

Culture & Electronic Word-of Mouth

A Case Study of the Hotel Industry in the Northern Sweden

Saga Nilsson
Karin Vennberg
2016

Bachelor of Science in Business and Economics
Business Administration

Luleå University of Technology
Department of Business, Administration, Technology and Social Sciences

Culture & Electronic Word-of-Mouth

A case study of the hotel industry in the northern Sweden

Saga Nilsson
Karin Vennberg

Bachelor of Science in Business and Economics
Business Administration

Luleå University of Technology
Department of Business Administration, Technology, and Social Sciences

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are proud to finally complete our Bachelor's thesis after ten weeks of hard work, learning and frustrating moments. This thesis has been executed during the end of our education at the International Business Program at Luleå University of Technology. The process of writing the thesis has provided us with new and useful knowledge about organisations' management of electronic word-of-mouth for our future careers. However, we also believe that this thesis will serve as useful material for other students and researchers interested in the area.

Furthermore, we would like to thank the people who have invested their time and effort to guide us through the creation of this thesis and the respondents for their participation. Without their time and effort this thesis would have been difficult to write from a business perspective. Lastly, we would like to thank our family and friends for their love and support throughout the writing of this thesis.

Luleå, May 2016

Saga Nilsson

Karin Vennberg

ABSTRACT

Word-of-mouth has been a part of individuals' lives since humans began to engage in oral communication, and is seen as powerful marketing tool. However, in the contemporary marketplace word-of-mouth marketing has evolved into electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This has given both marketers and consumers new possibilities to share information with each other as people have become active participants of eWOM. Consumers now share both positive and negative comments about experiences of products and companies, that in turn, functions as references for prospective customers and can damage or enhance the organisation's reputation. Furthermore, as a result of globalisation people are travelling around the world and this has led to an increasing interest in cultural differences and its effect on organisations. Travellers often check reviews before they make a reservation for accommodation and this have great implications for organisations in the hotel industry. However, there is not a shared understanding of how eWOM vary, strategies that are appropriate to use or how to adapt to cultural differences. Hence, the purpose of this thesis is *to provide a better understanding on how cultural dimensions' influence organisations' eWOM strategy*.

For this thesis, a case study of two hotels in northern Sweden was conducted and two managers responsible for their eWOM communication were interviewed. The findings from the case studies suggests that hotels distribute their attention to eWOM unevenly and adapt their communication to different cultural contexts poorly.

Keywords: WOM, eWOM, WOMM, culture, individualistic, collectivistic, strategies, hotel, consumers, comments, reviews

SAMMANFATTNING

Word-of-mouth har varit en del av individers liv ända sedan de började engagera sig i verbal kommunikation och kan därför ses som ett kraftfullt marknadsföringsverktyg. Idag har dock word-of-mouth marknadsföring utvecklats till elektronisk word-of-mouth (eWOM). Detta har skapat nya möjligheter för både marknadsförare och konsumenter att dela information med varandra eftersom människor aktivt börjat delta i eWOM. Idag delar konsumenter både positiva och negativa kommentarer om erfarenheter de fått av produkter och företag med människor världen över. Dessa kommentarer fungerar som referenser för blivande kunder och kan antingen skada eller förbättra ett företags rykte. Tack vare globaliseringen reser många människor runt om i världen och detta har lett till ett ökat intresse för kulturella skillnader och dess inverkan på verksamheter. Resenärer läser ofta omdömen före dem gör reservationer och detta har stor betydelse för organisationer i hotellindustrin. Det finns dock ingen delad förståelse mellan organisationerna om hur eWOM varierar, vilka strategier som är lämpliga att använda eller anpassning till kulturella skillnader. Därför är syftet för denna uppsats *att ge en bättre förståelse för hur kulturella dimensioner påverkar organisationers eWOM strategi.*

Till denna uppsats gjordes fallstudier av två hotell i norra Sverige där två personer ansvariga för hotellens eWOM kommunikation intervjuades. Resultatet från fallstudierna indikerar att hotell distribuerar sin uppmärksamhet till eWOM ojämnt och att anpassning av kommunikation till olika kulturella kontexter sker endast i ringa omfattning.

Nyckelord: WOM, eWOM, WOMM, kultur, individualistisk, kollektivistisk, strategier, hotell, konsumenter, kommentarer, recensioner

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 BACKGROUND	1
1.2 PROBLEM DISCUSSION	2
1.3 OVERALL PURPOSE	4
1.4 DELIMITATIONS	5
1.5 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS	5
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
2.1 WOM	6
2.2 EWOM	6
2.2.1 <i>eWOM Communication</i>	7
2.3 CHANNELS OF EWOM.....	9
2.4 CULTURAL DIMENSIONS.....	10
2.5 COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN EFFECTS ON HOW EWOM IS EXPRESSED	13
2.6 ORGANISATIONS ELECTRONIC WOMM COMMUNICATION	14
2.7 STRATEGIES OF EWOM	15
2.8 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	17
2.8.1 <i>Conceptualisation of research question one: Strategies to handle eWOM</i>	17
2.8.2 <i>Conceptualisation of research question two: Adapting communication to different cultural contexts</i>	18
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	21
3.1 RESEARCH PURPOSE	21
3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH	21
3.3 RESEARCH STRATEGY	22
3.4 DATA COLLECTION	24
3.5 SAMPLE SELECTION	25
3.6 DATA ANALYSIS	26
3.7 QUALITY STANDARDS	28
3.8 SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY	30
4. EMPIRICAL DATA	31
4.1 HOTEL A	31
4.1.1 <i>eWOM strategies</i>	31
4.1.2 <i>Adaptation to Culture</i>	34
4.2 HOTEL B.....	35
4.2.1 <i>eWOM Strategies</i>	35
4.2.2 <i>Adaptation to Culture</i>	37
5. DATA ANALYSIS	39
5.1 WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS.....	39
5.1.2 <i>Within-Case Analysis: Hotel A</i>	39
5.1.3 <i>Within-case analysis: Hotel B</i>	42
5.2 CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS	46

6. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS	51
6.1 RQ1 - HOW CAN ORGANISATIONS' STRATEGIES TO HANDLE eWOM IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY BE DESCRIBED?	51
6.2 RQ2 - HOW CAN ORGANISATIONS' ADAPTION OF eWOM COMMUNICATION TO DIFFERENT CULTURAL CONTEXTS BE DESCRIBED?	52
6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY	53
6.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS	53
6.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	54
REFERENCES	55

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Guide, English

Appendix 2: Interview Guide, Swedish

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	<i>Outline of the thesis</i>	5
Figure 2.1	<i>Integrative model</i>	8
Figure 2.2	<i>Hofstede's framework</i>	11
Figure 3.1	<i>Outline of the methodology</i>	21
Figure 3.2	<i>Overview of chosen methodology approach</i>	30

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	<i>Attentionscape model</i>	16
Table 2.2	<i>Conceptualisation of research question one</i>	19
Table 2.3	<i>Conceptualisation of research question two</i>	20
Table 3.1	<i>Relevant situations for different research strategies</i>	22
Table 3.2	<i>Sources of evidence – Strengths and weaknesses</i>	24
Table 3.3	<i>Case study tactics for four design tests</i>	28
Table 5.1	<i>Attentionscape dimensions</i>	46
Table 5.2	<i>Comparison of the hotels strategies to handle eWOM</i>	48
Table 5.3	<i>Comparison of cultural adaptation</i>	50

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents brief background information to the study, which will be followed up by a problem discussion that lands in a research purpose. Lastly, the outline for the thesis is presented.

1.1 Background

Word-of-mouth, abbreviated as WOM, “*is the oldest, newest marketing medium*” (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014, p. 5), and has been a part of human history since individuals began to engage in oral communication. WOM appears when consumers discuss purchased, experienced services or products with people in their surroundings. Such conversations often influence them to become interested in, and consider to buy the product or servicing discussed. (Alexandrov, Babakus & Lilly, 2013) In the contemporary marketplace it has gained new attention as people are more and more connected through social media and are able to share interpersonal messages with considerable speed. (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014) For example, people can connect electronically through social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, chat rooms and online communities (Groeger & Buttle, 2014).

The term, WOM, started to appear in academic literature in the 1950s emphasising on how opinion leaders impact followers. (Groeger & Buttle, 2014) An opinion leader is an individual that can exercise personal influence on others through informal WOM conversations. Early research showed that individuals that discussed services and products with each other had comparable buying and usage behaviour; that is, others influenced the individual in consumption related decisions. In this century, the influence of WOM is given in today’s marketplace. (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014) Yet, the interest has shifted to online environments as individuals become more connected electronically. (Groeger & Buttle, 2014)

Thanks to the development of Internet and its accessibility, reach, and transparency, WOM is seen as a powerful tool when used for marketing. At the same time, new possibilities for marketers interested in monitoring and using the power of WOM has emerged. Word-of-mouth marketing, abbreviated as WOMM, is becoming more popular as a component of the marketing communication mix, and is referred to in contemporary marketing management texts and popular business press. (Groeger & Buttle, 2014) Furthermore, the term WOMM, can sometimes be recognised as social media marketing, viral marketing, or buzz. (Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki & Wilner, 2010) Campaigns connected to WOMM are associated with strategies that seek to influence individuals who are given a product, which they are expected to use, share and discuss with others, such as family and friends. (Groeger & Buttle, 2014)

WOM has recently evolved into electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Kozinets et al., 2010) and can be defined as “*any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet*” (Fu, Ju & Hsu, 2015, p. 617). Internet users’ information sharing and

search behaviour have been facilitated with a rising popularity of the Internet. More and more consumers now choose to share experiences about their purchases online, so that future customers can be influenced before they make their own purchase decision. (Luo, Wu, Shi & Xu, 2014) Hence, the accessibility to Internet has enabled people to become active participants of eWOM instead of just being passive consumers' (Fu et al., 2015).

Consumers' now have better access to sites where they can share both positive and negative comments about products (Fu et al., 2015), brands, or companies with people from all over the world. (Sandes & Urdan, 2013) Due to the abundance of travel reviews posted in several different travel communities, information about travel is easy to get hold of. Such information facilitates the information searching process for new consumers as well as decreases their searching costs. However, it takes more and more effort and energy for the consumer to remember reviews and compare them as time passes. (Lee, Law & Murphy, 2011) Comments about experiences functions as references (Sandes & Urdan, 2013) and affects other consumers' trust in sellers (Fu et al., 2015). eWOM has a bigger information span (Zhao, Wang, Guo & Law, 2015) as opposed to traditional WOM and therefore negative comments can be more damaging for companies since the information is public and can reach out to a broad audience. (Fu et al., 2015)

An increasing globalisation is a contributing factor to the increased number of people travelling the world. (Zoomers, 2008) Additionally, it has opened up for a bigger interest in how culture and cultural differences impact on business decisions, behaviours and outcomes. (Brewer & Venaik, 2012) There are several different definitions about the concept of culture, one of which is *"Culture is a learned, shared, compelling, interrelated set of symbols whose meanings provide a set of orientations for members of a society..."* (Kale, 1991, p. 19), and attempt to assemble the gap between academic and business perspectives on culture. (ibid)

In a study of organisational strategy and culture, Gupta (2011) states that due to the global environment, organisations all over the world meet new challenges to win competitive advantages. A global world results in more competition, changes in customers' needs and technological changes. (Gupta, 2011) Cultural differences across countries are shown to be the factor that causes most problems in international marketing communications. It is important for organisations to understand the different dimensions of culture so that their marketers can use the right promotional appeal to the right country in order to streamline the communication process. All communication should be based on customer's culture because it determines which way information is perceived. Furthermore, companies should advantageously train their marketers in understanding individuals from different cultures behaviour in order to avoid mistakes during interactions. (Kale, 1991)

1.2 Problem Discussion

Previous research about WOM has mainly focused on traditional offline WOM; it is uncertain to which extent similar drivers of WOM operate in the online context and the degree of conversational overlap between online and offline WOM participants during a WOMM campaign. (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014) Hence, marketers may face various challenges, as WOM

are likely to affect several consumption behaviours at the same time between numerous participants. Some of these effects are likely to be silent, which in turn, will make it harder for researchers and practitioners to use both explicit and implicitly noted WOM effects. This calls for further research in order to get a grasp on eWOM communication and its impact. (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014) eWOM is considered as a more trustworthy source of information for consumers than advertisements, as peers are considered to be sincerer than companies. Hence, companies that gain positive eWOM have a better chance to improve their sales. Companies can set up eWOM campaigns for marketing communication although it is carried out by consumers. (Bao & Chang, 2014)

Marketers are becoming more and more aware of the importance of using eWOM. (Fong & Burton, 2008) Yet, there is still not a cogent understanding of how eWOM varies and what the effects of these differences can be for organisations. Hence, research is needed to understand how organisations should handle consumers' use of eWOM. Researchers agree that eWOM has an important part to play in marketing and public affairs, at the same time as it is commonly accepted that eWOM influences the consumers purchase decisions. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013) In the contemporary marketplace, the consumer has taken control and target groups have been divided into fragments and pieces, where the new eco system is composed of several disorganised peer-to-peer conversations. The Internet enables rapid WOM and research show that recommendations from the individual's social surroundings are the most essential source of information, above print media or TV-commercials. Both online and offline WOM has played a vital role in customers purchase decisions. Nonetheless, advertising companies still focus on television as their main communication tool - while the most popular target audience between the ages of 14-49 progressively use the Internet. (Meiner, Schwarting & Seeberger, 2010).

The global connectedness has expanded and consumers purchase from strangers on the other side of the world. Yet, there is a great cultural difference as to what, and how, social media platforms are used within different country contexts. (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014) Differences in behaviours and attitudes among consumers from different cultures are still an obstacle for companies expanding their business in the online environment since there are no apparent national boundaries. Researchers have commonly accepted Hofstede's dimensions of culture when it comes to classifying cultures. The individualism/collectivism dimension can be preferable to use for investigating differences in cultures online. (Fong & Burton, 2008) The dimension can be defined as: *"people looking after themselves and their immediate family only, versus people belonging to in-groups that look after them in exchange for loyalty"* (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 88f), thus it explains whether the society values individual freedom or group norms. In collectivist cultures, individuals are encouraged to do things that benefit the society; thereof individuals from collectivist cultures put society above themselves. They are also known for putting effort in personal networking and relationships, whereas people in individualist cultures value self-actualization, seek fulfilment, and are encouraged to share private opinions. (Fong & Burton, 2008) A distinction in information- seeking behaviour is apparent between collectivist and individualist cultures. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010)

A study made by Fong and Burton (2008), showed that individuals from collectivist cultures were much more likely to ask for information online than individuals from individualist cultures. However, the study found that just as individuals from collectivist cultures seek more information online, individuals from individualist cultures are more willing to share their opinions and information. A greater willingness from individualist cultures to share information has important effects for marketers who try to build favourable WOM. Furthermore, research has found that the highest predictor of a company's growth is consumers' willingness to recommend it. Since consumers from collectivist cultures are less likely to provide recommendations, companies encounter a bigger challenge in building WOM in collectivist cultures than in individualist cultures. (Fong & Burton, 2008)

Understanding the culture and adapting branding and advertising strategies to the consumers within it, has become important for global marketers since there is an increasing interest from organisations in what consequences culture has for global marketing and advertising. The choice of communication style is crucial for the consumers' acceptance of advertising. For example, individualistic cultures have a more direct style of advertising than collectivist cultures, the latter may be offended by a persuasive approach where the focus lies on information and not creating trust by interpersonal relationships. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010)

Marketing communications are one of international marketers' greatest challenges since cultural differences between involved countries often creates problems in international marketing communications or promotion. Marketers have to understand the underlying dimensions of culture to gain knowledge about the effectiveness of various promotional appeals across cultures. (Kale, 1991) Managers dealing with eWOM should be conscious about the differences and pay close attention to what is said in order to reduce the risks of damaging comments and enhance the effect of positive eWOM. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013) For example, reviews have great importance for prospective customers when it comes to the choice of accommodation in the hotel industry. (Melián-González, Bulchand-Gidumal & González López-Valcárcel, 2013) Consequently, it is an important part of consumer service to manage positive and negative feedback from consumers. Managers within public affairs must therefore prioritise where, what, and when they read and answer to eWOM, and the amount of time that should be devoted to every post. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013)

1.3 Overall purpose

Based on the problem discussion above, the purpose of this study is *to provide a better understanding on how cultural dimensions' influence organisations' eWOM strategy*. After studying the area of WOM and culture, the following research questions were stated:

1. How can organisations' **strategies to handle eWOM** in the hotel industry be described?
2. How can organisations' **adaption of eWOM communication** to different cultural contexts be described?

1.4 Delimitations

Due to the limited time of writing a bachelor thesis, the study will focus on hotels' that are located in the upper part of northern Sweden.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis will consist of six chapters in total. In Figure 1.1 below, an overview on the outline of the entire thesis is presented.

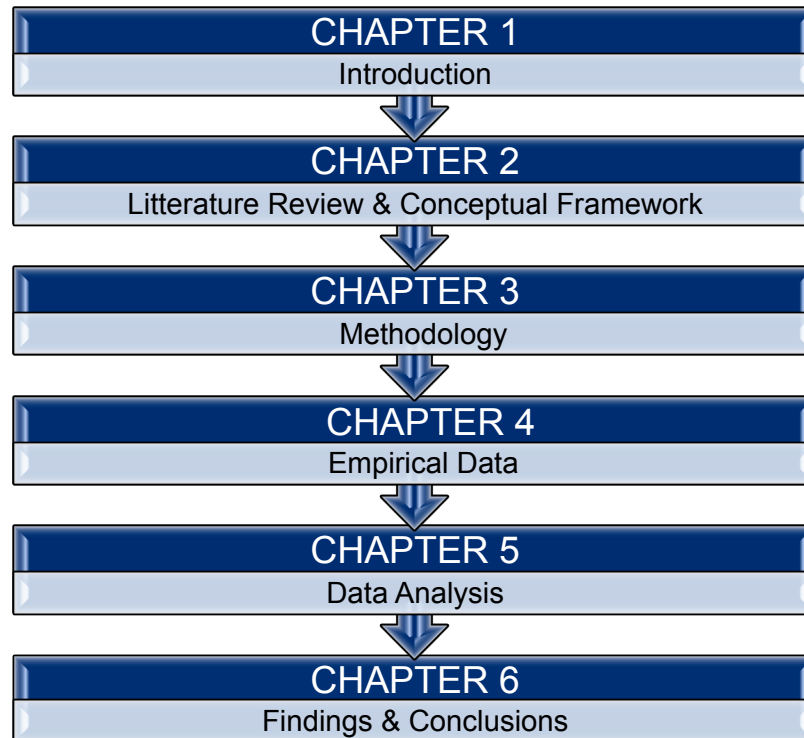


Figure 1.1: Outline of the thesis.

The *first chapter* is the introduction, which lays the foundation for the entire thesis. It begins with general information and theories in the background section, which is later on followed up with a problem discussion that lands in a research purpose. In the *second chapter*, the literature review will bring forth previous studies regarding our thesis purpose and land in a conceptual framework. In the *third chapter*, the methodology choices and an explanation on how the data will be collected is going to be presented. *Chapter four* will contain empirical data and in *chapter five* the data material will be analysed. *Chapter six* is the last chapter of the thesis, in which the findings and conclusions will be presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter several theories concerning WOM, eWOM, WOMM and culture will be presented. The theories will answer our research questions and finally, the chapter will end up in a conceptual framework.

2.1 WOM

WOM is the effect of an individual's informal opinion concerning brands and products that originates in consumption experiences in which there is an information provider and receptor (Sandes & Urdan, 2013). Individuals choose to engage in WOM as a result of several intentions; brand related drivers of WOM are considered to be factors such as loyalty, commitment, satisfaction, quality, trust and perceived values. (Alexandrov et al., 2013)

WOM is a natural phenomenon, which most of all purchase decisions are affected by and implemented through consumer-to-consumer communications (Kozinets et al., 2010), where the transmitter searches to gain both social and personal favour by sharing experiential knowledge about a brand. (Fu et al., 2015) When it comes to purchase decisions, WOM can be more powerful than conventional advertising media and alternative marketing tools. In fact, positive information that spread quickly can be seen as free advertising for the firm, and increase brand recognition and sales. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013) Organisations have to understand the importance of the brand's characteristics in order to create a brand that attracts individuals' attention but also encourages them to discuss it with others. In that way, the impacts of branding activities will be maximised. (Lovett, Peres & Shachar, 2013)

2.2 eWOM

“eWOM refers to any statement based on positive, neutral, or negative experiences made by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product, service, brand, or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet (through web sites, social networks, instant messages, news feeds...)” (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013, p.147f).

With the introduction of Web 2.0, a new world along with new opportunities were discovered, consisting of blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Sepp, Liljander & Gummerus, 2011). eWOM can be seen as WOM behaviour that has emerged through the possibilities of Internet. As opposed to WOM, eWOM information is easily spread, publicly available and remains accessible over time. Hence, it has the power to create communities and virtual relationships, with a much bigger influence than producers of WOM. (Melián-González et al., 2013)

eWOM communications are exerted in forums like blogs and other social networking web sites. (Kozinets et al., 2010) Many consumers seek entertainment and information in blogs because

bloggers are perceived as trustworthy and this attract readers. (Sepp et al., 2011) To attract consumers, marketing professionals have to realise the importance of consumer-to- consumer eWOM. One way for marketers to encourage this behaviour can be through sending bloggers free products, vouchers, discounts or offering free services. (Kulmala, Mesiranta & Tuominen, 2013)

Many discourses held by bloggers in the case of eWOM can be seen as different types of paid promotion, such as public relations. This type of promotion however, distinguish in the way that it does not hold the same professional level seen from a journalistic or advertising point of view. The promotional characteristic of the campaign affects the message and meaning of the WOM communication. The blogger is often a strong influencer, which has the ability to transform commercial promotions to valuable information for the consumers. (Kozinets et al., 2010)

2.2.1 eWOM Communication

eWOM is considered as one of the most influential sources of information online (Luo et al., 2014) as it is immediate, has a greater reach, and is trustworthy and publicly available. Hence, even though WOM is a more personal form of communication, eWOM is seen as more powerful because it has greater importance for consumers' decisions than information created by marketers online. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013)

There are several motivations affecting individuals to talk positively or negatively about products or services. (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014) Research has shown that the consumer is motivated to participate in eWOM when the consumer has had a remarkably bad experience or good experience. Therefore, the customers that will produce the most comments are the ones who are very satisfied or dissatisfied, whereas customers that feel neutral about their experience will post fewer comments online. (Melián-González et al., 2013) Hence, the chance of consumers producing eWOM depends on the experience related to a brand, service, product or a company. This suggests that eWOM is a coping response developed from an emotional reaction of satisfaction that itself is a result of an appraisal process. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013) To explain this relationship and the circumstances that give rise to eWOM, an integrative model is presented in Figure 2.1 below.

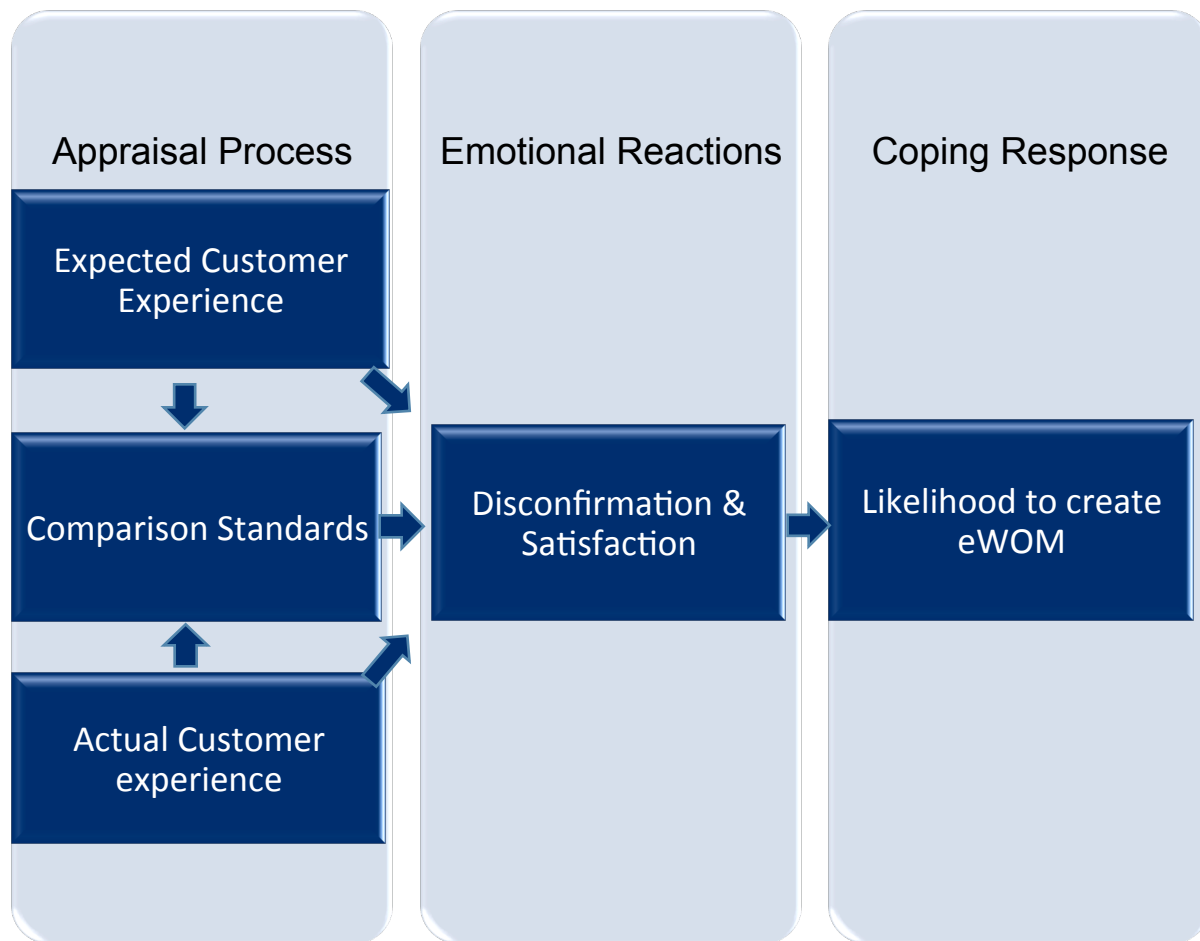


Figure 2.1: Integrative model.

Source: Adapted from Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013, p. 149)

The integrative model shows the appraisal process, which explains how the customer feels about the experience and the outcome of the degree of satisfaction/emotional reaction. Basically, if expectations are confirmed, consumers feel indifferent to participate in eWOM, however, when consumers' expectations are not met, it drastically affects the consumer's sense of satisfaction and likelihood to create eWOM. Hence, the role of satisfaction is a motivation for the consumer to participate in eWOM. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013)

In the hotel industry customers tend to pay more attention to negative reviews or criticism than positive eWOM. As it is possible for individuals to be anonymous on the Internet when posting reviews, it may favour negative eWOM. This can damage an organisation's reputation over time, however, it is the most recent comments that has the most influence on customers, particularly if all of them are negative. (Melián-González et al., 2013) Three-quarters of travellers have been found to carefully review other consumer's experiences that are posted online before they plan

their own trip, (ibid) as it is difficult to know the quality of the desired destination before they have experienced it. (Lee et al., 2011) Therefore, opinions from other consumers that are posted online are seen as the most important variable when travellers choose accommodation. (Melián-González et al., 2013) To obtain knowledge about destinations, travellers search for information through external sources such as online community websites. However, some reviewers are more helpful than others and the most reliable ones tend to travel to many destinations, actively post reviews and give hotels a lower review rating than other reviewers. (Lee, Law & Murphy, 2011)

On average, there are more positive than negative reviews, however, negative reviews outweigh positive reviews for consumers purchase decisions when there is a small quantity of them. (Melián-González et al., 2013) Nevertheless, as the quantity of reviews increases and time goes by the “surprise” element fades because prospective customers have already read about the potential flaws before they experience it. As a result, customers have less motivation to participate in eWOM or post negative reviews or comments. Therefore, reviews tend to improve over time and organisations should encourage customers to post reviews about them. Researchers also suggest that organisations should consider negative reviews as valuable information for improvements. (ibid)

2.3 Channels of eWOM

As mentioned earlier, eWOM has a greater reach and importance for consumers’ decisions than marketed created information online. Social media involves conversations that are generally based on user-generated content. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013) In a study made by Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) they concluded that consumers prefer Facebook and Twitter to create eWOM. Facebook was used when the respondents wanted to share ‘better-than-expected’ experiences with their friends. However, the favoured choice for consumers who wanted others to know about their worse-than-expected experience, wish for redress or start an open conversation with an organisation, was Twitter. Twitter is public in nature, whereas Facebook users have some degree of control over who might see their comments. (ibid)

Since social media is seen as a channel for users to make their opinions heard and to influence outcome, the level of satisfaction with an organisation's response to eWOM is important. For positive experiences, managers should use Facebook to engage with consumers, and to spot early signs of negative attitude toward the brand, they should engage with consumers on Twitter. However, platforms may vary depending on industry. Managers within the area of public affairs can collect data on preferences to find an indication on where relevant types of eWOM discussions take place and which platforms they should be monitoring. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013)

TripAdvisor is prominent when it comes to travel communities. It is the largest website in the world that provides customer reviews about hospitality services like lodging, dining and transportation. However, a study made in 2008 on how consumers use TripAdvisor for eWOM, found that comments are more often used when making accommodation decisions than when planning trips. TripAdvisor has more than 35 million visitors each month and provides more than 45 million reviews. (Melián-González et al., 2013)

2.4 Cultural Dimensions

Consumers' decision-making process and particularly the comprehension of information search before it, is affected by culture. (Kale, 1991) According to Kale (1991), culture can be defined as: *"A culture is a configuration of learned behaviours and results of behaviour whose component parts are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society."* In order to understand cultural differences, several models have been developed. (e.g. Hofstede, 1984; De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010; Voss, 2012) The framework presented by Hofstede (1984) is widely used in global marketing and advertising. The model explains differences in the concepts of self, personality and identity, where they in turn describe variations in communications and branding strategy. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010) The model looks at culture as a national-level phenomenon, which can be used for explaining individual's behaviour between different nations. (Luo et al., 2014)

Geert Hofstede founded the model when he wanted to explore differences in work-related values across countries. He distributed 116 000 questionnaires to employees of a multinational company operating in 66 countries. By processing the answers through statistical methods, he identified four dimensions of culture: power distance, individualism/collectivism orientation, masculinity versus femininity and uncertainty avoidance. (Kale, 1991) Thereafter, dimensions such as long-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint have been added to Hofstede's framework (Luo et al., 2014). The Hofstede model provides scales from 0 to 100 for each dimension, where each one of the 76 countries have a position, relative to the other countries. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010) Cross-cultural differences in individual's behavioural patterns and belief systems around the globe are highly explicated by the dimensions. (Kale, 1991) Since Hofstede's classification of culture is such straightforward through its large number of countries measured and simple dimensions, it appeals to both academic researchers and business people. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010) Hofstede's framework is presented in Figure 2.2 below.



Figure 2.2: Hofstede's Framework
Source: Modified from Gaygisiz, (2013)

Power distance describes in what way societies handle human inequality (Kale, 1991) and can be described as: *"the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally"* (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 88). Power distance cultures are known for individuals with clear social status that knows their rightful place in a social hierarchy. Possessing a pronounced social status brings respect from others, as in cases of global brands. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010) Individuals hold unequal qualities and capacities, which are met differently by different societies. Some allow them to grow into inequalities in power and wealth whilst others de-emphasise them. This makes some societies more unequal than others, however all societies are still unequal. According to Hofstede's sample, most countries that score high on both power distance and collectivism tend to be poor. (Kale, 1991)

The **individualism/collectivism** dimension aims to explain the relationship between individuals within a society. It is manifested by the way individuals live together, such as in nuclear families, tribes or extended families. Societies characterized with high individualism express loose

integration, where individuals are allowed to have a large degree of freedom and only need to look after themselves and their immediate family. (Kale, 1991) They use explicit verbal communication as they belong to low-context communication cultures and base negotiations on persuasion to get to the point quickly. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010) Low individualism cultures, also called collectivist cultures, are characterised by tight integration. In these cultures, individuals care about the interest of their in-group and only hold opinions and beliefs that are approved by it. (Kale, 1991) Their communication is indirect since the context is an important factor when they communicate, and therefore relationships and trust is important for individuals in these cultures before they make a deal with a business partner. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010)

Uncertainty avoidance deals with how societies handle individuals' uncertainty about the future (Kale, 1991) and can be defined as: *"the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid these situations"* (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 89). Weak uncertainty avoidance is characterised by individuals that accept the days as they come, take risks and adapt to opinions and behaviours that are different from their own. In strong uncertainty avoidance cultures on the other hand, a greater nervousness, aggressiveness and emotional stress are common since individuals are encouraged to outdo themselves. (Kale, 1991) They also value a structured life and feel a need to follow rules and formalities. Additionally, they avoid change and innovation in contrast to individuals in weak uncertainty avoidance cultures, who like change and innovation. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010)

Masculinity/Femininity describes to what extent societies subscribe to typical stereotypes related to males and females. (Kale, 1991) The dimension of masculinity/femininity can be defined as: *"The dominant values in a masculine society are achievement and success; the dominant values in a feminine culture are caring for others and quality of life."* (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 89) Values in masculine cultures are making money, individual brilliance and pursuing achievements (Kale, 1991), which are shown through status, brands or products. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010) In feminine cultures on the other hand, both men and women display values, which traditionally would be associated with feminine roles. This includes things such as nurturance and caring about individuals instead of money. (Kale, 1991) Moreover, household work is more equally shared between husband and wife in feminine cultures than in masculine (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010)

Long- versus short-term orientation can be defined as: *"the extent to which a society exhibits a pragmatic future-orientated perspective rather than a conventional historic or short-term point of view"*. In long-term orientation, perseverance, having a sense of shame and ordering relationships by status are important. In short-term cultures, individuals seek for personal steadiness and respects traditions. Their focus is on pursuing happiness as opposed to individuals from long-term orientation cultures, which seek to invest in the future instead. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010)

Indulgence versus restraint is one of the recently added dimensions to Hofstede's cultural model. In high indulgence societies, individuals are allowed to hold on to their basic endeavours as well as they are allowed to have fun and enjoy life. On the contrary, societies with restraint use strict social norms to regulate individuals' gratification of needs. (Gaygisiz, 2013)

2.5 Country-of-Origin effects on how eWOM is expressed

The Country-of-Origin effect is when consumers create stereotype images of countries and use it to judge products and services from different countries. This behaviour can be either positive or negative and affects consumers' perceptions as well as influences their purchase decisions. Hofstede's framework about individualism and collectivism can be useful when investigating cultural variations in Country-of-Origin effects. (Fong & Burton, 2008)

Whether the consumers attend an individualistic or collectivistic orientation has importance for how they perceive the credibility of information. Information sidedness is used to assess the credibility of certain information. One-sided information favours one aspect, for example positive comments, whereas two-sided information has two aspects, for example negative and positive comments. Hence, two-sided information is considered as a more credible source of information since it is considered to be unbiased. (Luo et al., 2014)

Countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Scandinavia, Israel, Italy, and Germany (The Hofstede Centre, 2016) are seen as individualistic cultures. eWOM readers from individualistic cultures tend to do extensive processing of eWOM information before making final decisions. Since two-sided eWOM information provides both positive and negative comments, this type of information is more suitable for consumers within individualistic cultures as they receive more information from it and will perceive it as credible. (Luo et al., 2014) Japan, Bulgaria and Russia are countries that belong to collectivist cultures. (The Hofstede Centre, 2016) Consumers from collectivist cultures care less about their own evaluation toward the attributes of the information sidedness because of their interdependence. Thus, information sidedness affects eWOM readers from individualistic cultures stronger than individuals from collectivistic cultures. (Luo et al., 2014)

Information consistency describes to which extent other composers of eWOM information that share the same attitudes and viewpoints with the current provider. As individuals from collectivistic cultures show stronger herd behaviour and more easily accept social opinions from others, they are more affected by information consistency. (Luo et al., 2014)

Information rating is a way for information seekers to learn whether previous readers find the viewpoint of the information valid and trustworthy. Rating information makes it possible for eWOM readers to give positive comments and express their feelings about the information, and enables other readers to learn previous readers' opinions. High information rating means frequent evaluation and has a positive effect on perceived information credibility. Since individuals from collectivistic cultures follow the mass, in opposite to individuals from individualistic cultures, which do not concern about others' opinions, eWOM readers from collectivistic cultures are more affected by information rating. To attract these individuals, marketers should make use of providing arguments with high quality, credibility of sources, consistency, and high rated eWOM information. (Luo et al., 2014)

Collectivist cultures and individualist cultures have different views on interpersonal situations, in collectivist cultures, feeling good is associated with feeling friendly, whilst in individualist cultures, feeling good is associated with interpersonal distance like feeling superior. To attract customers from both kinds of cultures, marketers therefore have to understand the importance of adapting their strategy. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010)

Companies and forums that have decided to use eWOM strategies to market themselves and improve their business should identify whether future consumers associate themselves with individualistic or collectivistic orientation values. Based on consumers' orientation, companies can then apply different eWOM marketing strategies to direct the consumers purchase intentions. One way to examine consumer's orientation is to construct the registration process to forums in a user friendly way. For example, marketers can add specific questions where the answer makes it possible for companies to classify whether the individual is from an individualistic or collectivistic culture. This classification makes it easy for companies to recommend different information of eWOM to consumers that belong to different orientations. (Luo et al., 2014)

2.6 Organisations electronic WOMM communication

Word-of-mouth marketing aims to encourage current consumers to converse with potential consumers and to introduce them to the company's overall marketing strategy. In order to face the new reality where consumers take more and more control, companies have to restructure their models based for marketing. For example, since the Internet makes eWOM available, promotion is now seen as less important than before. Hence, companies should add more P's like people, process and participation to their marketing mix to meet consumers purchase behaviour. (Norbert, Schwarting & Seeberger, 2010)

One study made in 2008 showed that consumers that are acquired to buy products through WOM have a higher brand loyalty and are more willing to repurchase than consumers that are exposed to traditional marketing methods. Thereof, companies should invest more in social media, as creating dialogues with customers, partners and employees strengthens the relationship. Despite serving as private leisure activities, social media with Web 2.0 is now important for managing professional corporate communications. The majority of Internet users are active on social media and might talk about companies or products on sites like Twitter, Facebook or blogs. A company that does not participate or market themselves on social media misses the chance to build a good reputation and respond to negative comments. (Norbert et al., 2010)

Obtaining credibility and authenticity through dialogues with customers will be a challenge for companies in the future. Therefore, WOMM has to be added to the modern communication mix, since it is seen as a definite factor for an enterprise success. (Norbert et al., 2010) Consumers creates value and meaning for marketing communications, however, the information flow of WOMM is transformed by consumers and thus not as straightforward as traditional marketing. Due to several different social norms and varieties that form the cultural environment, it is difficult to reach out to everybody when launching a brand message. (Kozinets et al., 2014)

Companies get different responses to their WOMM depending on which social media channel they use. This is because different types of consumers appreciate different commercials and messages that seem untrue may create mistrust towards the communication. There are many factors affecting the message transmission and which strategy that is suitable depends on the product or brand. Individuals are more often interested in evaluating technology products than for example fashion and entertainment products. Offers that are hard to sell entails more explanation and evaluation than humoristic advertising that spread quickly. (Kozinetz et al., 2014)

To design a WOMM campaign in an optimal way, an analysis of what is going on in the environment of a message is necessary. In order to do that, managers have to understand factors like brand characteristics, styles and types of forums but also how different types of social media sites are connected to their communities. They should not overstate their use of positive mentions and recommendations since it is shown that negative information can be useful in social branding processes to improve credibility and trust. Managers can also concentrate on insights that arise within their own managerial engagement with social branding processes as all different social media can be seen as archives with consumer feedback. (Kozinetz et al., 2014)

2.7 Strategies of eWOM

Online communication between consumers is a 'market force' that shall not be overlooked. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013) For effective management it is therefore important to know why and which channels consumers use to post eWOM and quickly respond to consumers' comments. (Gottschalk & Kreis, 2015) However, communication from companies is seen as less trustworthy than comments from strangers online and therefore buying intentions increase with the quantity and quality of online reviews. (Melián-González et al., 2013)

Travellers have started to perceive online reviews as an increasingly important resource to evaluate product and service quality. Thus, Internet is an effective channel to market hotels to customers. A survey made in 2013 showed that almost two-thirds of individuals active on the web relied on digital information channels for travel purposes, and since most online reviews are in written form, researchers have the possibility to estimate the extent to which reviews can influence consumers' attitudes and subsequent sales. (Zhao et al., 2015)

An organisation can experience both positive and negative implications from eWOM. If positive conversations about an organisation spread rapidly online, it can lead to free advertising for the organisation, increasing brand recognition and growing sales. Yet, negative conversations online can cause costly and irreparable damage such as financial loss. Therefore, it is crucial to understand what intentions consumers have to share their consumption experience in order to manage WOMM. This implies that grasping eWOM and how it can differ are paramount for organisations, as this understanding should inform eWOM management strategies correspondingly. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013)

Managers should pay close attention to eWOM as it is an important part of consumer service. Therefore, attention is seen as key in managing eWOM. However, attention is a limited resource that restrains how much information an organisation can handle. Managers are therefore forced to prioritise when, where, what they read and answer to eWOM, and the amount of time they should devote to each post. Hence, a lot of information demands that the attention is allocated efficiently among the plethora of information sources that may consume attention. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013).

In an attempt to get a grasp on how marketing managers distribute their attention to eWOM and different consumer communication types, Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) developed the attentionscape model presented in Table 2.1 below. This model consists of four dimensions: mindfulness, choice, appeal and amount of attention, and categorises how a manager may prioritise their attention to eWOM.

Table 2.1: Attentionscape dimensions

Dimension	Selection	Description
Mindfulness	<i>Front of mind</i>	<i>Attention to eWOM that is conscious and deliberate.</i>
	<i>Back of mind</i>	<i>Attention to eWOM that is unconscious or even spontaneous</i>
Choice	<i>Captive</i>	<i>eWOM is thrust on the manager, like comments on the company's Facebook wall.</i>
	<i>Voluntary</i>	<i>Manager looks for eWOM anywhere, of his or her own free will and volition.</i>
Appeal	<i>Aversion</i>	<i>Manager pays attention to eWOM because (s)he is afraid of the consequences of not paying attention.</i>
	<i>Attractiveness</i>	<i>Manager pays attention to eWOM because it fascinates him or her</i>
Amount of attention		

Source: Adapted from Kietzmann and Canhoto 2013, p. 155

The attentionscape model presented above is a useful tool for public affairs managers to learn how they handle various kinds of eWOM, and if this is suitable given their target audiences' engagement needs. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013) However, the model has greater value when the manager is able to set apart how they prioritise their attention to certain kinds of eWOM, and

social media platforms. The *mindfulness dimension* seeks to categorise whether the marketing manager's attention to eWOM is conscious and deliberate or unconscious and spontaneous. The *choice dimension* categorises whether the marketing manager pays attention to eWOM because (s)he has to, or because (s)he wants to. The *appeal dimension* describes whether the marketing manager pays attention to eWOM because (s)he is afraid of what consequences can be if (s)he does not, or because of fascination. The last dimension, which is called *amount of attention*, describes the amount of attention spent on each type of eWOM. (ibid)

2.8 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework presents the main things that are going to be studied, either graphically or in a narrative form. (Miles & Huberman, 1994) The purpose of the study is *to provide a better understanding on how cultural dimensions' influence organisations' eWOM strategy*, and based on the stated research questions and the literature review, a conceptual framework has been developed. are going to be studied, either graphically or in a narrative form.

2.8.1 Conceptualisation of research question one: Strategies to handle eWOM

There are two definitions used to describe electronic word-of-mouth, one is taken from Fu et al. (2015) who explains eWOM as a statement made by current, previous or a prospective customer that is publicly available through the internet. Another definition is taken from Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013), whom explain eWOM as determined by 'neutral, negative or positive experiences' connected to a 'brand, company, service or product'.

The first research question is "*How can organisations' strategies to handle eWOM in the hotel industry be described?*" The purpose of this question is to understand if, and how, organisations in the hotel industry pay attention to what is said about them online. The conceptualisation of eWOM strategies is based on recent studies by:

- Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki and Wilner (2014), describes the importance of WOMM, how companies get different responses depending on which social media channel they use and what affects an intended message.
- Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013), describes implications of positive and negative comments online and why the consumers might use different social media platforms to express different emotions about an experience. The authors describe how attention is a limited resource that needs to be allocated efficiently by managers, they also present an attentionscape model with four dimensions that displays how managers of eWOM may distribute their attention. The attentionscape model is shown in Table 2.1. As this thesis focus lies on describing strategies to handle eWOM rather than measuring the extent of marketing managers' attention, the last dimension that describes the amount of attention to eWOM is not included.
- Melián-González, Bulchand-Gidumal and González López-Valcárcel (2013), describes how organisations should handle reviews from travellers and that online communication

should be seen as a market force that shall not be overlooked. They also mention that organisations should consider reviews as valuable information for improvements and should encourage consumers to review them online as this creates positive eWOM over time.

- Norbert, Schwarting and Seeberger (2010), describes how companies should handle the new reality where consumers take more and more control through the Internet. The authors suggest that companies should restructure their marketing models to meet changes in important aspects for the organisation. Consumers who buy products through WOM are more willing to repurchase since they get a higher brand loyalty than consumers acquired through traditional marketing methods. Companies should put effort in operating on, and invest in social media, since creating dialogues with customers strengthen the relationship.

2.8.2 Conceptualisation of research question two: Adapting communication to different cultural contexts

The definition of culture is taken from Kale (1991) and explains culture as a collection of learned and shared symbols whose meanings gives a set of directions for ‘members of a society’. This definition tries to fill the gap between academic and business perspectives on culture. (ibid)

The second research question is *“How can organisations adaption of eWOM communication to different cultural contexts be described?”*. The aim is of this question is to learn how organisations adapt their eWOM communication to different cultural contexts, and how organisations may adapt their response to eWOM dependent on different cultural contexts. The conceptualisation of research question two is based on studies by:

- Luo, Wu, Shi and Xu (2014), describes the importance for companies to identify future consumers’ cultural orientation and adapt their eWOM strategies to it. By doing this, companies can direct consumers purchase intentions and recommend different eWOM information depending on consumer’s cultural orientation. Whether the consumers are espoused to an individualistic or collectivistic culture affect how the credibility of information is perceived. This is related to consistency and rating of information. Therefore, companies should provide arguments with high quality and credibility of sources that are consistent to attract consumers, especially doubtful ones from collectivist cultures.
- Kale (1991), describes the importance of adapting communication to different cultures as it determines which way the information is perceived, and how understanding individuals from different cultures behaviour reduces the risk of making mistakes during interactions.
- Fong and Burton (2008), describes that differences among consumers from different cultures are obstacles for companies expanding their business in the online environment since there are no apparent national boundaries. The authors further explain important differences between individualist and collectivist cultures and states that the highest predictor of a company’s growth is consumers’ willingness to recommend it.

- De Mooij and Hofstede (2010), presents Hofstede's framework, which is the model most frequently used for understanding cultural differences. In this study, the individualism/collectivism dimension is conceptualised since that is the dimension that differ the most in how individuals perceive the credibility of information and how they use it.

Chosen theories and aspects for this thesis are compiled and graphically presented in Table 2.2 and 2.3 below.

Table 2.2: Conceptualisation of research question one.

Concept	Conceptualisation
eWOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet" (Fu, Ju & Hsu, 2015, p.617).</i> • <i>"eWOM refers to any statement based on positive, neutral, or negative experiences made by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product, service, brand, or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet (through web sites, social networks, instant messages, news feeds.)" (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013, p.147).</i>
Strategies to handle eWOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Important to know differences in eWOM and pay attention to damaging comments (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013).</i> • <i>Management of eWOM is an important part of consumer service. Managers must prioritise where, what and when eWOM is read and answered to. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013)</i> • <i>Strong influencers can transform commercial promotions to valuable information (Kozinets et al., 2010).</i> • <i>Online reviews improve with the quantity and organisations should encourage customers to post reviews. When the quantity increases the customers buying intentions increases. Negative reviews are valuable information for improvements. (Melián-González et al., 2013)</i> • <i>Companies should participate in social media to build a good reputation (Norbert et al., 2010).</i> • <i>WOMM leads to credibility and authenticity (Norbert et al., 2010).</i>

Table 2.3: Conceptualisation of research question two.

Concept	Conceptualisation
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Culture is a learned, shared, compelling, interrelated set of symbols whose meanings provide a set of orientations for members of a society.” (Kale, 1991, p. 19)
Cultural dimensions: <i>Power distance</i> Individualism/Collectivism <i>Masculinity vs. Femininity</i> <i>Uncertainty avoidance</i> <i>Long-/short term orientation</i> <i>Indulgence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The individualism/collectivism dimension explains the relationship between individuals within a society and is manifested by the way individuals live together (Kale, 1991). • Collectivistic and individualistic cultures perceive the credibility of information different (Luo et al., 2014).
Adaption of eWOM communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use information consistency to attract individuals from collectivistic cultures (Luo et al., 2014). • Consider different cultural behaviours to reduce the risk of making mistakes during interactions (Kale, 1991). • Develops strategies to build favourable WOM for individualistic or collectivistic cultures (Fong & Burton, 2008). • Adapt commercial messages to collectivist and individualistic cultures to build trust with the former, give information to the latter and not offend. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methods used for the thesis. It starts with a discussion of the purpose of the research. Thereafter, the chosen approach and strategy is presented as well as how the data was collected and which sample that was used. Finally, an overview of how the analysis was conducted and the quality and credibility of it is discussed. The methodology chapter consists of seven parts, which together have laid the foundation for our study. In Figure 3.1 below, an overview of these parts is presented.



Figure 3.1: Outline of the methodology.

The chapter begins with a description of the thesis research purpose, research approach and selection of research strategy. Based on the selection of these parts, the data collection method is presented. Thereafter, the data analysis section describes how to make sense of the obtained data, and lastly, the validity and reliability of the study is discussed.

3.1 Research Purpose

There are three common research purposes for a study: descriptive, explanatory and exploratory. However, which purpose a study serve depends on how the research questions are formulated (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009), the amount of previous knowledge within the chosen area of investigation and what information that is needed to fulfil the purpose of the study. (Yin, 1994) In a descriptive research, you seek to collect as much information as possible, and focus on the “how” and “why”. In other words, you seek to describe what is happening and increase your understanding. (Bryman & Bell, 2013) As the purpose of this thesis is *to provide a better understanding on how cultural dimensions’ influence organisations’ eWOM strategy*. The thesis has a descriptive research and aims to describe which strategies organisations in the hotel industry use to handle eWOM and how they adapt their eWOM communication to different cultural contexts.

3.2 Research Approach

The research approach can be quantitative and/or qualitative (Bryman & Bell, 2013), for this thesis a qualitative approach was the best choice as the research questions seek to describe and get an understanding of *“how cultural dimensions’ influence organisations’ eWOM strategy”*.

Considering this research purpose, conducting a qualitative study was appropriate since the aim was to describe and get an in-depth view of the study. Interviews were needed to provide useful information and to get the opportunity to ask additional questions to get a better understanding.

Qualitative data is useful when trying to understand rationale or theory underlying relationships. (Ravenswood, 2011) It tends to appear in the form of words instead of numbers and can present a chronological flow showing exactly which events that lead to certain consequences, with important explanations behind. A qualitative research approach focuses on naturally occurring events in natural environments and the fact that data is collected close to specific situations, gives it confidence. (Miles & Huberman, 1994) Furthermore, qualitative research has an epistemological approach that may be described as interpretative, which implies that the emphasis is to understand the social reality on the basis of how the participants in a certain environment interpret this reality. (Bryman & Bell, 2013)

3.3 Research Strategy

Yin (1994) describes five different research strategies that have different ways to collect and make sense of empirical evidence, all with their own logic. Each one has its own advantages and disadvantages that are important to know in order to select the most appropriate strategy. However, all of these strategies may be used for all of the research purposes - exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. (Yin, 1994) Table 3.1 below presents differences and similarities of each strategy.

Table 3.1: Relevant situations for different research strategies

Strategy	Form of research question	Requires control over behavioural events?	Focuses on contemporary events?
Experiment	<i>How, why</i>	Yes	Yes
Survey	<i>Who, what, where, how many, how much</i>	No	Yes
Archival analysis	<i>Who, what, where, how many, how much</i>	No	Yes/No
History	<i>How, why</i>	No	No
Case study	<i>How, why</i>	No	Yes

Source: Adapted from Yin 1994, p. 6

According to Yin (1994), the most suitable approach to use is based on three conditions:

1. What kind of research question that is stated.
2. The degree of control that an investigator has over real time behavioural events.
3. The level of attention to historical as opposed to contemporary events.

A case study is the favoured choice when investigating contemporary events and when manipulation of relevant behaviours is not possible. Furthermore, the case study adds two more sources of evidence to its strategy: systematic interviews and direct observation. (Yin, 1994)

The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result. (Yin, 1994, s.12)

This definition implies that the topic of “decisions” is the main focus of this type of research strategy. The case study is considered to be an empirical inquiry that examines a *“contemporary phenomenon within its real-life surroundings, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”*. (Yin, 1994, s.13) A case study is appropriate when you wish to study one case in detail and in depth, as it has a small sample size and several variables. (Bryman & Bell, 2013) Furthermore, a case study allows for real life events to be investigated and still retain the holistic characteristics. (Yin, 1994)

Case studies can be done by using single cases or multiple cases. Single cases are commonly used when they for example, represent a critical-case, or a unique case. Multiple case studies are appropriate to use when there is a need to establish if the discoveries of the first case happen in other cases. (Saunders et al., 2009) It can also be seen as more appealing, as the possibilities of doing a satisfying case study is greater than a single case design. The reason for this is that analytic findings that arise independently from two cases are seen as more compelling. (Yin, 2009)

The *first* research question is *“How can organisations’ strategies to handle eWOM in the hotel industry be described?”*. This research question focuses on the “how” and seeks to describe contemporary circumstances at the same time as it does not require any control over behavioural events. The *second* research question *“How can organisations’ adoption of eWOM communication to different cultural contexts be described?”* meets the same criteria and therefore a case study has been chosen as the most appropriate strategy to comply with the purpose and answer the stated questions. This is also supported by the topic of the thesis questions, as they seek to understand the *decisions* of an individual that handles an organisation's eWOM communication and the context in which this individual makes his or her decisions. Hence, by choosing a case study including multiple cases, the thesis is able to describe why the decisions of the manager were taken and the differences of the managers’ decisions.

3.4 Data Collection

Based on the stated research questions, it is appropriate to use different methods for collecting data. Data can be divided into two categories: primary and secondary data. Primary data is new data that is gathered specifically for the research purpose, whereas secondary data has been collected for another purpose (e.g. for a prior study). Methods for collecting primary data include interviews, questionnaires and observations, whereas interviews can be divided into subcategories; structured-, semi-structured-, and unstructured interviews. (Saunders et al, 2009) Interviews and observations are two sources of information that is commonly used for case studies. (Yin, 1994) In Table 3.2 below, an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of interviews is presented.

Table 3.2: Sources of evidence - Strengths and weaknesses

Source of Evidence	Strengths	Weaknesses
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Targeted: Focuses directly on case study topic.</i>• <i>Insightful: Provides perceived causal inferences.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Bias due to poorly constructed questions.</i>• <i>Response bias.</i>• <i>Inaccuracies due to poor recall.</i>• <i>Reflexivity: Interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear.</i>

Source: Adapted from Yin 1994, p. 80

Interviews are effective to use when collecting data for case studies as it gives the researchers the opportunity to go in-depth and ask the respondents about their personal opinions and why they made certain decisions. This is also called open-ended interviews as the respondent may propose his or her own insights into certain events and facts of a matter. Another advantage when using interviews is that they focus directly on the topic and are an important source of information because most case studies are about human affairs. In interviews, the interviewer has more control as the respondent is observed on a face-to-face basis and non-standardised questions can be asked. This implies that the interviewer has to behave appropriate and avoid pressing the respondent for an answer to prevent a stressful environment. Furthermore, the interviewer should clarify for the respondent that he or she has the opportunity to decline to respond. (Yin, 1994)

When the desired sample to interview is geographically dispersed it can be advantageous to use electronic interviews. These interviews can be synchronous, that is, taken in real time through chat rooms, or asynchronous, which means that the interview is taken offline via email or Internet forums. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher has developed a list of questions and themes that will be covered in the interview. However, depending on the flow of the conversation and the organisational context, the order of the questions may vary and some questions may be omitted. To further explore the research questions, the interviewer can ask additional questions during the interview if the interviewer links it to something the respondent has spoken of. (Saunders et al., 2009)

Firstly, contact was established with one person, a CEO who gave us permission to interview his two employees who handled the eWOM communication for three hotels in the northern Sweden. After establishing contact with the employees, one of them was able to participate in our interview. This individual handled one of the hotels eWOM communications in another city of northern Sweden, thereby; we were at a geographical disadvantage and decided to conduct the interview electronically via Skype. This individual “female A” had a good insight on how the hotel handled eWOM and was able to describe “why” and “how” certain decisions were made. However, to get satisfying data, another hotel was searched for to compare the different strategies and decisions made by managers of two different hotels. Contact was thereafter established with a hotel that is located in Luleå, and a face-to-face interview was conducted. The interviewed individual, henceforth called “female B”, was the person in charge for the management of eWOM for a hotel that was a part of a hotel chain. Female B was able to describe “how” and “why” certain decisions was made and had a good insight into the hotels strategies and thoughts of eWOM. Due to the fact that one of the respondents wanted to remain anonymous, interviewees has been called “female A” and “female B”.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by preparing topics and interview questions that were open ended to acquire in-depth information. The interviews were focused as they were conducted within a short period of time and we were able to confirm some of the studies with the respondents’ way of handling eWOM. Moreover, during the interviews the respondents always had the opportunity to answer freely and develop their answers. Both interviews were held approximately 60 minutes and in Swedish. To confirm managers’ statements, we made observations of the hotels Facebook page and their reviews on TripAdvisor. By doing this we felt more confident of our conclusions that will be presented in chapter six.

3.5 Sample Selection

Evidence from multiple case designs is often more appealing, and considered as more robust. When revealing an important finding from a single experiment, a first concern is to replicate this finding by making a second, third or more experiments. Some replications may attempt to duplicate the exact context, and other might change some experimental conditions that are seen as unimportant. With such replications the original result would be seen as robust. The logic behind multiple cases is similar; every case has to be selected so that they either (1) anticipate similar results or (2) anticipates contrasting results but for anticipated reasons. (Yin, 2009)

The thesis research questions aim to describe how organisations handle eWOM in the hotel industry and if their eWOM communication is adapted to different cultural contexts. Therefore, an assessment was made, and hotels were naturally chosen as suitable organisations to answer the stated questions. The criteria for choosing the hotels were:

- The hotel has to serve international customers
- The hotel has to have a website and a presence on social media
- The hotel must have an assigned manager that handles eWOM communication
- The hotel should operate in northern Sweden

To get a better “*understanding on how cultural dimensions influence an organisation’s eWOM strategy*”, in the selected cases (hotels) we identified and selected respondents with profound knowledge about and responsibility for the organisations eWOM strategies. Interviews were carried out with, female A, a manager of eWOM at hotel in Piteå and female B, a manager of a local hotel’s eWOM communication that is a part of a larger chain in Sweden.

Non-probability sampling is favourable to use when the study has a particular purpose and only focuses on one or a few cases that can provide useful information for the stated research questions. Quota, judgement, probability, snowball, self-selection and convenience are all different types non-probability sampling. Judgemental sampling indicates that the chosen sample method is elected to give the best answers for the research questions and meet the objectives of the study in the best possible way. This method of sampling is often chosen when using relatively small samples such as in case study research and when the researcher wants cases that are particularly informative. In a convenience sample the researcher chooses cases that are easiest to get a hold of. (Saunders et al., 2009) Hence, the sample selection of this thesis can be seen as judgemental and partially convenience as the chosen hotels operates in northern Sweden where the authors of this thesis reside. In short, two interviews were conducted where one participant handled the eWOM communication for a hotel in Piteå and the other participant handled the eWOM communication for a hotel in Luleå. Hence, each participant was in charge of different hotels and their eWOM communication

3.6 Data Analysis

When analysing collected data, it is important to treat it in a fair manner, to produce credible compelling analytic conclusions and to eliminate alternative interpretations (Yin, 2009). There are two general analytic strategies “*relying on theoretical propositions*” and “*developing a case description*”. These strategies aim to guide the investigator's decision between different techniques and to finish the analytic phase successfully. Developing a case description is the least preferred strategy, which has the intention to develop a descriptive framework for organising the study. The more desirable strategy is relying on theoretical propositions; that is, the information from previous theories and theoretical propositions that has led to the case study. Such propositions are presumably the base of case studies, and reflect a set of research questions and the literature review. The proposition helps the researcher(s) to target their attention on relevant

data, construct the case study and to examine alternative explanations. Furthermore, theoretical propositions concerning causal relations - replies to “why” and “how” questions might be useful when directing case study analysis in this manner. (ibid)

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative analysis is divided and analysed through following three flows of activity:

1. Data Reduction
2. Data Display
3. Conclusion Drawing

In data reduction a simplification and a description of the collected empirical data are made to direct attention toward certain parts of the data. Thereafter, in the data display, the reduced data is organised and put into tables and/or figures to get a better understanding of the data that otherwise could be hard to analyse in an extended text. The last step of the analysis process is the verification and illustration of the data, this stage entails that the conclusions will be drawn and interpreted. (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

When using multiple cases, a cross-case synthesis might be an appropriate method of analysis. This kind of analysis might be simpler to use and the findings more robust compared to a single case. The method of analysis treats each particular case study as a separate study. (Yin, 2009) This thesis has relied on theoretical propositions as analytic strategy. This is because information from previous theories and theoretical propositions has been the foundation for the case study, and thus, the collection of data has been formed by relevant studies. Firstly, a within-case analysis was made to reduce data and then compared to the theory presented in the conceptual framework. In addition, a within-case analysis and a cross case analysis has been conducted. This is because we wanted to analyse both individual cases by themselves to see if, and how they would fit previous studies, and thereafter compare them to each other to find similarities or differences.

3.7 Quality Standards

Concerning quality and credibility of the collected data, there are two aspects that have to be considered: reliability and validity. (Saunders et al., 2009) According to Yin (1994) the quality of case study research can be examined through four different tests. These tests, as well as the recommended tactics for each test and its phases of research are shown in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3: Case study tactics for four design tests.

Tests	Case study tactic	Phase of research in which tactic occurs
Construct validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Use multiple sources of evidence</i> • <i>Establish chain of evidence</i> • <i>Have key informants review draft case study report</i> 	← <i>Data collection</i> ← <i>Data collection</i> ← <i>Composition</i>
Internal validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Do pattern-matching</i> • <i>Do explanation-building</i> • <i>Do time-series analysis</i> 	← <i>Data analysis</i> ← <i>Data analysis</i> ← <i>Data analysis</i>
External validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Use replication logic in multiple-case studies</i> 	← <i>Research design</i>
Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Use case study protocol</i> • <i>Develop case study database</i> 	← <i>Data collection</i> ← <i>Data collection</i>

Source: Adapted from Yin 1994, p. 33

Construct validity deals with whether the measures for the studied area are correct or not. This can be especially hard to implement for case study research because the investigator uses subjective judgments to collect data instead of developing an operational set of measures.

According to Yin (1994), a researcher should cover two steps to construct validity: (1) chose the particular kinds of changes that are to be studied, and (2) show that the chosen measures of these changes reflect the particular kinds of change that have been chosen. Furthermore, to increase the validity, there are three different tactics: multiple sources of evidence, establish a chain of evidence and to have the draft case study reviewed by key informants. Triangulation is when two or more sources of evidence are used to find out if they reach the same conclusion for the same study. Hence, by using triangulation the researcher can feel more confident if several sources of evidence reach the same result. (Yin, 1994)

To increase the validity of this thesis, multiple sources of evidence has been used, i.e. triangulation, composed by interviews and observations of the hotels' Facebook pages. Expressed relevant studies was combined with the conceptual framework and functioned as a chain of evidence that made it easier to understand which steps that had been taken and how. Both interviews were recorded in order to not miss anything the respondents said during the

interviews, and to reduce the risk of misinterpretations, the data presentation chapter was sent to the respondents for approval.

Internal validity is only applicable for explanatory case studies, where the investigator aims to determine if event x led to event y (Yin, 1994). Therefore, internal validity has not been assessed for this thesis.

External validity describes whether the findings of a study are generalizable beyond the specific case study. Case studies depend on analytical generalisations; in these generalisations the researcher are striving to generalise the results to a broader theory. The theory that contributed to the case study will help to recognise other cases where the findings are generalizable. However, the generalisation is not straightforward, as it must be tried through replications of the results in a second or third case study. In these replications, theory should specify that the same findings should occur. When replications have been done, the findings could be accepted for other similar cases. (Yin, 1994) To construct external validity, replication logic and multiple case studies have been used to see if findings could be used and connected to previous research, in this case, the conceptual framework. Furthermore, the research has also functioned as a protocol to prevent incorrect assumptions.

Reliability answers the question: *Will a later investigator reach the same findings and conclusions if he or she follow exactly the same procedures and conduct the same case study as an earlier investigator?* This means that the objective for reliability is to reduce biases and mistakes in a study. (Yin, 1994) Qualitative interviews is subjective and can therefore have biases as the respondent may be influenced by the researcher's body language, tone of voice and/or what they believe the researcher wants to hear. The researcher should also be careful when analysing the collected data to make sure they perceive the respondents answers in the right way. (Saunders et al., 2009)

In order to make this thesis as reliable as possible, the previous sections of the method have been written in detail to show the collection and analysis of data. An interview guide is also attached to this thesis and may function as a checklist for future researchers when trying to replicate this study. The interview guide was tested on an online marketing manager (E. Garcia, personal communication, 17 may 2016) who handles social media accounts. The manager thought that our questions were too specific in some cases, but gave her approval to use the interview guide. The interviews were held in Swedish, but since a lot of time and effort has been put to ensure that the meaning of the questions have been maintained, we feel confident that the questions were translated correctly and connected to the theory presented in chapter two.

In total, two individuals were interviewed, one of the individuals was interviewed through Skype to create an authentic environment, and the other was interviewed face-to-face. The interviews were held in Swedish, but we put a lot of work and attention on the translation and scrutiny of the interview guide in order to maintain the meaning of, and the connection of the questions to the theory presented in chapter two also after translation. To avoid respondent bias, the questions

were formulated in a non-leading and open-ended way, which enabled the respondent to answer the questions without too much the influence of the interviewer. Furthermore, the interview was audio-recorded, which enabled us to listen to the interviews again when it was time to analyse the data.

3.8 Summary of methodology

An overview of possible methodology approaches is shown in Figure 3.2 below. The blue boxes illustrate specific approaches for this thesis.

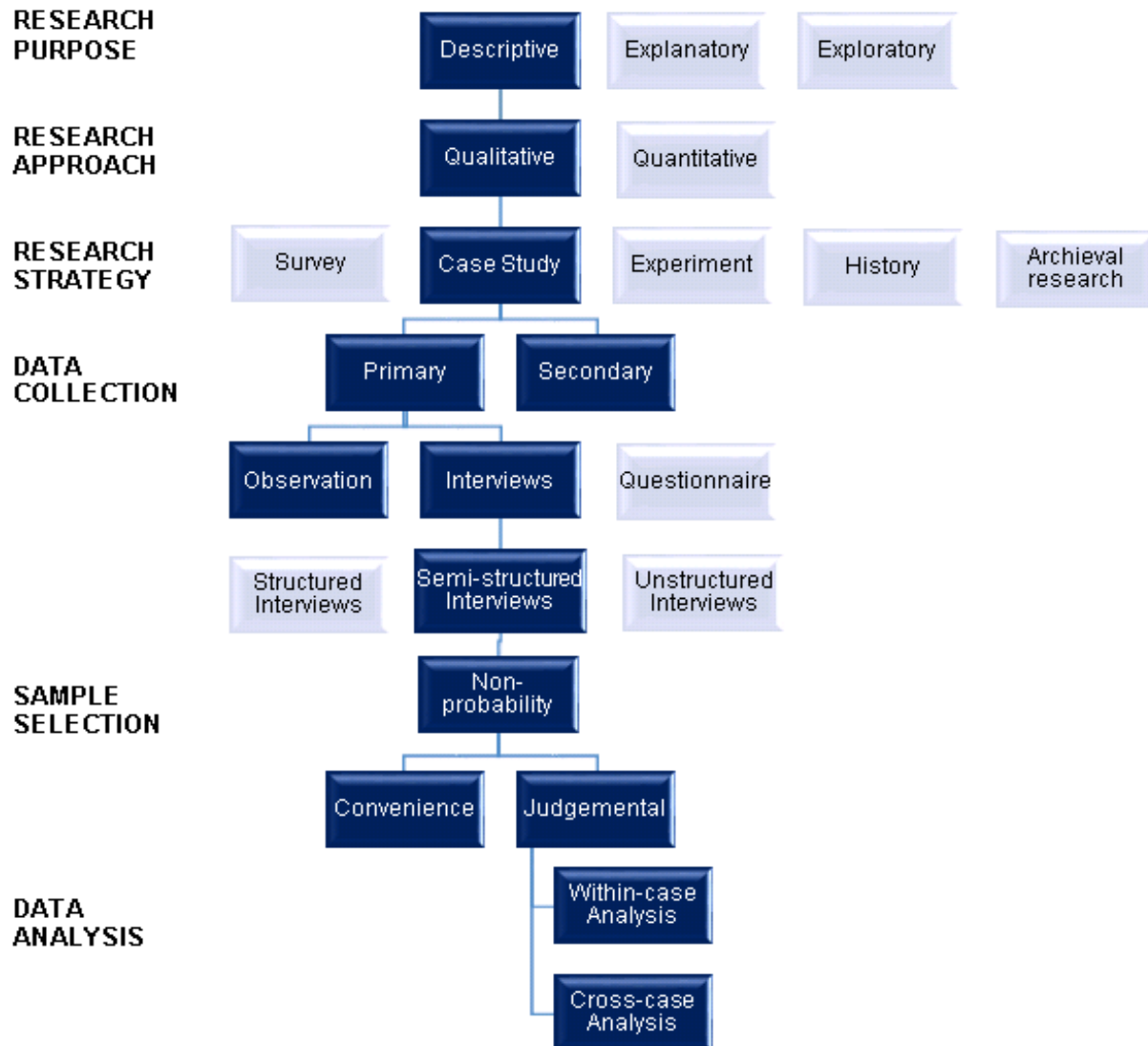


Figure 3.2: Overview of chosen methodology approach.

4. EMPIRICAL DATA

This chapter aims to present the empirical data of the case studies. The data is collected from individual semi-structured interviews with employees from two hotels in northern Sweden and observations of Facebook and TripAdvisor. The data is thereafter organised and presented for one hotel at a time by using the topics from the conceptual framework and questions from the interview guide.

4.1 Hotel A

The first interview was held through Skype with the marketing communicator of hotel A in Piteå. The respondent of hotel A, called female A, says that she has about four years of experience in management of social media. Female A explains that she manages the hotel's social media accounts with another person; however, they both have the same knowledge in social media management. Additionally, there are around five more people that may answer to comments and messages on the hotel's social networking sites. Observations of TripAdvisor shows that hotel A has received mixed ratings, however, their overall rating lands in the lower section, that is, below three on a scale of one to five.

4.1.1 eWOM strategies

When it comes to social networking sites, female A explains that they use both Facebook and Instagram to reach their target audience. According to observations, their Facebook page is updated frequently during the whole year, however their Instagram is mainly updated during peak seasons such as Christmas and summer. She also mentions that hotel A has a registered account on Twitter to secure that their brand is not used by anyone other than the hotel, they do not use Twitter for communication purposes. Hotel A is active on Facebook and Instagram because it reaches their target audience in contrast to Twitter, which is perceived as a website where individuals express their political opinions. The prioritisation of social networks is based on a survey conducted two years ago and was published on the hotel's website and Facebook. Afterwards, she explains that she acknowledges the possibility that their target audience may have changed their preferences of social media platform in the contemporary marketplace.

The hotel has established a policy for comments online; if they are condescending or offensive toward an ethnic group or breaks the policy; they will hide the comment from the public. This is confirmed by observations of the hotel's Facebook page information.

The respondent says, that they do not deliberately post anything on their social networking sites to encourage eWOM. However, they occasionally ask questions like "*what would you like for breakfast?*" The objective of this is to interact with the target audience and get a response. A post on the hotel's Facebook page can confirm this: "*Do you remember the arcade that were here a long time ago? Here we go again - but in a much smaller scale...*". Furthermore, female A explains that they mainly read and respond to comments on their social networking sites during

working hours, but always tries to have someone available on their Facebook page as the comments are more frequent there. They always check for comments in the morning and reply to private messages. If another errand is done through the computer, they always check their Facebook page as well. However, the response rate is very low on weekends.

According to the respondent, Loopon¹, a site where hotel visitors can give feedback and recommendations, is sometimes checked, as they want to know what their guests think about the hotel. The hotel has recently registered an account on TripAdvisor in order to edit their site themselves and reply to comments. However, they have not yet begun to work with this. Furthermore, she says that they have recently made a deal with Observify, which is a business intelligence tool that offers hotels to buy keywords and reports of what is being said about their brand. Female A explains that Observify is a new tool that they have chosen to use, as they want to know visitors' opinions. Yet, they have still not received their login credentials. In the future they hope to meet both positive and negative comments, however, they plan to thank for the reviews regardless of the type of comment. This is because they are dependent on the customers and their feedback helps them to make improvements. Thereof, they have planned to pay attention to both positive and negative comments and perhaps use it in social media. If they, for example, have received complaints about the breakfast, they plan to write about the negative feedback and then explain what actions they have taken to improve it. According to female A, this proves that the hotel listens to the customer and then they can take advantage of the situation and turn it into something positive. Or, that is the plan at least. She believes that it is important to acknowledge the time that the customer has taken to write the comment.

When it comes to the priorities of eWOM and which comments the hotels replies to, female A says that they try to answer all comments that are not offensive. However, this is not confirmed by the company's Facebook page, as there are only a few comments replied to. This applies to all comments, regardless of what it is about. Comments that are fabricated and not based on any truth about the hotel are hidden from their Facebook page. She believes that this might be cowardly since it is the easy solution. However, they do not feel that they have time enough, and have chosen to prioritise comments where someone wants information about something. Some comments can be very unpleasant and accusing the hotel for being a refugee camp. Those comments are hidden, but the one who wrote it still sees it. Female A reflects and says that perhaps you should meet these comments as well, but the time is limited. If comments are negative, they try to respond by explaining that they will do their best to improve. According to female A, all comments that are allowed to remain on their social networks are replied to. However, there is no established strategy for how they answer to positive comments besides "thank you". If there are any negative comments, they try to absorb constructive criticism and thereafter thank for it. They also try to direct the dialogue away from the public by asking the person to contact them via phone or email to solve the problem. In some cases, customers are compensated, but this is not shown on any social networks to avoid the risk of other customers

¹ Loopon is a site that provides the hotel- and conference market with guest satisfaction surveys.
<http://www.loopon.com> (ACCESSED: May 10, 2016)

requiring compensation for minor problems. The respondent perceives that people tend to write about hotel A when major changes occur in the organisation. Lately, there have been a lot of comments about the Swedish Migration Agency and the fact that they are renting a part of the facility as a centre of lodging and education. Before that, individuals had opinions about the ownership when the hotel was sold. Female A, explains that they used to be a typical summer resort, but after the Swedish Migration Agency rented their facility, they have been negatively paraphrased, at the same time as people fabricates rumours about the place. Some rumours are not responded to because that can be the easiest solution sometimes.

Female A, believes that the hotel's online reputation is very important since people rely on reviews in most purchase decisions and internet is probably the biggest source of published reviews. They definitely think that negative reviews affect consumers' choice of hotel and connect cancellations to the circumstances regarding the Swedish Migration Agency. Having them as tenants has created a lot of attention online.

To establish personal relations through communications with visitors online, the respondent says that they avoid using auto answers and the person who responds always signs with his or her own name. This makes the answer feel more real for the visitor, at the same time as an actual person stands behind the answer. According to the respondent, they have made a partially conscious choice to not encourage visitors to talk about the hotel on social networks during or after their stay. This is because the comments are likely to be of negative nature, especially considering the current situation with the Swedish Migration Agency. Lately, they have been forced to review status updates and ask themselves "is it possible to turn this into something negative?". Female A explains that they are worried that the comments would hurt hotel A more than it would help, therefore, they plan to wait until the summer to encourage visitors to share their stay, as they hope that visitors trust will be rebuilt then.

According to the respondent, they have not investigated which consumers that actively engage in eWOM, yet, by looking at the hotels target audience can draw some conclusions about who writes comments. In this case, women in their midlife that do not work. However, they have not analysed this thoroughly but have indicators, which is nothing scientific.

The respondent points out, that the hotel has loose plans on starting collaborations with some strong influencers; however, the criterions are not decided yet. It would favourably be with a person that is a representative of their target audience, and this person would reasonably be a middle-aged woman who is the head of the family and decides how they will spend their vacation. The thought of collaboration with an influencer was established recently after gained insights from a course in social media management. The course covered several different parts, such as tools appropriate to use, where to be seen, advices and ideas. For example, one useful advice was to have a strategy, a common thread, continuity, keeping it interesting, and that there should be something to gain for potential visitors and followers. This was the spark to market monitoring; we need to listen to what people say about us. Female A further explains that they are not aware of any strong influencers that have spoken badly about them online. However, she

believes that strong influencers may have talked negatively about hotel A, and points out that they have not yet any tools to catch these things and therefore it might have passed their knowledge.

4.1.2 Adaptation to Culture

According to the respondent, most visitors come from Norway and Sweden and a few from the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland. Sometimes they have visitors from Denmark and Russia as well, but most visitors are from Scandinavia. However, the business is seasonal, in the summer there are mostly Scandinavian people whilst there are mostly business people from outside of Sweden in the winter, such as Israelis, Frenchmen, Italians and people from all over Europe. The hotel's social networking sites are not adapted to different nationalities since these are focused on the tourists rather than business people. Therefore, they only communicate in Swedish on social networking sites. Norwegians are the nationality that comments the most, they write in Norwegian and managers of the hotel reply in Swedish. This works really well as Norwegians understand Swedish very well at the same time as the managers understand Norwegian really well. The Finns do not usually write in Finnish, and the ones that visit understands Swedish. Female A admits that they have not even considered adapting their social networking sites to English. She believes that this is a result of being extremely naive and thinking that they only have Swedish followers, but that might not be so smart she continues.

After a conference, business people always receive an email where they are encouraged to share their experiences about the conference, which according to the respondent, probably is a cause for not posting comments on the hotel's social networks. It is mostly tourists that write reviews, not business travellers. However, female A does not know what kind of visitors that post reviews about them on TripAdvisor and Looon since time is something that they have too little of.

After the respondent has reflected a while, she says that there are a lot of Norwegians that comments, but that is on Facebook. She cannot answer which nationality that comments the most on TripAdvisor and Looon, but she believes that it is equally divided between Norwegians and Swedes. She guesses that Norwegians are a little more positive than Swedes, and says "but are they not always?". When they are here they are so pleased and happy and it is clearly noticeable. That is why she believes that they behave the same online. Norwegians usually rate the hotel high and post a short review and Swedes tend to be more negative and write long reviews.

Female A has not perceived visitors from some countries as more doubtful than other or desiring for more information. They have the same way of meeting customers from different nationalities. When customers communicate with them they usually ask questions about opening hours, open camping spots and other information that the customer could easily find at the website, but it is easier to write a message via Facebook. Furthermore, the respondent explains that they have not thought about how they can reach customers from other countries, but maybe they should.

4.2 Hotel B

The second interview was held in the city centre of Luleå with the sales- and marketing manager of a hotel that is a part of a larger chain, called “female B”. Based on observations, female B manages eWOM for a hotel that is consistently and highly rated on both TripAdvisor and Facebook by many nationalities and the same applies for the whole chain. The respondent has three years of experience of social media management at hotel B and some experience from previous employment. She is responsible for managing social media at hotel B’s own website and manages the hotel’s Facebook page and Instagram together with the marketing coordinator of the hotel and another employee whom she has recently hired to not get overwhelmed of the workload. The respondent used to reply to comments whenever she could and this took a lot of time and effort, nowadays she has prioritised the devoted time to handle eWOM. The reception manager handles TripAdvisor, however, they all have the same experience and knowledge within social media management.

4.2.1 eWOM Strategies

Female B says that they primarily use Facebook and Instagram to communicate with visitors. However, Instagram is still very new to them and they prefer to use Facebook. This is because Facebook is easy to work with and people can easily ask questions and share posts. The respondent explains that the hotel reaches out to even more people in this way. Therefore, they are more active on Facebook than Instagram, although female B admits that Instagram might have the same effect if they put more effort into it. Posts published on Facebook are intended to spread and function as a marketing tool. The brand also works actively with arranging competitions on their Facebook page centrally, yet hotel B has not had a competition in a while.

Instagram is updated once a week or once every other week with no competitions. The hotel’s Facebook page is updated around four to five times a week or more. This is confirmed by observations of the hotels Facebook page and the frequency of their posts.

The respondent mentions that there have not been any investigations on which social networks their customers prefer to talk about them locally. However, the hotel chain has made investigations centrally. The investigation resulted in a greater presence on Instagram for the hotel, since it turned out they could get a lot of attention from that network. They have talked about hiring a company to help them segment their target audience in order to reach out to the right people and to market the posts in the right direction. Female B explains that three posts on their Facebook page every week is assembled centrally by a person who solely works with the hotel chain's marketing. This person makes all the common posts, for example, this person might make a post connected to mother's day or some other holiday and then the posts are customised for the local market. At a local level, the respondent explains that they have decided to focus more on being personal and highlight the individuals behind the scenes, like the ones working in the restaurant for example. The hotel does not intentionally create posts that encourage individuals to positive WOM.

In addition to the previously mentioned social networks, the hotel is registered on TripAdvisor and Loopon.com, where they have their own website where individuals can post comments. When posting a review on Loopon, Female B explains that their customers have the opportunity to decide whether they want to be public or not. If they choose to publish their review it is instantly posted on hotel B's own website as well. Regardless of where comments are posted, Facebook, Instagram, TripAdvisor or the website, the respondent explain that they reply to it. If a comment is not replied to, it has fallen between the cracks. They always thank every comment they get, whether it is positive or negative since they believe that if a person has made an effort and put time into writing a review, they feel like they have something important to share. By checking their Facebook page, it is evident that they interact with the individuals who have commented, however, they do not always reply with words but with a "like". In the case of positive comments, they try to highlight some part of the comment, if the visitor liked the breakfast, they might reply by saying: *"Oh, how fun you enjoyed the breakfast, it is an important part of a stay with us"*. If the comment is negative, the respondent points out that they always try to eliminate the problem as soon as possible and explain to the visitor that they will take action to remove the problem, and then they do take action in real life. That is, they always fix problems that occur and explain to the visitor how they did it. They apologise that the expectations were not met and then they attach their email address and tell the customer to get in touch in case of further information, or they contact the customer themselves in cases where the customer will be compensated. This is partly confirmed by the company's communication on their Facebook page, a lot of negative comments are replied to by stating what actions that have been taken and contact information of the hotel for further information.

Female B perceives that visitors post reviews and comments about hotel B if they have had an extraordinary experience, it can either be something good, like a buffet breakfast that was the best they ever had, or something that was negative, like a small bed. She believes that it is much easier to share opinions online that are more negative than positive. Sometimes they notice that many combined and smaller negative events can create an explosion and then the visitor chooses to write a negative post or review. However, there is always a reason behind every post. In the future, the respondent hope to use some system that informs them if a visitor writes something about hotel B, so that they can be answered to immediately.

According to the respondent, the hotel's online reputation is very important. The brand should always be protected as the opinions of others can easily spread. Female B points out that TripAdvisor and bookings.com are constantly checked before a prospective customer makes reservations, and therefore reputation and reviews about the hotel affect customers' choice of accommodation. She also mentions that if you respond to the comments, you can turn something negative into something positive for the next customer as well. However, if they would not answer, she believes that others would think that they do not care. If you reply, you can protect the brand in a way, she continues.

The hotel has not used strong influencers nor been affected by one, except two years ago, when they arranged an event with information about cosmetic surgeries. These kinds of events had

proven to be successful for hotels in the southern Sweden. Nevertheless, this was picked up by another organisation in northern Sweden, who got upset and questioned how hotel B could stand for such a thing and received a lot of bad attention. The respondent describes that they create authenticity and credibility by meeting the customers' comments and thereby showing that the hotel cares about the customers. They are very thorough that the information that they give out is correct, and avoid being in a position where they have promised something they cannot deliver. By making observations of the hotels site on TripAdvisor it is evident that the reception manager replies to all comments and signs her posts with her name.

The hotel uses Loopon.com as a basis for checking comments, since individuals who post on Loopon usually post on other sites as well. However, they have many Facebook administrators, which enable them to provide quick answers to messages or comments, as there is always someone available. However, by making observations of the hotel's Facebook page some reviews and comments are not replied to. Loopon is favourable to use since the website makes it possible to respond to negative reviews rapidly and inhibit them to spread further. Restructurings have recently been made in the organisation and the aim is to have one person doing the daily work with the hotel's social media sites, which is estimated to around four hours every week. The sales manager is also connected to all the hotels social networking sites through her phone and constantly checks comments or messages. Female B repeats herself and says that no comments should be left unanswered or hidden.

According to the respondent, all customers that have registered their email address receive a request to participate in a survey through Loopon, which is directly published on the hotel's website. Furthermore, the respondent explains that they do not encourage visitors to post reviews about them online. Even if a customer mentions the hotel in a positive way, they are a bit worried that visitors may post negative comments about them as well. However, there are still many visitors that post reviews and comments about their stay and she believes that it is better that people that have something to say share their opinions rather than forcing reviews from everybody.

4.2.2 Adaptation to Culture

The hotel has visitors from all over the world, but mostly from United States of America, Japan, Norway, Germany, and United Kingdom. They have the same policy for foreign visitors and domestic and do not encourage the visitors to post reviews; however, visitors do receive a survey in English sent by email after their stay. Female B estimates that the individuals who engage in eWOM are a part of the younger generation, and not over 40 years old. However, she believes that the age will increase as a result of the development of society. However, in the summer most of the visitors come from Norway. The respondent admits that they have not adapted their social networks to different nationalities, but their website is available in Swedish and English. English comments are replied to in English but posts are not intentionally made in English on Facebook or TripAdvisor. However, the respondent point out that they adapt their answers to different nationalities and follow a template that also contains words that are appropriate to use. They are

especially careful when they answer to Americans and Englishmen, since these nationalities demands a very positive approach and you have to say “please” to everything. She has not noticed a difference between which nationalities that most frequently write reviews about them online. Although, Finns often post reviews on the hotel’s own website and Japanese prefer to post reviews on TripAdvisor and booking.com. She cannot detect any pattern of visitors that post more positive or negative reviews than others. Nevertheless, Japanese tend to write that they like the hotel’s bathtubs but not the small beds. Female B has noticed that visitors from Asia differ from others as they ask for a lot of information before and after they have made their reservation. They are curious about the hotel and the city in general. Yet, this is something that she believes is going to change since they have noticed that younger people from Sweden want to know what they will get in advance as well. The respondent admits that they do not actively participate in social networks where they can communicate with foreign visitors, however, the chain that hotel B is a part of is more adapted to do such things.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the conceptual framework is compared to the collected data from interviews and observations. The analysis is presented in the same order as our research questions and will consist of two kinds of analyses, a within-case analysis of each hotel as well as a cross-case analysis.

5.1 Within-Case Analysis

In this part of the analysis, data collected from each case is analysed in-depth individually and compared to the theories presented in the conceptual framework

5.1.2 Within-Case Analysis: Hotel A

Research question one - *How can organisations' strategies to handle eWOM in the hotel industry be described?*

Earlier studies point out the importance of understanding eWOM and to enhance the positive effects of it. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013) When analysing the collected data, it is clear that the hotel follows previous research to some extent. They understand the benefits of using different platforms to reach their target audience and after a survey to investigate their preferences they chose to be active on Facebook and Instagram. The marketing communicator explained that they answer all comments that do not violate their policy and remains on their social networks. Yet, there are several negative comments on their Facebook pages that are unanswered. These comments remain on the Facebook page without any attempt of defending the hotel, answering the customers' complaints or attempts to transform negative eWOM into positive eWOM. In the future they plan to answer to comments in the same way as they do on Facebook or other sites and thus they do not intend to make any differences in how they communicate on different social networks.

Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) explain that the consumer engages in eWOM when expectations are not met. In discussion with the marketing communicator, it seems as the hotel is talked about when major changes occur, for example, the situation with the Swedish Migration Agency. This confirms previous research, as the Swedish Migration Agency an unexpected tenant for consumers, became an ignition for negative eWOM.

According to research an important part of consumer service is to manage eWOM, at the same time as managers have to prioritise where, what, and when they read and answer to it. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013) The marketing communicator has realised this, nevertheless they are still in the planning and registration stage when it comes to important websites such as TripAdvisor, Looon and Observify. Female A explained that they respond to negative comments by saying that they will do their best to improve, but there is no established strategy for how they answer to positive comments besides "thank you". When the comment is negative they try to take the dialogue offline to solve the problem, in some cases the customer is

compensated but this is not shown on any social networks. However, the collected data follows previous research made by Melián-González et al. (2013), as they always try to absorb negative and constructive criticism from their visitors. Nevertheless, their management of positive and negative eWOM can be considered poor as they mainly prioritise to answer comments where customers want information about something and avoid comments that are susceptible. Furthermore, the data collection revealed that the hotel has decided to answer to comments in the morning and that their updates on social networks become more frequent during seasonal peaks. Therefore, the hotel seems to have prioritised where, what and when they answer to eWOM, but not with the thought that this is an important part of consumer service.

Suggestions from research made by Kozinets et al. (2010) imply that strong influencers can transform commercial promotions to valuable information. The hotel has not used a strong influencer to transform any commercial promotions and does not know if any strong influencers have affected them in a negative or positive way. In the future they plan to use strong influencers, as they have learned that it may be beneficial to use an influencer in order to transform messages to their target audience. This is still in the planning stage and no criteria have been determined.

Previous studies made by Melián-González et al. (2013) have found that online reviews improve with the quantity. The hotel does not encourage visitors to post reviews, as they are worried that these reviews might be negative, especially considering their situation with their current tenants. Furthermore, earlier research indicates that it is hard for companies to build a good reputation and defend themselves against negative comments if they avoid participating in social media (Norbert et al., 2010). The marketing communicator believes that their online reputation is important as they affect consumers' choice of accommodation and connects cancellations to the current situation with the Swedish Migration Agency. The hotel is active on Facebook and Instagram, however, they are not completely active on TripAdvisor or Looon yet, which are sites that travellers use before they make their reservations. To secure their brand on Twitter they have registered an account that they do not plan to use in the future. Through dialogue with the marketing communicator it is evident that the hotel receives a lot of negative eWOM and by observations it is clear that they do not reply to all of it. This in turn, has affected their brand badly and therefore supports previous research.

According to research conducted by Norbert et al. (2010) it will be a challenge to obtain credibility and authenticity through dialogues with customers and therefore WOMM should be added to the communication mix. The hotel's brand is in bad shape at the moment as they have been exposed to several fabricated rumours about the offline situation and have been unable to create a dialogue with their stakeholders to obtain their credibility. As mentioned earlier, several comments on their networks remain unanswered and the marketing communicator did not mention any developed strategy to handle negative or positive comments. This implies that previous research is correct as the hotel does not seem to use WOMM to a larger extent and as a result the hotel has been affected badly.

Research question two - *How can organisations' adaption of eWOM communication to different cultural contexts be described?*

Previous studies have found that individuals from collectivistic cultures follow the mass, easily accept social opinions from others, and are affected by the consistency of information. (Luo et al., 2014) Visitors are mainly from Scandinavia and areas of Europe, which are cultures that are mostly characterised as individualistic. Moreover, the hotels ratings are inconsistent and tend to be in the lower section, this, together with no evident strategy of creating WOMM campaigns with emphasis on consistency might have contributed to the absence of visitors from collectivistic cultures. Thus, the implications of not adapting their eWOM communication to cultural differences support previous research. By not encouraging individuals to post eWOM, the hotel remains their low rating. Since individuals from collectivistic cultures tend to follow the mass, they choose to not visit hotel A due to bad and inconsistent rating.

Research states that understanding different cultural behaviours reduces the risk of making mistakes during interactions. (Kale, 1991) The hotel's social networks are not adapted to different cultures, since they believe that it is not necessary when accommodating tourists and not business people. The hotel only communicates in Swedish as most of the visitors are from Scandinavia and they have not considered adapting their social networking sites to different nationalities. Moreover, the hotel has been exposed to several fabricated rumours that assumable stem from a cultural clash between the tenants and the tourists that usually visits the hotel. As the hotel does not seem to have developed a strategy to meet these 'attacks' and cultural clashes, a reasonable assumption is that the data supports previous research. They have not considered adaptation of their communication toward other cultures and therefore fabricated rumours have spread and affected them badly in terms of cancellations and reputation.

Fong and Burton (2008) suggest that individualist cultures sharing of information have important effects for marketers who try to build favourable WOM, at the same time as the highest predictor of a company's growth is consumers' willingness to recommend it. Collectivist cultures are less likely to provide recommendations; therefore, there is a bigger challenge in building WOM in collectivist cultures than in individualist cultures. (ibid) After the interview it was evident that the hotel has not developed any strategies to build favourable WOM that is customised to different nationalities or cultures. Furthermore, it is difficult to see if previous studies can be confirmed as the hotel mainly receive customers from individualistic cultures, and the respondent is not aware of who writes reviews about them on TripAdvisor or Looon. However, the individualists that have shared their negative thoughts about the hotel have created a lot of bad attention and thus they have also hindered favourable WOM. Additionally, the hotel has experienced cancellations in association with the renting of facilities to the Swedish Migration agency and this supports the research that connects growth with the consumers' willingness to recommend a company.

De Mooij and Hofstede (2010), describes that individualistic cultures has a more direct style of advertising than collectivist cultures, and the latter may be offended by a persuasive approach where the focus lies on information and not creating trust. The hotel mentions no strategies to

create trust with collectivistic cultures or how they satisfy individualistic cultures by being informative. Therefore, it was not possible to analyse this part as the hotel mainly has visitors from individualistic cultures and has not considered adapting their communication to reach foreigners or plan how they could do this in the future.

5.1.3 Within-case analysis: Hotel B

Research question one - *How can organisations' strategies to handle eWOM in the hotel industry be described?*

Previous research states that it is important to understand the differences of eWOM, how it varies and pays attention to damaging comments. (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013) In this case, the data collected from the hotel indicates that the hotel acts in accordance with previous research, as the respondent is aware of the importance of knowing where the consumers talk about them and respond to negative eWOM. The hotel is active on several different networks to interact with their customers or prospective customers; these networks include Facebook, TripAdvisor, Loopon and to some extent Instagram. They are active on these networks as a result of surveys conducted by the head office of the hotel chain to understand customers' preferences of eWOM on a national level. These surveys are intended to direct the hotel's communication in the right direction, for example, they began to use Instagram after it was stated that their target audience preferred to use the network. They have different people that supervise and answers comments or reviews on Facebook and TripAdvisor, and in the latter network they always sign their response with their name. This implies that they have adopted their communication to different social networks. Additionally, they have a policy of replying to all comments they come across, and this is largely supported by observations on Facebook, and on TripAdvisor all reviews are replied to. The respondent felt that it is especially necessary to respond to negative comments on, for example, TripAdvisor as customers check this site before they make a reservation. When responding to these comments, she felt that you could turn something negative into something positive for the next customer as well. However, an important side note is when the respondent was asked which social networks that they were active participants of and she only mentioned Facebook and Instagram. They are very active on TripAdvisor, but do not seem to look at this website as a social network.

According to Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013), the consumers engage in eWOM when there is a disconfirmation in the expectancy of what they will receive of a firm. Hotel B does not explicitly say this, however the manager mentions that she believes that the reason the customers engage in eWOM is because an experience has been something out of the ordinary and therefore it is important for the hotel to show the customer that they care.

Kietzmann and Canhoto (2013) describe management of positive and negative eWOM as an important part of consumer service. Additionally, negative reviews should be seen as valuable information for improvements. (Melián-González et al., 2013) The hotel has a strategy for dealing with both positive and negative eWOM, firstly they always thank the individual for sharing their experience and thereafter they answer to the actual comments with different

strategies. When there are positive comments they seem to enhance the eWOM by confirming what the consumers has written. If the comment is negative they try to take the conversation with the consumer offline for compensation or further discussion. They also put emphasis on how they took action to prevent this from happening again, and thus the hotel seems to take negative comments as areas of improvements. Moreover, the hotel is determined that all of these 'said' actions are taken in order to prevent a bad reputation. Thus, the hotel seems to have learned that there are differences in how customers want to be met and have adopted their strategy to the message they receive.

As mentioned in the data presentation chapter, the hotel has planned how many updates per week they should devote to each social network. Furthermore, after the manager used to feel consumed by replying to peoples comments she understood the importance of prioritising when to answer to eWOM and hired another person to share the workload. This clearly shows the difficulties in prioritising eWOM and how attention is limited to the twenty-four hours of one day. Yet, the manager also mentioned that they try to reply to all comments everywhere, but this was not completely confirmed by observations. This could be a result of the scarcity of attention and the abundance of shared information online, even so, they seem to prioritise reviews on TripAdvisor and other booking sites as this might affect the consumer's intention to make a reservation at their hotel. In short, it is possible to say that the hotel use eWOM as a consumer service, plans their updates in advance, and prioritise reviews on travelling sites a bit more than Facebook and thereby follows previous research.

Strong influencer can transform commercial promotions to valuable information. (Kozinets et al., 2010) The hotel has not used strong influencers and does not seem to have any plans to use one. However, they have been affected by a strong influencer that gave them a lot of negative attention by questioning how they could host an event devoted to cosmetic surgeries, in turn, this affected how others perceived the hotel badly in northern Sweden. The influencer transformed the intended message and turned it into valuable information for the northern population that reacted badly to the event. Thus, previous research is supported by the implications of the strong influencer's reaction.

Research implies that customers should be encouraged to write online reviews as they improve with the quantity, and when the quantity increases the customers buying intentions increases. (Melián-González et al., 2013) The hotel does not encourage visitors to talk about them before, during or after their stay. This seems to be a result of several purposes, one is the fear of negative comments about them online, the other seems to be the perception that the customer would feel forced and the ones who wants to share something important does so anyway. Furthermore, research says that companies should participate in social media to build a good online reputation (Norbert et al., 2010). The manager of the hotel's eWOM communication explains that their online reputation is of great importance, and bases this on the effect TripAdvisor has on travellers when they make their reservation. When replying to negative or positive comments she felt that they could influence what others may feel about their brand at the same time as they protected it.

The hotel is active on several networks, answers to comments and is consistently highly rated by their visitors. Therefore, it is easy to say, that in accordance with observations and dialogue with the respondent, the hotel follows previous research.

Obtaining credibility and authenticity through dialogues with customers will be a challenge for companies in the future and therefore, WOMM has to be added to the modern communication mix. (Norbert et al., 2010) Hotel B's communication mix is consisting of WOMM as the respondent continuously mention how they look for comments everywhere, use social networks that are preferred by their target audience, plan their updates to suit local preferences and how they have adapted their responses to different comments. This, together with their high ratings on different social networks indicates that they have obtained credibility by adding WOMM to their marketing communication mix and thus, the data supports previous research.

Research question two - *How can organisations' adaption of eWOM communication to different cultural contexts be described?*

Individuals from collectivistic cultures easily accept social opinions from others and are affected by information consistency. (Luo et al., 2014) The hotel attaches great importance of consistent communication as they always make sure that said actions is taken at the same time as they plan their updates on their social networks. However, the hotel does not consciously do this to adapt their WOMM communication to different cultures. Yet, the data supports previous studies as the respondent noticed that Japanese, a collectivist culture, frequently writes about the same things as others, for example, the bathtubs and small beds. Moreover, as the hotel is consistently highly rated on both TripAdvisor and Facebook this can be a contributing factor to why the hotel has a lot of visitors from collectivist cultures.

Kale (1991) describes that culture determines how information is perceived and that understanding different cultural behaviours reduces the risk of making mistakes during interactions. The organisation's five main foreign visitors are a mix of individuals from individualistic and collectivistic countries. They have not adapted their social networks to different cultures, but if the comment is in English they adapt their answers to English. Moreover, the hotel uses a template with words that are appropriate to use when responding to certain nationalities. They are extra careful when replying to Americans or British and always emphasises positivity in their comments to these nationalities, as they know that this is what is expected from these cultures. Hence, it is noticeable that the hotel is aware that cultural differences affects how information is perceived, yet, they do not fully adopt their communication to different cultures. However, an important side note is that during the interview the respondent mentioned that they had hosted an event about cosmetic surgeries that was a success in the southern Sweden but not accepted by the northern culture. This event supports earlier research and emphasises the importance of understanding cultural differences to avoid mistakes during interactions as the hotel received bad attention in northern Sweden with the same event. However, as the hotel only adapts the promotional messages they receive from the head office to fit the local culture and not different nationalities, they only comply with theory to some extent.

According to an earlier study by Fong and Burton (2008), individualist cultures sharing of information have important effects to build favourable WOM and a predictor of a company's growth is consumers' willingness to recommend it. Yet, collectivists do not provide recommendations as easily and therefore it is a challenge to build WOM in these cultures. (ibid) The hotel mentions no strategies to build favourable WOM in order to influence individuals to recommend the organisation for opportunities to grow. The respondent could not detect any pattern of certain nationalities that wrote more reviews or comments than others and therefore it is difficult to decide if previous research about the importance individualists has to favourable WOM can be confirmed. However, she had noticed that Japanese, a collectivistic culture, frequently tends to write about their stay at TripAdvisor and booking. This contradicts previous research as it states that individuals from collectivistic cultures does not provide recommendations as easily, however, their reviews tended to be short and not as informative as others. Moreover, many visitors recommend the hotel chain and this can be seen as a predictor for its growth, and thus this support previous research. The respondent also noticed that guests from Japan frequently use TripAdvisor and booking to write about their stay, although these reviews tend to concerns smaller things. This behaviour contradicts theory, as it says that individuals from collectivistic cultures, such as Japan, do not usually share information online. Nevertheless, they only write short reviews that does not contain an extensive amount of information.

Research states that individualistic cultures have a more direct style of advertising than collectivist cultures and the latter may be offended by a persuasive approach where the focus lies on information and not creating trust. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010) Hotel does not use a different style of communication that is customised to different cultures and it was not possible to detect if this could offend collectivistic cultures. However, some research can be partly supported by the respondent's answers as she has noticed that people from Asia, collectivistic cultures, ask for a lot of information before and after they have made a reservation. They also ask questions about the city in general and to handle this doubtfulness the hotel continuously gives them the information they desire. The seeking of information is most likely an attempt from collectivist cultures to build relationships and trust with the hotel before they make their reservation.

Lastly, the hotel relies on the head office to communicate to different nationalities through social networks. With this said, it seems like the hotel's eWOM communication is more adapted toward the Swedish individualistic culture. But the hotel still considers comments from other nationalities important to address.

5.2 Cross-case analysis

In this section, theories presented in the frame of reference and the two cases are compared to describe the differences and similarities between the data and previous research.

5.2.1 Research question one - *How can organisations' strategies to handle eWOM in the hotel industry be described?*

To conduct the cross-case analysis the attentionscape model will be used to provide a comparison of how marketing managers for hotel A and B distribute their attention to eWOM. This comparison is presented in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: Attentionscape dimensions

Dimension	Selection	Selection	Hotel A	Hotel B
Mindfulness	<i>Front of mind</i>	<i>Attention that is conscious and deliberate.</i>		x
	<i>Back of mind</i>	<i>Attention that is unconscious or even spontaneous.</i>	x	
Choice	<i>Captive</i>	<i>eWOM is thrust on the manager like comments on the Facebook wall.</i>	x	
	<i>Voluntary</i>	<i>Manager looks for eWOM anywhere, of his or her own free will and volition.</i>		x
Appeal	<i>Aversion</i>	<i>Manager pays attention to eWOM because (s)he is afraid of the consequences of not paying attention.</i>	x	x
	<i>Attractiveness</i>	<i>Manager pays attention to eWOM because it fascinates him or her.</i>		

Source: Modified from Kietzmann and Canhoto 2013, p. 155

Hotel A and hotel B both agree that it is important to understand the preferences of their customers and try to use social networks to suit these. Both hotels use Facebook and Instagram to communicate with their customers, and both considers websites where customers write reviews as important to pay attention to. However, it is not as highly prioritised by both hotels. Hotel B has a policy of responding to all comments everywhere to enhance the effect of positive eWOM, the hotel also plans their updates to suit their target audience. Hotel A prioritises comments where people seek information, have a policy of deleting comments that are fabricated and/or violates their policy, describes no specific strategy for updates or answers and have not yet

sought to enhance positive eWOM. Moreover, both hotels are aware of why an individual decides to engage in eWOM, however, they describe this differently and hotel B's description is more in line with previous studies than hotel A's. This further implies that hotel B's attention is conscious and deliberate. Yet, it is important to consider that hotel B has benefited from customised updates that are assembled by the hotel's chain.

Hotel B searches for eWOM everywhere and the answer depends on the nature of the comment. With this said, it seems like the hotel is searching for eWOM and participating in eWOM to protect their brand from negative associations. What separated hotel B from hotel A is the emphasis on *taking action* to prevent a negative event from happening again, whereas hotel A emphasises that the hotel will *try* to improve. Both hotels seem to use negative reviews as information to help them improve, yet hotel B seems to be more vigorous. The hotels are also alike when it comes to handling negative comments; they try to take the conversation with the customer offline and away from the public eye. This is confirmed by observations of hotel B's Facebook page but not by observations of hotel A's page as several negative comments remain unanswered. This implies that hotel A chooses to engage in eWOM because they feel captive to do so. Compared to the other hotel they are not active participants of influential sites such as TripAdvisor, and do therefore not seem to use eWOM as a tool for consumer service. When, where and what they read and answer to is planned by both hotels, but as mentioned earlier the importance of this is unevenly distributed. However, this might be a result of shortage of time and the fact that hotel B has help from the head office to handle their eWOM communication.

The hotels have not used strong influencers to reach their target audience. Nevertheless, one has negatively affected hotel B and hotel A has plans of using an influencer in the future. Moreover, none of the hotels encourage their visitors to engage in eWOM before, during or after their stay. Thus, regardless of their rating, both hotels perceive the risks of creating negative eWOM as greater than the chances of enhancing positive eWOM. Furthermore, both hotels seem afraid of what might happen if they do not participate in eWOM and therefore the appeal of it seems to be aversion.

Both hotels believe that their online reputation is important as travellers' value others review of hotels before they make their own reservation. However, hotel A is not yet an active participant of networks such as TripAdvisor and Loopon. Therefore, they have missed out on the chance of defending themselves against negative eWOM, which in turn seems to have affected their brand badly. Hotel B is an active participant of several networks, has a higher rating and tries to influence others opinions about the brand by answering to both negative and positive comments. Thus, the hotel has been able to defend themselves against negative eWOM and this may have contributed to their consistently high ratings. A reasonable assumption is that the head office emphasises the importance of having a good online reputation as one 'bad link' might affect the profit of the whole chain. This in turn, may have put more pressure on hotel B to uphold their online reputation.

Hotel A has not put as much importance on obtaining credibility and authenticity by adding WOMM to their marketing communication mix compared to the other hotel. Their brand is in bad shape as several fabricated rumours circulates, and by making observations of their Facebook page it is evident that they have not been able to create a dialogue with their customers offline or online. On the other hand, hotel B whom has put a lot of importance on WOMM is consistently highly rated and has managed to create a dialogue with their customers.

In Table 5.2 below an overview of the different studies related to eWOM strategies and the hotels compliance is presented.

Table 5.2 Comparison of the hotels strategies to handle eWOM

eWOM Strategies	Hotel A	Hotel B
<i>Understands differences in eWOM and pays attention to damaging comments (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013).</i>	/	+
<i>Use eWOM as consumer service (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013).</i>	-	+
<i>Prioritise where, what, and when eWOM is read and answered to (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013).</i>	+	+
<i>Uses strong influencers to transform commercial promotions to valuable information (Kozinets et al., 2010).</i>	-	-
<i>Encourages customers to post reviews as customers buying intentions increases with the quantity of reviews (Melián-González et al., 2013).</i>	-	-
<i>Use negative reviews for improvements (Melián-González et al., 2013).</i>	+	+
<i>Tries to build a good reputation by participating in social media (Norbert et al., 2010).</i>	-	+
<i>Use WOMM to obtain credibility and authenticity with customers (Norbert et al., 2010).</i>	-	+

Codes: + Hotel acts in accordance with previous studies
 - Hotel does not act in accordance with previous studies
 / Hotel acts in accordance with previous studies to some extent

5.2.2 Research question two - *How can organisations' adaption of eWOM communication to different cultural contexts be described?*

The hotels visitors distinguish as hotel A mainly has visitors from individualist cultures, whilst hotel B has visitors from collectivistic cultures as well. None of the hotel use information consistency as a strategy to reach different nationalities. However, hotel B uses information consistency in their WOMM communication and as a result they may have unconsciously attracted individuals from collectivistic cultures as visitors.

As mentioned earlier, hotel A mainly has visitors from individualistic cultures and has not adopted their social networks to different nationalities or cultural behaviours to avoid risks. Partly, because they believe that it is not necessary when accommodating tourists. Furthermore, the hotel seems to have been affected by cultural clashes between their 'ordinary' visitors and their tenants, which have resulted in problems with cancellations. Hotel B has also been affected by a cultural clash when they hosted an information event about cosmetic surgery. Likewise, neither hotels have customised their social networks to different nationalities, however, hotel B relies on their head office for communication with different nationalities on a national level. Another difference between the hotels is that hotel B adapts their answers to the messages they receive and use a template of words that are appropriate for certain nationalities.

There are no apparent strategies to build favourable WOM by adapting their communication to different cultures, and in turn receive recommendations that contribute to growth. However, individualists have shared a lot of thoughts about hotel A's tenants that in turn, has affected them badly and hindered favourable WOM. The same goes for hotel B, when they hosted cosmetic surgery event. Nevertheless, Hotel B is recommended by several different nationalities and is consistently highly rated with no mention of cancellation due to negative eWOM. Whilst hotel A has experienced cancellations as a result of negative eWOM. Lastly, none of the hotels has adapted their communication to suit cultural differences, at the same time as it was not possible to detect if any of these cultures might be offended by the hotels communication.

In Table 5.3 below an overview of the different studies related to cultural adaptation and the hotels compliance is presented.

Table 5.3 Comparison of cultural adaptation

Cultural adaptation	Hotel A	Hotel B
<i>Use information consistency to attract individuals from collectivistic cultures (Luo et al., 2014).</i>	-	-
<i>Consider different cultural behaviours to reduce the risk of making mistakes during interactions (Kale, 1991).</i>	-	/
<i>Develops strategies to build favourable WOM for individualistic or collectivistic cultures (Fong & Burton, 2008).</i>	-	-
<i>Adapt commercial messages to collectivist and individualistic cultures to build trust with the former, give information to the latter and not offend. (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010)</i>	-	-

Codes: + Hotel acts in accordance with previous studies
 - Hotel does not act in accordance with previous studies
 / Hotel acts in accordance with previous studies to some extent

6. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides answers to the research questions stated in chapter one. Overall findings and conclusions from the study are also provided, after which implications for further research as well as implications for practitioners is discussed.

6.1 RQ1 - How can organisations' strategies to handle eWOM in the hotel industry be described?

To answer the first research question we have used the relevant studies presented in the conceptual framework that are related to eWOM strategies. After conducting our study, we have come to realise that eWOM strategies are powerful to use and should be embraced as a part of every organisation's marketing communication mix. Yet, eWOM can be considered as a rather confusing and new marketing tool for organisations. Our findings suggest that hotels distribute their attention to eWOM unevenly at the same time as they use eWOM strategies differently.

The data implied that hotels prefer to use Facebook and Instagram to communicate with their customers and considers TripAdvisor and Loopon as websites that are important to pay attention to. This is because the hotels believe that these websites influence customers' choice of accommodation. Yet, the results from this study indicate that hotels in the northern Sweden prioritise comment differently and this seems to be a result of different experiences. Regardless of strategy, hotels seem to have established an approach within the organisation so that everyone handles comments in the same way.

If the hotels brand is in bad shape or is exposed to a lot of negative attention, it can put too much pressure on the hotel, which in turn, chooses to prioritise comments that can be considered as easier to handle. This can be a common behaviour for hotels' that receive a lot of negative attention, and do not want risk making it worse and therefore avoid getting into conversations. However, if the hotel is not in the centre of negative attention, the hotel might look for eWOM everywhere voluntarily.

The hotels in northern Sweden seems to understand the underlying factors that contributes to eWOM and considers their online reputation of great value for their hotel. Negative reviews are also considered to be valuable information for the hotels as they use it for improvements. However, hotels differ in the way they handle negative reviews; they either put emphasis on the action they have taken to prevent it from happening again or they explain that they will do their best to improve. Thereafter, the hotels try to move the conversation with the customers' offline and away from the public eye. This seems to be the strategy hotels use to prevent negative eWOM.

Strong influencers were not yet a part of the investigated hotels' eWOM strategies, and they will not risk encouraging visitors to post reviews. This is because they are well aware of the risks associated with reviews; it can be negative and affect the hotel brand badly. Hence, the risks

associated with negative reviews outweigh the advantages of a positive review. Additionally, hotels seem to be afraid of what might happen if they do not participate in eWOM. This choice means that they probably fail to gain profit from a strategy that, according to previous studies, should be beneficial. However, the hotels tend to rely on business visitors and visitors registered on Looon when it comes to sharing opinions and posting reviews, this is possibly because these consumers are seen as serious.

Hotels prioritise, when, where and what they read and answer. Yet, an important finding is that when the hotel does not prioritise and participate in popular social networks or attaches importance to WOMM, they are not able to defend themselves against negative eWOM. With that said, a reasonable assumption is that hotels might have a better chance of getting credibility if they add WOMM to their communication mix to create authentic dialogues with their customers. Moreover, when WOMM is added to the marketing communication mix the hotel seems to obtain credibility and authenticity, which in turn, can influence higher ratings on social networks. This study's result implies that the common grounds for hotels in the northern Sweden are as follows:

- They understand differences in eWOM
- Both hotels prioritise where, what and when eWOM is read and answered to
- They use negative reviews for improvements
- They do not use strong influencers or encourage reviews from their visitors

As a conclusion, it seems like hotels that are parts of major brands have clearer strategies and are more conscious of how to handle eWOM. This could be a result of benefits received from already tried and established strategies that the hotel then can use to customise their communication. Smaller independent hotels have to manage their eWOM communication themselves with fewer resources.

6.2 RQ2 - How can organisations' adaption of eWOM communication to different cultural contexts be described?

To answer the second research question we have used the relevant studies presented in the conceptual framework that are related to cultural adaptation. The result from this study indicates that hotels in the northern Sweden do not adapt their online communication to different cultures. This is based on the fact that the hotels have visitors from several different nationalities and does not adapt their use of social networks to these consciously.

If a hotel has an already established WOMM communication for their national culture they might have added information consistency as a strategy and thus, attracted people from individualistic cultures unconsciously. Therefore, the risks of not adapting eWOM strategies to different national cultures are overlooked. However, hotels in northern Sweden should adapt their strategies to their local culture as well, to prevent cultural clashes and negative eWOM. It is apparent that events that happen offline can easily go online and damage an organisation's

reputation. This implies that it is of great importance to adapt eWOM strategies to several different cultural contexts. The hotels management of comments from different nationalities varies. In this area, there can be some adaptation on how to formulate answers to not offend another nationality, at the same time as there can be no adaptation at all. If the hotel is a part of a chain, visitors from different parts of the world might be expected and therefore, it can be natural to adapt answers to different nationalities.

Furthermore, the amount of attention that is prioritised for TripAdvisor and Looon varies. The hotel can be aware of what and if foreign visitors write about them, at the same time as it can be the complete opposite. However, the hotels want to know their guests' opinions about their stay and thus seem to use the customers' feedback from other nationalities as valuable information for improvement as well.

Through the analysis of our data collection, we can conclude that the extent to which hotels adapt their eWOM communication to different cultural contexts differs and is almost non-existent. We found that if the hotel is a part of a larger brand they seem to have better knowledge on how to adapt their eWOM communication to different cultural contexts. This probably depends on the fact that the head office can be responsible for, and manage the communication with different nationalities. Thus, they have resources to let one person solely work with WOMM while hotels that operates in a smaller scale does not have a head office with someone to rely on. Furthermore, if the hotel is used to visitors from several different cultures it can be an additional reason for them to develop their eWOM communication to different cultural context.

6.3 Implications for Theory

The purpose of this study was to provide a better understanding on how cultural dimensions' influence organisations eWOM strategies in the northern Sweden. The collection of data for the study both support and contradict previous studies. Bearing in mind that the results from this case study cannot be generalised to a larger population, the conclusions drawn from our research is that hotels follow some of the stated theories but pays too little attention in general to adapt their eWOM communication to different cultural contexts.

6.4 Implications for Practitioners

Based on the data collection and findings from the study, this section provides aspects that management are suggested to consider when working with eWOM communication. Following implications can be useful when managing eWOM communication.

eWOM Strategies

- *Encourage visitors to post reviews as it creates positive eWOM over time.* Negative reviews outweigh positive reviews when there is a small quantity of them. As the quantity of reviews increases, reviews tend to improve.
- *Investigate the target audience of the hotel.* It is important to investigate which

individuals that are of interest for the hotel in order to allocate the resources efficiently. When the target audience has been found communicate through the websites they use.

- *Be present and consistent on social media.* To create credibility, it is important to answer quickly to all comments, regardless if they are of positive or negative nature. You should also be personal when replying to comments and for example, sign them with your name.
- *Use a strong influencer.* Strong influencers can transform commercial promotions to valuable information and attract readers

Adaptation to Culture

- *Adapt to cultural contexts.* Ensure that customers from different cultures understand the hotel's online communication. Most hotels seem to have websites in English but their communication on social networks are in Swedish.
- *Avoid using a persuasive approach.* Individuals from collectivist cultures may be offended by a persuasive approach where the focus lies on information instead of creating trust.

6.5 Implications for Future Research

Based on the findings from this study, we have observed that there is a need for further research of eWOM communication from a business perspective. The two hotels in this study adapted their eWOM strategy to different cultural contexts poorly and their eWOM communication could be improved. In order to generalize the results and draw conclusions, more hotels should preferably be investigated in the area. It would be interesting to see how the hotels revenues are affected by poor respectively well communication and adaption of eWOM. We also believe that there could be interesting results to gain by doing this study in other parts of Sweden as well as in other parts of the world.

REFERENCES

- Alexandrov, A., Lilly, B., & Babakus, E. (2013). The effects of social- and self-motives on the intentions to share positive and negative word of mouth. *Journal of the Academy Science*, Vol. 41, No. 5, pp. 531-533
- Bao, T., & Chang, T. S. (2014). Finding disseminators via electronic word of mouth message for effective marketing communications. *Decision Support Systems*, 6721-29. doi:10.1016/j.dss.2014.07.006
- Brewer, P., & Venaik, S. (2012). On the misuse of national culture dimensions. *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 29, No. 6, pp. 673
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2013). *Företagsekonomiska forskningsmetoder*. 2nd edition, Stockholm: Liber.
- De Mooij, M., & Hofstede, G. (2010). The Hofstede model: Applications to global branding and advertising strategy and research. *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 29, No. 1 pp. 85-86
- Fong, J., & Burton, S. (2008). A cross-cultural comparison of electronic word-of-mouth and country-of-origin effects. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(3), 233-242. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.06.015
- Fu, J. R., Ju, P. H., & Hsu, C. W. (2015). Understanding why consumers engage in electronic word-of-mouth communication: Perspectives from theory of planned behavior and justice theory. *Electronic Commerce Research & Applications*, Vol. 14, No. 6, pp. 616-618
- Gaygisiz, E. (2013). How are cultural dimensions and governance quality related to socioeconomic development? *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 47170-179. doi:10.1016/j.socec.2013.02.012
- Groeger, L., & Buttle, F. (2014). Word-of-mouth marketing influence on offline and online communications: Evidence from case study research. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 20, No. 1/2, pp. 21-41.
- Groeger, L., & Buttle, F. (2014). Word-of-mouth marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(7/8), 1186-1208. doi:10.1108/EJM-02-2012-0086
- Gupta, B. (2011). A comparative study of organizational strategy and culture across industry. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 510-511
- Hofstede, G. (1984). Cultural dimensions in management and planning. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 1(2), 81-99.
- Kale, S. H. (1991). Culture-specific marketing communications: An analytical approach.

International Marketing Review, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 18-21

Kietzmann, J., & Canhoto, A. (2013). Bittersweet! Understanding and managing electronic word of mouth. *Journal of Public Affairs* (14723891), 13(2), 146-159. doi:10.1002/pa.1470

Kimmel, A. J., & Kitchen, P. J. (2014). WOM and social media: Presaging future directions for research and practice. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 20, No. 1/2, pp. 5-20

Kozinets, R. V., de Valck, K., Wojnicki, A. C., & Wilner, S. J. S. (2010). Networked narratives: Understanding word-of-mouth marketing in online communities. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 74, No. 2, pp. 71-74

Kozinets, R. V., de Valck, K., Wojnicki, A., & Wilner, S. S. (2014). Lost in translation: The social shaping of marketing messaging. *GfK-Marketing Intelligence Review*, 6(2), 22-27. doi:10.2478/gfkmir-2014-0094

Kreis, H., & Gottschalk, S. A. (2015). Relating eWOM motives to EWOM channel choice – Why do we post where we do? *Schmalenbach Business Review (SBR)*, pp. 407

Kulmala, M., Mesiranta, N., & Tuominen, P. (2013). Organic and amplified eWOM in consumer fashion blogs. *Journal of Fashion Marketing & Management*, 17(1), 20-37. doi:10.1108/13612021311305119

Lee, H., Law, R., & Murphy, J. (2011). Reviewers in TripAdvisor, an online travel community. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, Vol. 28, No. 7, pp. 675

Lovett, M. J., Peres, R., & Shachar, R. (2013). On brands and word of mouth. *Journal of Marketing Research (JMR)*, 50(4), 427-444.

Luo, C., Wu, J., Shi, Y., & Xu, Y. (2014). The effects of individualism–collectivism cultural orientation on eWOM information. *International Journal of Information Management*, 34(4), 446-456. doi:10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2014.04.001

Meiners, N. H., Schwarting, U., & Seeberger, B. (2010). The renaissance of word-of-mouth marketing: A 'new' standard in twenty-first century marketing management?! *International Journal of Economic Sciences & Applied Research*, 3(2), 79-97.

Melián-González, S., Bulchand-Gidumal, J., & González López-Valcárcel, B. (2013). Online customer reviews of hotels: As participation increases, better evaluation is obtained. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 54(3), 274-283. doi:10.1177/1938965513481498

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. (1994). *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis*. 2nd edition, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.

Ravenswood, K. (2011). Eisenhardt's impact on theory in case study research. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 64, No. 7, pp. 682

- Sandes, F. S., & Urdan, A. T. (2013). Electronic word-of-mouth impacts on consumer behavior: Exploratory and experimental studies. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 183-184
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2009). *Research methods for business students*. 5th edition, England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Sepp, M., Liljander, V., & Gummerus, J. (2011). Private bloggers' motivations to produce content – a gratifications theory perspective. *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 27, No. 13/14, pp. 1479-1480
- The Hofstede Centre. (2016). *Country Comparison*. Retrieved 2016-05-29, from <https://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>
- Voss, R. S. (2012). Civilization in the balance: A comparative validation of Hofstede and Globe cultural dimensions against the Toynbee-Huntington civilization model. *International Journal of the Academic Business World*, 6(1), 21-37.
- Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods*. 2nd edition, SAGE Publications Inc., USA
- Yin, R.K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. 4th edition, Volume 5, SAGE Publications Inc., USA
- Zhao, X., Wang, L., Guo, X., & Law, R. (2015). The influence of online reviews to online hotel booking intentions. *Management Decisions*, Vol. 53, No. 8, pp. 1344-1345
- Zoomers, A. (2008). Global travelling along the Inca route: Is international tourism beneficial for local development? *European Planning Studies*, 16(7), 971-983. doi:10.1080/09654310802163769

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Guide, English

ABOUT THE RESPONDENT

Name:

Profession:

Time within social media management:

Social media manager for:

Previous experience:

Please describe your work with social media:

Are you solely in charge for these social networks?

Clarification for the interviewee:

- Comments are reviews or any post online that is directed toward the hotel(s).
- Are we allowed to use your name or your organisation name in our study?
- Are we allowed to record this conversation?

Research Question	Interview Questions
How can organizations' strategies to handle eWOM in the hotel industry be described?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Which and how social media platforms that are used.<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1. Which social media platform(s) are the hotel(s) participants of?1.2. If, several, is there a difference between how you participate on these platforms? I.e. to handle negatively or positively comments.1.3. Have you investigated which platforms that your customers prefer to talk about you online? If yes, why? If not, why not?1.4. Have you tried to engage with the participants on these platforms by creating posts that encourages positive word-of-mouth? How?1.5. Have you noticed that the hotel(s) is/are mentioned on other platforms? If yes, how do you manage positive or negative comments on these platforms?2. Questions concerning attention to eWOM<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1. Do you read all comments online or do you prioritise when and where you read comments online? If yes, how are these platforms prioritised?2.2. Do you answer to all comments or are there certain comments that you prioritize? If yes, why? And on which platforms?2.3. Do you respond, in any way, to positive comments? If yes, why? If not, Why not?2.4. Do you respond, in any way, to negative comments? If yes, why? If not, Why not?2.5. How often would you say that these comments are answered? E.g. once a week or when there is time.2.6. Are there any particular comments that go unanswered? If so, what type of comments is left unanswered?

	<p>2.7. Do you know what triggers the customer to write about you online? If yes, please explain.</p> <p>2.8. Is online reputation important for your organisation? If, yes, why? If no, why not?</p> <p>2.9. Do you perceive that online reputation affects the customer accommodation decisions?</p> <p>3. eWOM strategies</p> <p>3.1. How do you create authenticity and credibility when communicating with hotel visitors online?</p> <p>3.2. Are your customers encouraged to engage in social media during, or after a visit at your hotel(s)? If yes, why? If not, why not?</p> <p>3.3. Can you see a pattern of which consumers who actively engage in electronic word of mouth?</p> <p>3.4. Have you recognised any strong influencers when it comes to positive electronic word of mouth?</p> <p>3.5. If yes, have you used these strong influencers to write about your hotel(s)? If yes, how? If not, why not?</p> <p>3.6. If a strong influencer has given you a bad judgement online, how have you responded?</p>
How can organisations' adaption of eWOM communication to different cultural contexts be described?	<p>1. Adaption and Cultural context</p> <p>1.1. Do you have visitors from many different countries? If yes, which nationalities visit you most frequently?</p> <p>1.2. Is your use of social media platforms adapted to these nationalities? If yes, in what way? If no, why not?</p> <p>1.3. Do you adapt your answers to comments online to these nationalities? If yes, in what way? If not, why not?</p> <p>2. eWOM communication and cultural context</p> <p>2.1. Do you perceive visitors from some countries keener to post reviews than others? If yes, from which countries and how (positive/negative)?</p> <p>2.2. Do you see a pattern in which visitors from certain countries post positive comments online? If yes, in what way? Are these comments similar to those before?</p> <p>2.3. Do you see a pattern in which visitors from certain countries post negative comments online? If yes, in what way? Are these comments similar to those before?</p> <p>2.4. Do you perceive visitors from some countries more doubtful and wanting more information than others about your hotel(s) before making their reservation? If yes, in what way?</p> <p>2.5. How do you handle that doubtfulness?</p> <p>2.6. Do you encourage visitors from all countries to review and rate your hotel(s) online?</p> <p>2.7. Do you actively participate in different social media sites and communicate with individuals from different countries?</p> <p>2.8. Do you feel particularly keen about answering to reviews and comments from visitors from certain countries? If yes, which countries and why?</p> <p>2.9. How do you reach out to visitors from different countries online?</p>

Appendix 2: Interview Guide, Swedish

OM RESPONDENTEN

Namn:

Yrke:

Tid inom social media hantering:

Hanterar sociala medier för:

Tidigare erfarenhet inom detta område:

Beskriv gärna ditt arbete inom sociala medier:

Är det fler som gör denna uppgift?

Tydliggörande för respondenten:

- Med kommentarer menas recensioner eller inlägg på internet som är riktat mot hotellet.
- Har vi er tillåtelse att använda ert eller hotellets namn i vår studie?
- Går det bra att vi spelar in detta samtal?

Forskningsfråga	Intervjufråga
Hur kan en organisations strategier för att hantera eWOM i hotellindustrin beskrivas?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Frågor angående användning av sociala nätverk<ol style="list-style-type: none">1.1. Vilka sociala nätverk använder hotellet?1.2. Om flera, finns det en skillnad i hur ni deltar på dessa plattformar? Dvs. hur ni hanterar negativa eller positiva kommentarer.1.3. Har ni undersökt vilka sociala nätverk som era kunder föredrar att prata om er på nätet? Om ja, varför? Om inte, varför inte?1.4. Har ni försökt att kommunicera med deltagare på dessa sociala nätverk genom att skapa inlägg som uppmuntrar till positiv word-of-mouth? Om ja, hur?1.5. Har ni märkt att hotellet(-n) nämns på andra sociala nätverk? Om ja, hur hanterar ni positiva eller negativa kommentarer på dessa nätverk?Frågor angående prioriteringar av eWOM<ol style="list-style-type: none">2.1. Läser ni alla kommentarer på nätet eller prioriterar ni när och var ni läser kommentarerna? Om ja, hur prioriteras dessa nätverk?2.2. Svarar ni på alla kommentarer eller finns det vissa kommentarer som ni prioriterar? Om ja, varför? Och på vilka sociala nätverk?2.3. Svarar ni på något sätt till positiva kommentarer? Om ja, på vilket sätt? Om inte, varför inte?2.4. Svarar ni på något sätt till negativa kommentarer? Om ja, på vilket sätt? Om inte, varför inte?2.5. Hur ofta skulle ni säga att dessa kommentarer besvaras? Finns det en utsatt tid eller svarar ni när ni har möjlighet?2.6. Finns det några kommentarer som förblir obesvarade? Om så är fallet, vilken typ av kommentarer lämnas obesvarade?2.7. Vet ni vad som är den bidragande faktorn till att kunden skriver om er på nätet? Om ja, förklara gärna.

	<p>2.8. Är organisationens rykte på internet viktigt? Om ja, på vilket sätt och varför? Om nej, varför inte?</p> <p>2.9. Upplever ni att er rykte på internet påverkar kundens val av boende?</p> <p>3. Frågor angående eWOM strategier</p> <p>3.1. Hur arbetar ni för att skapa genuinitet och trovärdighet när ni kommunicerar med hotellbesökare på nätet?</p> <p>3.2. Uppmuntrar ni era kunder att kommunicera på sociala nätverk under eller efter ett besök på ert hotell? Om ja, varför och på vilket sätt? Om inte, varför inte?</p> <p>3.3. Kan ni se ett mönster av vilka konsumenter som aktivt engagerar sig i elektronisk word-of-mouth?</p> <p>3.4. Har ni sett några "starka påverkare" när det gäller positiv elektronisk word-of-mouth?</p> <p>3.5. Om ja, har ni använt dessa starka påverkare för att skriva om hotellet på nätet? Om ja, hur? Om inte, varför inte?</p> <p>3.6. Har en "stark påverkare" någon gång gett er ett dåligt omdöme på nätet? Om ja, hur hanterade/bemötte ni detta?</p>
<p>Hur kan en organisations anpassning av eWOM kommunikation till olika kulturella kontexter beskrivas?</p>	<p>1. Anpassning till kulturella sammanhang</p> <p>1.1. Har ni besökare från många olika länder? Om ja, vilka nationaliteter besöker er oftast?</p> <p>1.2. Är er användning av sociala nätverk anpassade till dessa nationaliteter? Om ja, på vilket sätt? Om nej, varför inte?</p> <p>1.3. Har ni anpassat era svar på kommentarer på sociala nätverk för dessa nationaliteter? Om ja, på vilket sätt? Om inte, varför inte?</p> <p>2. eWOM kommunikation och kulturella sammanhang</p> <p>2.1. Har ni uppfattat att besökare från vissa länder är mer angelägna att skriva recensioner än andra? Om ja, från vilka länder och på vilket sätt (positiva kommentarer eller negativa kommentarer)?</p> <p>2.2. Har ni upptäckt ett mönster där besökare från vissa länder skriver mer positiva kommentarer på nätet? Om ja, på vilket sätt? Liknar dessa tidigare kommentarer?</p> <p>2.3. Har ni upptäckt ett mönster där besökare från vissa länder skriver mer negativa kommentarer på nätet? Om ja, på vilket sätt?</p> <p>2.4. Har ni uppfattat att besökare från vissa länder är mer tveksamma och vill ha mer information än andra om ert hotell innan de gör sin reservation? Om ja, på vilket sätt?</p> <p>2.5. Hur hanterar ni den tveksamheten?</p> <p>2.6. Uppmuntrar ni besökare från alla länder att recensera ert hotell på nätet?</p> <p>2.7. Deltar ni aktivt i sociala nätverk och kommunicerar med personer från olika länder?</p> <p>2.8. Känner ni er särskilt angelägna om att svara på recensioner och kommentarer från besökare från vissa länder? Om ja, vilka länder och varför?</p> <p>2.9. Hur når ni ut till besökare från olika länder på nätet?</p>