiness had also indirect effects on brand awareness, purchase intention, eWOM behavior, and eWOM intention. However, these effects were mostly not significant except for expertise and trustworthiness regarding brand awareness. This indicates that it is better if these relationships are explained through eWOM source credibility than as individual relationships. Brand awareness has also indirect effects on eWOM behavior and eWOM intention, which are significant. EWOM credibility, on the other hand, has indirect effects on purchase intention, eWOM behavior, and eWOM intention. The relationship with purchase intention is significant, but relationships with eWOM behavior and eWOM intention are not significant. This indicates that it is better to explain these relationships through brand awareness. Also, in this model, the values of social homophily toward other constructs are not significant.

TABLE 11 Total effects of a model configuration

	BA	PI	BEHAV	CRED	INT
Brand awareness		.495***	.200***		.208***

Expertise	.106***	.052 ^{ns}	.021 ^{ns}	.327***	.022 ^{ns}
Purchase intention			.405***		.421***
Social homophily	.027 ^{ns}	.014 ^{ns}	.005 ^{ns}	.085 ^{ns}	.006 ^{ns}
Trustworthiness	.170***	.084 ^{ns}	.034 ^{ns}	.525***	.035 ^{ns}
eWOM credibility	.323***	.160***	.065 ^{ns}		.067 ^{ns}

Notes: *** $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; ns - not significant.

Finally, the actual research model was compared to the alternative model configuration. It can be noticed that in both models, expertise and trustworthiness have a strong and quite equal relationship toward eWOM source credibility, whereas social homophily remains not have a statistically significant relationship toward eWOM source credibility. eWOM source credibility, on the other hand, seems to have a strong and quite equal relationship toward brand awareness in both models. However, even when in actual research model eWOM source credibility has also a strong relationship toward purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior, in model configuration the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intention as well as relationships between purchase intention and eWOM intention and purchase intention and eWOM behavior is statistically more significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that the alternative model configuration is actually better and follows the results of prior research, and also suits better when thinking about the theoretical aspect.

5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter the findings of this study in respect of the theoretical background are discussed, giving the answers also for the research questions. The discussion in this chapter is also a base for the managerial implications that are also proposed. The reliability and validity of this study are also evaluated in this chapter. Finally, this chapter discusses the limitations of this research and proposes some suggestions for future research.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

The previous studies regarding eWOM credibility have been mainly concentrating on the impact of source credibility on a message recipient. Thus, the research has been lacking the side of eWOM credibility on consumer behavior. (Ismagilova et al., 2020.) Just recently, the aspect of eWOM credibility in the social media context has been gaining interest among the researchers. In other words, researchers have become interested in investigating the factors, that affect the credibility of the content created in different social media channels as well as how consumers evaluate it. (O'Reilly, & Marx, 2011.) This study aimed to gain a better understanding of what is the impact of the informative factors on perceived eWOM source credibility. Furthermore, it was of interest to examine how perceived eWOM source credibility impacts brand awareness, and consumer behavior, such as purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior. Based on these aspects, the research questions of this study were the following:

Main research question:

- Is consumer-to-consumer electronic word-of-mouth considered to be credible in online communities maintained by consumers on Facebook?

Sub-research questions:

- How does the credibility of consumer-to-consumer electronic word-of-mouth affect brand awareness in the context of social media?
- How does the credibility of consumer-to-consumer electronic word-of-mouth affect consumer behavior, such as purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior in the context of social media?

Based on the source models, the credibility of eWOM is influenced by expertise, trustworthiness, and social attractiveness i.e., social homophily of a source (Ohanian, 1990). In other words, consumers estimate the credibility of a source

by the quality of the arguments that are made, how honest and objective the source seems to be, and whether the source has similarities with the message receiver (Lis, 2013; Kapoor et al., 2020). The results of this study are similar to the previous studies (e.g., Lis, 2013). In other words, expertise and trustworthiness are the two most remarkable factors that affect perceived eWOM source credibility. However, social homophily was not a statistically significant factor with perceived eWOM credibility or with any other construct of this study. This indicates that because eWOM occurs in an online environment, the social similarities are more difficult to perceive because people can choose the level of anonymity by choosing what information they share about themselves. Therefore, it is harder to gain a deeper picture of someone's personality. This also meets with the fact that eWOM can occur also with totally unfamiliar consumers (Kapoor et al., 2020). In this case, it is more likely to have more unfamiliar than familiar members in the Facebook group of over 10.000 members.

One direction of interest was also to investigate, how does the perceived eWOM credibility affects brand awareness of the members of the Facebook group under study. In this study, the connection between perceived eWOM credibility and brand awareness was statistically significant, which indicates that members of the Facebook group consider the source and shared information credible. Hence, the members of the group seemed to become aware of the different shoe brands that are following official recommendations. This is also supported for example by the research of Barreda et al. (2015), who found out that the more credible, honest, and updated the shared information, the greater is the influence on brand awareness. Additionally, Hutter et al. (2013) stated that consumers are more likely to share their experiences with the brands that they have positive experiences with. The results of this study indicate that this is also the case in this group, which increases the brand awareness among other members of the group.

As the connection between brand awareness and purchase intention has long been acknowledged (e.g., Hutter et al.), and was again confirmed in the model configuration of this study, one of the interests of this study was to investigate whether there is a connection also between perceived eWOM credibility and purchase intention. Based on the findings of this study, perceived eWOM credibility affects positively purchase intention, which is also supported by the previous studies (e.g., Zhang et al. 2014; Ismagilova et al. 2020). It seems that because the Facebook group under study is created and maintained by the consumers, and there is a possibility in a certain level of anonymity, the source of the information is considered credible. This thereby seems to have a positive impact on the purchase intention.

Finally, it was of interest to investigate whether there is a connection between perceived eWOM credibility and eWOM intention and eWOM behavior. The findings of this study show significance in the relationship between these constructs. First, because selling is forbidden in this Facebook group, it seems that the information shared in the group is beneficial for other consumers, which indicates that consumers are driven by altruistic motivation presented by (Cheung & Lee, 2012). Overall, the information shared

in online communities is usually based on consumers' experiences (Erkan & Evans, 2018), which indicates that the members of this Facebook group are experts at some level regarding the products and they share the information to benefit others more than themselves. Second, most of the participants of this study were females, which indicates that they are more active in different online communities. These results go hand in hand for example with the study of Krasnova et al. (2017), who found out that females spread the information more actively in different online communities compared to males, which also helps them to maintain and create new relationships. Additionally, the study of Mishra et al. (2018) gives support for the findings of this study, as they found out that young female's behavior seemed to be affected by the informative impact of the peers, which means that the credibility aspect influences their eWOM behavior.

5.2 Managerial implications

From the managerial viewpoint, this study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the eWOM interaction in Facebook and how it affects brand awareness and consumer behavior from the aspect of source credibility. The findings of this study indicate that online communities maintained by consumers are an effective fundament for eWOM interactions between consumers. Because the information in these online communities is considered credible, it is good to notice that it has a huge impact on consumers' brand awareness and their behavior such as purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior. Because eWOM is known to be one of the most impactful ways to communicate with others (Lis & Neßler, 2014), it should have an impact on companies' marketing communication strategies. Thus, when companies have a deeper understanding of consumer behavior and its effects for example on buying behavior, it will help them to develop their marketing communication strategies better.

Even when companies cannot control the content that is created by the consumers, it would be advisable to gain knowledge about their products and services from the conversations that appear in online communities. This helps companies to identify the needs as well as the problems that consumers may have regarding their products or services. Furthermore, this helps companies to improve their products and services to match customer's needs. However, the findings of this study indicate that because the content in online communities maintained by consumers is more credible, companies should pay attention to the informative factors such as expertise or trustworthiness when evaluating the content to notice the real concerns about their products and services.

Also, because SNSs are an effective way for companies to create and maintain relationships with consumers (Ali et al., 2020), they should find a way to interact with consumers in online communities that are maintained by consumers. However, they should carefully think, plan, and evaluate, how they

should participate in such communities. Nowadays consumers value transparency in all circumstances. Thereby, companies could for example have a brand ambassador or an employee inside the community to interact with consumers by sharing knowledge and information about companies' products and services, but it should be done in a way that consumers are aware of these actions. This way, it would be possible for companies to create brand awareness and enhance company image among the consumers. This would further help companies in customer acquisition as well as keeping the old customers. These actions would impact positively purchasing, which forecast an increase in sales.

The online communities can have thousands of members in them, which means that the information that is shared in such communities has a huge audience. Also, because of the development of SNSs, consumers have become content creators of these communities. Usually, when consumers have good experiences with some brand's products or services, they want to share their experiences with others. (Hutter et al., 2013.) These experiences consumers can rely on, and therefore have been acknowledged to have an impact on consumer decision making (Pour & Lotfiyan, 2020). However, companies cannot forget the possibility of negative eWOM and the wide audience it would reach in online communities. If companies have an employee inside the online community, it will allow them to react and reduce the negative eWOM.

5.3 Reliability and validity

The quality of research is usually measured through the constructs of reliability and validity. Reliability is related to the repeatability of a study. In other words, the findings of the studies that examine the same kind of phenomenon should be nearly the same every time the study is repeated. The validity, on the other hand, consists of external validity and internal validity. The external validity refers to whether the study can be generalized through external factors such as a sample of the study. Internal validity refers to whether the study is measuring what it should be measured. Thus, when examining the internal validity, attention should be paid to the scales and constructs of the study and whether they are based on the previous studies and theory and do they comprise the phenomenon wide enough. (Metsämuuronen 2011, pp.125-126.)

In this study, the measures of the survey were drawn from previous studies and theory. In other words, the measures used in the survey were the same as those used before in the previous studies, which thereby enhance the internal validity of this research. However, the measures needed to be translated from English into Finnish, which may have an impact on both the internal validity and reliability. In order for the measurement to be reliable, the constructs and main concepts of the study need to be defined clearly (Adams et al., 2014, p.246). Therefore, the negative impact of the translation was tried to be reduced by testing them with two persons before publishing the official

questionnaire. Based on the testing, some of the measures were modified in order to enhance the understanding of those.

The external validity of this study is evaluated through sample size. In this study, the response rate was 45.5 %. This means that little less than half of the group members who opened the questionnaire were actually answering and returning the questionnaire. Thus, the response rate under 50% still requires a careful examination when the results are generalized. In this study, most of the respondents were women and most likely also the members of this group, because it requires access from the moderators of the group, it improves the external validity slightly.

The reliability of the study is evaluated through factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha, and composite reliability. According to Sarstedt & Ringle (2017), the factor loadings evaluate the reliability of an individual factor. In this study, all factor loadings were exceeding the recommended value of .07, thereby indicating good reliability for each individual factor. Sarstedt & Ringle (2017) also pointed out, that the values of Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability should be above .70 and below .95 to indicate a satisfactory level of reliability. In this study, all the values of Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability are between these two values, thereby indicating a good and satisfactory level of internal reliability. It can be concluded, that based on the results, they are in line with previous studies, which indicates good reliability.

5.4 Limitations and future research

There are few limitations of this study, which creates possibilities also for future research. First, most of the members that were participating in the survey were females. Therefore, the results of this study could be generalized to concern more females than males, and it was not possible to compare the effects of perceived eWOM credibility between females and males. The findings of this study support the previous study (e.g., Krasnova et al., 2017), where women are known to be more active in different online communities to search for information and create social relationships. However, in the future, it would be interesting to examine also how men are perceiving the source credibility of eWOM in similar online communities than in this research, and does it have an influence on their brand awareness as well as behavior such as purchase intention, eWOM intention, and eWOM behavior.

Second, this study focused to examine the perceived eWOM credibility in the light of source credibility factors. However, the source credibility does not consist only of the informational factors such as *expertise*, *trustworthiness*, and *social homophily* but includes also the normative factors such as *recommendation consistency* and *recommendation rating* (Lis, 2013; Cheung et al., 2009). Therefore, it would be interesting to see whether other consumers would impact perceived eWOM credibility. Thus, to get a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of eWOM source credibility on brand awareness

and consumer behavior, future research should consider also the normative aspect.

Additionally, the overall concept of eWOM credibility includes also message credibility, which consists of *message structure*, *language intensity*, *the inclusion of evidence*, and *message attractiveness* (Kapoor et al., 2020). Because credibility is assessed usually by the information that is shared, the written content should also be taken under consideration when evaluating credibility. Therefore, future research could focus more on evaluating these aspects together in order to provide a broader view of the factors that affect the overall perceived eWOM credibility and further how they affect brand awareness and consumer behavior.

Third, in this study, the incomes of the participants nor the prices of the shoes were not considered. The incomes have been acknowledged to have an impact on purchase intention. Thus, people with higher incomes tend to purchase products more easily because there is a lower financial risk involved in the process. People with lower incomes, on the other hand, may consider the possible losses caused by the purchasing before making any decisions to purchase. Also, the amount of time spent in online communities to search for information about different products or services has been recognized to impact purchase intention. (Tiruwa, Yadav & Suri, 2018.) Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate that is the credibility of a source in eWOM conversations considered so strong that it would actually impact also on purchasing intention and behavior of people with lower incomes. Thus, would consumers purchase products and services even if it would not be wise or even possible?

The Facebook group in this study also gained more and more members during the time of the research. Thus, between the October of 2020 and April of 2021, the number of members in this group increased from a little over 10 000 to a little over 18 000. The duration of membership, meaning the time that a member has been a part of an online community, has been acknowledged to affect positively consumer engagement in such communities (e.g., Vohra & Bhardwaj, 2019). Therefore, it would be interesting to examine whether the duration of membership would enhance the engagement all the time or would it reduce it at some point. And further, would it lead to more passive behavior in these communities, and would it even impact the length of these relationships.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Construct	Reference(s)
Expertise: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I think the reviewers of this group are experts. 2. I think the reviewers of this group are experienced. 3. I think the reviewers of this group are knowledgeable. 4. I think the reviewers of this group are qualified. 5. I think the reviewers of this group are skilled. 	Lis (2013).
Trustworthiness: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I think the reviewers of this group are undependable. 2. I think the reviewers of this group are honest. 3. I think the reviewers of this group are sincere. 4. I think the reviewers of this group are trustworthy. 	Lis (2013).
Social homophily: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I think the reviewers of this group are very similar/very different compared to me. 2. I think the reviewers of this group thinks similarly/don't think similarly with me. 3. I think the reviewers of this group behave like me/don't behave like me. 	Lis (2013); Chu & Kim (2011).
Perceived eWOM credibility: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I think the reviews are factual. 2. I think the reviews are accurate. 3. I think the reviews are credible. 	Cheung et al. (2009); Lis (2013).
Brand awareness: Because I am a member of a Facebook group called "Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapsille": <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I have no difficulties to remember the shoe brands that are following recommendations. 2. I know the models of the shoe brands that are following recommendations. 3. I can distinguish the different shoe models of the brands that are following recommendations. 4. I can easily describe the shoe brands that are following recommendations to a friend. 	Hutter et al. (2013); Langaro et al. (2018).
Purchase intention: After considering the product information on the Facebook group "Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapsille": <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I plan to buy shoes for my child that are following recommendations. 2. It is very likely that I will buy shoes for my child that are following recommendations. 3. I will purchase shoes that are following recommendations next time my child needs shoes. 4. I will definitely try shoes for my child that are following recommendations. 	Prendercast et al. (2010); Hutter et al. (2013); Tien et al. (2019).

5. I have bought shoes for my child that are following recommendations.

eWOM intention:

1. I intend to share my experiences about shoes that are following recommendations with other members of the Facebook group
"Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapsille".
2. I will try to share my experiences of shoes that are following recommendations with other members of the Facebook group
"Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapsille".
3. I will always provide my experiences about shoes that are following recommendations at the request of other members of the Facebook group
"Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapsille".

Cheung & Lee (2012).

eWOM behavior:

1. When I consider new shoes for my child, I ask other members of the Facebook group
"Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapsille" for advice.
2. I like to get the opinion of other members of the Facebook group
"Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapsille" before I buy new shoes for my child.
3. I often persuade other members of the Facebook group "Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapsille" to buy products that I like.
4. I tend to pass on information or opinions about the shoes that are following recommendations to other members of the Facebook group
"Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapsille".
5. I have passed on the information or opinions about the shoes that are following recommendations to other members of the Facebook group
"Suositusten mukaiset kengät lapsille".

Chu & Kim (2011); Lee & Choi (2019).