

The Influence of Online Consumer Reviews on Consumer Buying Behavior in the Buying Process

With a Focus on High and Low Involvement Products

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Abstract

Customers' use of online consumer reviews is increasing as a method of finding product information before making the buying decision. Online consumer reviews is a form of electronic word-of-mouth which is an unpaid form of communication. Earlier customers of an organization write their experiences and opinions of products, which becomes available to read for a large number of people. These reviews are published on both independent review websites and organizational websites.

The purpose of the thesis is to examine how online consumer reviews influence consumer buying behavior in the consumer buying process. This is examined with a focus on high and low-involvement products. Four research questions were developed to reach the purpose of the thesis;

RQ1 How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

RQ2 How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

RQ3 How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

RQ4 How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

The main findings in the thesis are that customers are motivated to search and process information in online consumer reviews for high involvement products. Customers of high involvement products value review quality as an important review factor because they perceive these reviews to be most efficient in delivering accurate product information. Customers of high involvement products mostly use online consumer reviews in the stages of information search and post-purchase in the consumer buying process. The purchase decision is made outside of the Internet after customers' have complemented online consumer reviews with information from social contacts. Customers do not use online consumer reviews when buying low involvement products, instead they rely on traditional word-of-mouth and product popularity.

The thesis key concepts are; Consumer buying process, Customer-to-customer interactions, Electronic word-of-mouth, online consumer reviews as well as high- and low involvement products. The thesis main theoretical model is the elaboration likelihood model.

Sammanfattning

Kunders användning av kundrecensioner på Internet ökar som en metod till att hitta produktinformation innan de tar ett köpbeslut. Kundrecensioner på Internet är en form av elektronisk verbal kommunikation vilket är en obetald form av kommunikation. Tidigare kunder till en organisation skriver sina erfarenheter och åsikter om produkter, vilket blir tillgängligt att läsa för ett stort antal personer. Dessa recensioner publiceras på både oberoende webbplatser för recensioner såväl som organisationers webbplatser.

Syftet med avhandlingen är att undersöka hur kundrecensioner på Internet påverkar konsumenters köpbeteende i konsumenters köpprocess. Detta undersöks med ett fokus på produkter som kräver antingen ett stort eller lågt engagemang från kunder. Fyra forskningsfrågor har utvecklats för att nå syftet med avhandlingen;

RQ1 Hur kan påverkan av kundrecensioner på konsumenters köpbeteende när de köper produkter som kräver ett stort engagemang, beskrivas?

RQ2 Hur kan påverkan av kundrecensioner på konsumenters köpbeteende när de köper produkter som kräver ett lågt engagemang, beskrivas?

RQ3 Hur kan kunders användning av kundrecensioner i de olika stegen av köpprocessen, när de köper produkter som kräver ett stort engagemang, beskrivas?

RQ4 Hur kan kunders användning av kundrecensioner i de olika stegen av köpprocessen, när de köper produkter som kräver ett lågt engagemang, beskrivas?

Avhandlingens huvudsakliga resultat visar att kunder är motiverade till att söka efter och bearbeta information i kundrecensioner för produkter som kräver ett stort engagemang. Kunder som köper dessa produkter värderar recensionskvalité som en viktig recensionsfaktor för att de uppfattar dessa recensioner som mest effektiva i att tillhandahålla korrekt produktinformation. Kunder till produkter som kräver ett stort engagemang använder främst kundrecensioner i steget för informationssökning och efterköpsbeteende i konsumenters köpprocess. Köpbeslutet tas utanför Internet när kunderna har mottagit kompletterande information från sociala kontakter. Kunder använder inte kundrecensioner när de köper produkter som kräver ett lågt engagemang. Istället förlitar de sig på traditionell verbal kommunikation och produktpopularitet.

Avhandlingens nyckelbegrepp är; konsumenters köpprocess, kund-till-kund interaktion, elektronisk verbal kommunikation, kundrecensioner på Internet samt produkter som kräver ett stort eller lågt engagemang. Avhandlingens huvudsakliga teoretiska modell är sannolikhet för informationsbearbetning.

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1. Introduction

The introducing chapter will give a background to the research topic, which leads into a problem discussion, presentation of research problem, thesis purpose, and delimitations.

1.2 Background

Nowadays fierce competition creates challenges for companies in attracting customers and convincing them into buying their products instead of the competitors' products. To be able to attract customers there is a need to understand the consumer buying process (Pelau, 2011). It is no longer possible for companies only to rely on keeping a low-cost production and aiming for a high volume of sales to stay in business; customers' needs are now the main focus and companies need to be able to achieve customer satisfaction to remain competitive (Ji & Wang, 2010). In order to create a suitable marketing strategy, companies need to have an understanding of customer needs and the consumer buying process (Pelau, 2011).

According to Solomon (2013), the customer's recognition of a problem is the first stage of the buying process. The next stage is the information search, when there is an evaluation of different product alternatives. This stage consists of both an internal and external stage; the internal stage is when the customer can go back in memories and earlier experiences of products. The external stage is when the customer turns to family, friends, advertising or use observational learning for additional information. Many customers use the Internet in the search for information; 60 percent of customers begin their Internet search by using search engines such as Google. The two last stages in the buying process are purchase when there is a transaction between customer and company and post purchase which includes customer activities after purchasing the product. (Ibid)

Social media is a new kind of information technology which makes it possible for people to communicate with others through Internet-based platforms. The leading Internet-based platforms are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn (Alavi, Borgatti, Kane & Labianca, 2014). After using search engines for information search, 40 percent of customers move on to using Internet-based platforms. These are important in the search for information and this is because customers visit Internet-based platforms with the purpose of viewing others' opinions. With the help from others' opinions and recommendations, it is easier for customers to evaluate and reduce product alternatives. According to Cheung & Lee (2013), customers also share opinions of products after the purchase and those who post their opinions online are driven by a desire to spread a reputation of a product or company, a willingness to help other customers and for the purpose of sensing a belonging to the customer group. (Ibid)

It has been found in an earlier study of Internet usage in Sweden (Findahl, 2013) that the total usage of the Internet is increasing; mostly within the area of mobile Internet through the use of smart phones and tablets. Social media is one of the areas where Internet users spend most of their time and for Internet users in the age of 12-25, a third of their time is spent on social media networks. People in the age of 16-25 are the most frequent users of Internet and social

media. Within this group of Internet users', five out of ten post comments on open discussion forums and eight out of ten give comments on posts that others have published. (Ibid)

According to Curran, McCabe and Meuter (2013), word-of-mouth (WOM) in social media is increasing and customers are interacting with each other online in a greater extent to share advice and recommendations of services and products. Word-of-mouth is defined as an unpaid communication between people which in many cases can have an influencing effect on consumer buying behavior. (Ibid) WOM is considered to be a critical factor in the success of marketing and one of the most important influencing factors on consumer buying behavior. WOM has an impact on customers' evaluation of products, final purchase decision as well as post-purchase evaluations. (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014)

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can be described as when customers of a certain company post positive or negative reviews of the company's products and services on the Internet, which becomes available to read for a large number of people. (Ibid) These reviews are also called online consumer reviews and they describe earlier customer's opinions, experiences and evaluation of products (Lee and Park, 2008). Customers participate in eWOM for the reason of reducing the uncertainty and risk with buying products and services. This is done by searching for accurate information before making a purchase decision and to search for the lowest prices. (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014)

Because of the increased use of word-of-mouth in social media, online consumer reviews have become increasingly important as a marketing force for organizations. Online consumer reviews has also become a key motivating force for new product sales. Understanding the possible outcome of online consumer reviews is important for organizations because customers can either promote or oppose new products by sharing their product opinions with other customers. (Cui, Lui & Guo, 2012)

Adjei, Noble and Noble (2012) describes that some companies give customers the opportunity of sharing product experiences with each other on company websites. Customers can then interact through discussion forums called online brand communities. Depending on the quality of C2C interactions in OBC's, customers' uncertainty of products and services can be reduced and their view of the organization can be improved, which results in possible buying decisions and increased profits for the company. The positive outcome of C2C interactions in OBC's are increased sales, more loyal customers, good opportunities for marketing of products and services, development of new product ideas and reduced costs on customer support. C2C interactions can affect the brand image of companies and customer satisfaction. There is a possibility for negative outcomes such as damages of company reputation, because of unsatisfied customers' choice of sharing experiences with others. (Ibid)

1.3 Problem Discussion

Customers' use of online consumer reviews as an additional information source to organizational product information is increasing (Curran, McCabe and Meuter, 2013). In the consumer buying process and the stage of information search, customers use Internet-based platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to find product experiences from earlier customers. It is easier for customers to evaluate product alternatives when receiving help from earlier customers. (Alavi, Borgatti, Kane & Labianca, 2014) In the consumer buying process, customers write and share reviews in the stage of post-purchase behavior. This is partly because of customers' desire to spread a reputation of a product or a company. The outcome of online consumer reviews can have several effects on companies, both positive and negative. (Cheung & Lee, 2013)

Online consumer reviews have become increasingly important as a marketing force for companies and also a key motivating factor for new product sales. This is because customers have the power of making or breaking products by sharing their product experiences with other customers in online consumer reviews. (Cui, Lui & Guo, 2012) Previous research (Adjei, Noble and Noble, 2012) describes that the positive effects of C2C interactions in OBC's are that customers' uncertainty about products and services can be reduced and customers' perception of the company can be improved. This might lead into increased sales and increased profit for the company. C2C interactions in OBC's can also result in more loyal customers, good opportunities for marketing of products and services, development of new product ideas and reduced costs on customer support. (Ibid) C2C interactions influence customer satisfaction and this means that it can affect companies brand image. Because of unsatisfied customers desire to spread negative product information there is the possibility of damaging companies reputation. (Adjei, Noble and Noble, 2012)

Online consumer reviews are a new topic; even though it is new it has potential for companies. Understanding and managing the possible outcome of online consumer reviews is important for companies because customers can either promote or oppose new products by sharing their product opinions with other customers (Cui, Lui & Guo, 2012). It is important for managers to learn how to manage the information flow on OBC's to give positive influence on customers and work to reduce the negative influence (Adjei, Noble and Noble, 2012). The influence of online consumer reviews on consumer buying behavior is a relatively well researched topic, but there are problems that earlier research has not covered. The thesis research problem is how online consumer reviews influence consumer buying behavior in the buying process. This is examined with a focus on high- and low involvement products.

1.4 Purpose of the thesis

The purpose of the thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of how online consumer reviews influence buying behavior in the buying process, to be able to help companies in understanding and managing how online consumer reviews can influence company activities such as product sales and company reputation. In order to reach the purpose of the thesis, the following research questions were developed;

RQ1 How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

RQ2 How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

Customers' motivation of searching for product information online in online consumer reviews can be determined according to their product involvement (Sanjay & Sanjay, 2013). The product involvement depends on the customers' earlier product experiences, the influence of product advertising and perceived risk of purchasing the product (Khare & Rakesh, 2011). The question is important in order to gain an understanding for possible differences in online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior in the buying process, for high-and low involvement products.

RQ3 How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

RQ4 How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

There are many ways of describing the consumer buying process (e.g., Kotler, 2009; Frambach, Krishnan and Roest, 2007) and it has been researched extensively. Still there are problems which previous research has not covered and there is a need to look deeper into how online consumer reviews influence consumer buying behavior in the buying process. This is to find out in which specific stages of the buying process when customers use reviews and if there are any difference between high- and low involvement products.

1.5 Delimitations

The thesis has the delimitation of focusing on high-and low involvement products and it is based on the consumer buying process as it is described by Kotler (2009) and Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen, (2006).

2. Literature Overview

The chapter presents earlier research in the thesis subject of online consumer reviews and its influence on consumer buying behavior; it is divided into three parts of Customer-to-customer (C2C) Interactions and Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), Consumer buying behavior and Buying process and Consumer buying behavior and Product type.

2. 1 Consumer Buying Behavior and Buying Process

In consumer buying behavior there is the problem of choice which results in a certain outcome (Taylor, 1974). Because the customer cannot know the outcome until after the purchase, there is a risk involved in every choice. The risk can be described as the possible loss that the customer can experience after a purchase. The loss can be economical, functional, psychological or social. The customer can reduce the risk related to purchase decisions by finding information about the product. Then the customer can get an idea of the possible outcome before making a purchase decision. The information can be acquired through word-of-mouth which has been found to reduce customers' perception of risk. (Ibid)

There are many ways of describing the consumer buying process (e.g., Kotler, 2009; Frambach, Krishnan and Roest, 2007) and this is something that has been studied for a long time. Although previous research presents models with various numbers of stages, a common theme includes the following three stages; information search (cognitive), evaluation of the found alternatives (affective) and finally the purchase transaction (behavior) (Sakkthivel, 2010). This buying process is related to when customers buy products offline. The degree of customer involvement is determined according to how much money the customer is willing to spend in the purchase and the length and complexity of the buying process varies according to this. (Ibid)

Sakkthivel (2010) describes that the buying process tends to be longer in the purchase of high-cost products, such as cars, TV's and jewelry. In this case the customer is not willing to choose substitute brands because of the high risk in the purchase of expensive products. The length of the buying process is reduced in the purchase of low-cost products such as groceries or cinema tickets. In this case customers are flexible and willing to change to substitute brands if the purchase is a disappointment. Because of the low cost there is a low risk of making the wrong decision. (Ibid)

Another version of the consumer buying process is described by Frambach, Krishnan and Roest (2007) and it consists of the stages of pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase. In the pre-purchase stage the customer search for information of a product offering from a company. In this stage it is important that the customer have easy access to product information and the Internet is a good source for this because of its efficiency in finding product information, organizing and evaluating the information. The Internet provides customers with good possibilities to evaluate alternatives and compare product information. In the stage of purchase, the customer has gathered all the information that is needed. Now the focus is on comparing product alternatives prior to making the decision whether to purchase or not. If the

customers make a purchase decision there is a transaction between customer and company. In the last stage of post-purchase, the customer evaluates the product and decides whether to continue buying from the seller. (Ibid)

A widely distributed and used model of the consumer buying process is Kotler's model (2009) and it consists of; need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post-purchase. In the stage of **need recognition**, the customer realizes a problem that is created by external or internal stimuli. The internal stimulus consists of humans most basics needs such as thirst and hunger. The external stimulus can create needs such as a longing for a certain product because of for example advertising. In the stage of **information search** the customer gather product information through different channels; personal, commercial, public and experiential. The personal channel consists of family, friends, neighbors and other acquaintances. In this channel the customer receives the most effective information because the customer can be sure that the information is truthful and helpful in evaluating alternatives. (Ibid)

Kotler (2009) describes that although customers find information from family and friends as the most truthful one, they find most of the information through the commercial channel from salespersons, dealers, advertising, web pages and displays. The public channel consists of consumer-rating organizations and mass media and the experiential channel consists of examining, handling and using the product. While gathering information customers learn about competing companies and their products. (Ibid)

Considering that the starting point of the buying process is a problem recognition, the most interesting products for the customer are the once that seems to have the characteristics that are most likely to deliver the problem solution. In the **evaluation of alternatives** stage the factors of beliefs and attitude influence the customer's judgment of alternatives. Buying behavior is influenced by the customer's earlier experiences which determine beliefs and attitudes. A customer's attitude towards a product is the emotional feeling and also negative or positive product judgment, which results in how the customer chooses to handle the product; buying it or rejecting it. The customer's belief is the perception and understanding of the product. The customer gets certain perceptions and opinions of the available alternatives and from these choose one that seems favorable in satisfying the need and solving the problem. (Kotler, 2009)

In the stage of **purchase decision** the customer make the final buying decision, but even in this stage there are factors that influence the decision. One of the influencing factors is other peoples' opinions of the product and the closer the person is personally to the customer, the influence increases. The customer's negativity and chance of rejecting a product increase when social contacts have a high degree of negativity. On the other hand the customer is positively influenced into buying a product if others speak positively and give recommendations about it. Customer reports on the Internet also influence the customer's final buying decision. Another influencing factor that can change the customer's final decision is when unexpected situations emerge; it can for example be a sudden unavoidable

change in the customer's personal economy or if another purchase has become more important and must be carried out instead of the first possible purchase. (Kotler, 2009)

The final stage in Kotler's (2009) five stage buying process comes after finishing the purchase; **post purchase** behavior. This is when the customer evaluates level of satisfaction after using the product. The customer's satisfaction with the product is determined according to if the product characteristics are able to deliver according to expectations. If this is not the case the customer will feel unsatisfied with the purchase. If the expectations are met the customer will be satisfied and if the product delivers above expectations the customer will feel delighted. The fulfillment of customer expectations with a product will determine future feelings towards the products and determine if the customer is willing to re-purchase it. (Ibid)

2.1.1 Online buying processes

According to Sakkthivel (2010), customers use online sources to find information prior to making purchase decision because the Internet provides product information to a low cost. Customers evaluate the available alternatives and then make a purchase decision to either buy the product online or in store. Customers go through a similar kind of process when buying products and services online as in a traditional buying process; problem recognition, information search, evaluation of product options, purchase decision and post-purchase support. (Ibid) The process of online shopping begins with the customer's recognition of a problem and continues with an online search for product information. Then the best alternative is chosen from a number of alternatives and a transaction between customer and company can take place. Customers are motivated to shop online because it offers a wide range of products and services, easily accessible information and it is efficient in comparing prices. (Garima & Gupta, 2013)

Kotler's model is also used in the online world; the model is widely used among other scholars, for example Comegys, Hannula and Väisänen (2006) who presents the model in the context of a buying process where the Internet is used as a means of help in the buying decision. Comegys, Hannula and Väisänen (2006), describe that they are examining differences between US and Finnish university students online shopping behavior, during the stages of the traditional five stage buying process; need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post purchase behavior. The researchers are looking into the influence of gender and how customers' behavior influence purchase volume. (Ibid)

According to Comegys, Hannula and Väisänen (2006), the **need recognition** occurs online because of external or internal stimuli or because the customer finds a solution to an earlier problem. In the stage of **information search** the customer make an active search online in public sources for additional product information prior to purchase. The next stage is the **evaluation of alternatives** with the possibility of leading to a purchase decision. The **purchase decision** refers to when the customer decides for whether to purchase while online. The **post-purchase** behavior refers to if the customer is willing to buy the same product more than once, depending on if the product met the expectations the first time and also if the

customer is willing to leave product reviews online. Comegys, Hannula and Väisänen's (2006) main findings in the research are that the Internet can be seen as an important information source when customers are going through the stages of the buying process. Customers' use of Internet during the buying process was greatest at the stage of the purchase decision. Men were found to be more active during most of stages in the buying process than women were. (Ibid)

2. 2 C2C Interaction and eWOM

2.2.1 C2C Interactions

The information exchange of product information between customers is increasing. Customer-to-customer interaction (C2C) is when customers share opinions and experiences of products with each other and this exchange of information can influence customers' attitudes towards products. The connection between companies, customers and C2C interactions have changed as customers have moved on from traditional verbal C2C interactions to the use of online networks to connect with other customers. (Andreassen et. al., 2013)

Han, Lee & Park (2007) describes that companies can complement existing product information by adding discussion forums on their websites for customers, to give them the opportunity to speak to each other and exchange opinions. This can be helpful for customers in their decision making. The new kind of word-of-mouth in the form of consumer online reviews is when earlier customers of a company share their product experiences and opinions after purchase. This new method of information sharing is becoming more popular among customers when searching for product information online. (Ibid)

According to Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006), the reason that customers search for product information online is to find the opinions of others and thereby reduce the risk when making purchase decisions. The online search is a good source of information prior to purchase and it is an opportunity to compare product prices and quality. Customers interact online in social networks, blogs, online communities, chat rooms and review sites where they share experiences and opinions of products and brands. (Ibid)

2.2.2 Electronic word-of-mouth

According to Cheung and Thadani (2012), the development of media channels has led to a new kind of communication between customers. An increasing number of people are using online communication such as social networks, discussion forums and consumer reviews sites for sharing experiences and exchanging information of products and services. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is when earlier, current or possible customers of a company share experiences of products and services with other customers online. When searching for information prior to a purchase decision, customers find eWOM more credible than traditional media such as TV advertisement, radio, personal selling and print ads. (Ibid)

According to Xue and Zhou (2010), there is either positive or negative information in WOM messages because customers either recommend or warn others of products according to their own experiences. Positive WOM has a greater influence on customers than negative WOM

because it enhances the positive perception of brands or products. Positive WOM has also been found to influence consumer buying decisions. When it comes to the source of WOM, customers tend to be more influenced when the information comes from people they know than when information originates from advertising and organizational sources. (Ibid)

Current online communication includes social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. These in turn creates new possibilities for customers to connect with each other and become active participants instead of passive observers through eWOM in social media. Customers participate in eWOM for the reason of reducing the uncertainty risk with buying products and services by searching for accurate information before making a purchase decision and to search for the lowest prices. WOM is considered to be a critical factor in the success of marketing and one of the most important influencing factors on consumer buying behavior. WOM has an impact on customers' evaluation of products and services and, final purchase decision as well as post-purchase evaluations. (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014)

2.2.3 Online brand communities

In earlier research (Adjei, Noble & Noble, 2010), online Customer-to-customer (C2C) communication is defined as interactions between customers in online brand communities (OBC). Many companies provides customers with the opportunity of using OBC's to search for product- and service information before making a purchase decision. An OBC can be a discussion forum on a company's website where it is possible for customers to post comments of their opinions about products and services and share their experiences with other customers. OBC's has a significant influence on sales and organizations can learn to understand customers' behavior when viewing the exchange of information. Depending on the quality of C2C interactions in OBC's, customers' uncertainty of products and services can be reduced and their view of the organization can be improved, which results in possible buying decisions and increased profits for the organization. (Ibid)

Adjei, Noble and Noble (2012), describes that the positive outcome of C2C interactions in OBC's are increased sales, more loyal customers, good opportunities for marketing of products and services, development of new product ideas and reduced costs on customer support. Since C2C interactions affect the brand image of organizations and customers' satisfaction there is also a possibility for negative outcomes such as damages of organizations' reputation, because of unsatisfied customers' choice of sharing experiences with others. Because of this it is important for managers to learn how to manage the information flow on OBC's to give positive influence on customers and work to reduce the negative influence. According to Wu (2008) C2C interactions affect customer satisfaction; positive interactions can improve an already positive experience a customer has of a service or product and negative interactions has a negative effect on customer satisfaction.

2.2.4 Online consumer reviews

According to Lee and Park (2008), customers' purchase intentions can be influenced by online consumer reviews. The reviews describe earlier customers' opinions, experiences and evaluations of products and reviews have two roles in the influence on consumer purchase

intentions; as an informant and a recommender. The online consumer reviews serves as the role of an informant because it provides customers with supplementary product information. The reviews also have the role as a recommender because the messages either contain positive or negative product information. Online consumer reviews can completely meet customers' needs prior to making purchase decisions because the reviews provide customers with both information and recommendation, which are the two important factors customers search for. (Ibid)

Customers who do not have much earlier knowledge in the product area tend to turn to their social contacts for additional information (Sanjay & Sanjay, 2013). Customers of a young age who does not have much experience rely more of the knowledge of others prior to making purchase-decisions. Customers use personal sources and turn to opinion leaders to find additional information because the purchase of high-involvement products demands a high degree of problem solving. Opinion leaders' can be defined as well informed people with an expertise in a product area who can influence consumers buying decision through word-of-mouth. An opinion leader is a person who has expertise knowledge of a product. When it comes to low-involvement products customers tend to spend less time searching for information. (Ibid)

2.2.5 Factors for evaluating reviews

According to Han, Lee & Park (2007), the major factors that define the characteristics of the online consumer reviews are; review quantity, quality and credibility. These factors are the most crucial ones for customers when evaluating the usefulness of online consumer reviews in the search for product information. Quantity and quality has an important role when customers evaluate information found in consumer online reviews. Online consumer reviews can be written from either an objective or subjective point of view, and the reviews can be thoroughly written or only give a brief description of the product. Reviewers, who base their product opinion on facts, with an objective and logic approach and adequate knowledge of their own, are considered to provide reviews of high quality. Consequently, reviews written with a subjective approach, consisting of emotional and unclear content are considered to be of low quality. (Ibid)

A large quantity of reviews of positive content can signal product popularity because it shows that a lot of customers have decided to purchase the product. Review quantity is important to low-involvement customers who do not have the motivation or ability to put effort and time into searching for a large amount of product information. For these customers, recommendations from other customers are enough to base the buying decision on. High-involvement customers on the other hand perceive review quality as the most important factor. This is because they are looking for reviews which provide them with useful, logic information and product facts with convincing arguments. This can help high-involvement customers to make a buying decision. (Han, Lee & Park, 2007)

Online consumer reviews are considered to be less credible than product information that comes from social contacts. This is because online consumer reviews are written by unknown

customers and traditional word-of-mouth is product information that comes directly from social contacts. This means that customers evaluate credibility in review messages according to its content. Customers perceive reviews as believable when the content is logical and persuasive. Product information from reviews also becomes credible to customers if a large amount of earlier customers have given positive product comments (Han, Lee & Park 2007).

The main findings in Han, Lee & Park's (2007) research according to the quality and quantity aspect of reviews is that reviews with logic and convincing arguments, provide the customers with useable product facts, which positively influence the customer in the buying decision. A large number of reviews reflect the popularity of the product and is also positively influencing in the consumers buying decision. Both review quality and quantity is important for high-involvement customers and review quantity is most important for low-involvement customers. Review quantity is important for high-involvement customers, because it was found in the research results that a large amount of reviews gives the impression that the product is popular and bought by a lot of other people. This is perceived of high-involvement customers as an important signal for product popularity and not just as a peripheral cue. (Ibid)

2.2.6 Elaboration likelihood model

According to Bodoff & Shuk Ying (2014), the basic elaboration likelihood model (ELM) describes how customers' attitude towards products and buying behavior can change when they receive messages such as online consumer reviews. The change in attitude and buying behavior is according to the characteristics of the message and it can be persuading for the customer in either a central or peripheral direction. The central and peripheral directions refers to the depth of information processing that customers go through; it can either be a high depth of information processing, which means that customers carefully evaluate the arguments and content of messages, or it can be a low depth of information processing. This in turn, refers to when customers do not evaluate the message content as carefully; a brief overlook can be sufficient. (Ibid)

The ELM model (Figure 1) describes the high depth of information processing as the central direction to attitude change and the low depth information processing as peripheral direction to attitude change. The customers' choice of how to process information is related to what motivates them and their capabilities. (Bodoff & Shuk Ying 2014)

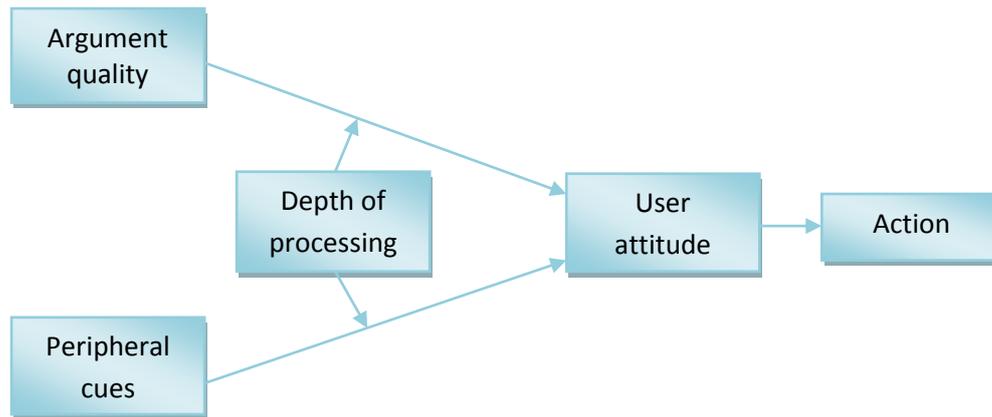


Figure 1: The Basic Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

Source: Bodoff & Shuk Ying, 2014, p. 500

According to Han, Lee & Park (2007), the ELM model can be used to explain the difference in customers' perception of online consumer reviews depending on if they are going to buy high- or low involvement products. The definition of involvement is the level of importance that products have to individuals depending on values, interests and needs. It is difficult to categorize which products that belong to low- or high involvement because in every case of purchase this depends on customer preferences and circumstances. This can be exemplified by the product shampoo, which can be considered to be highly involving for some customers because of allergies, bad experiences with the product or because of personal opinions as opposition to animal testing. Shampoo can also be considered, by other customers, to be a low-involvement product that is bought out of habit, without much thought. (Ibid)

Han, Lee & Park (2007) describe the model of ELM as customers' motivation and ability in processing product information. Customers' ability and willingness to process the information depends on their involvement with the product and their earlier knowledge and experience. Customers who are more willing, motivated and able to process the information do it via the central route; in other words these customers spend more time and effort into partaking in product arguments and form their own opinions about the product. (Ibid)

Customers who are not motivated and who does not have the ability to process information then do it via the peripheral routes; which means without any effort or much time spent. These customers look at non useful content in information messages and rely on peripheral cues such as product popularity and amount of consumer reviews. The qualities of online consumer reviews are most important for highly involved customers because they are looking for reviews with logic content and useful product facts. Low involvement customers are satisfied if there is a large amount of reviews because this signals product popularity. This means that the quantity is more important than the quality of reviews. (Han, Lee & Park 2007)

2.3 Consumer Buying Behavior and Product Type

2.3.1 Product involvement

Involvement can be described as the level of interest that customers have of learning about a product and looking for additional information (Goodstein, Grewal, Price, Puccinelli, Raghurir & Stewart, 2009). The amount of time customers spend on searching for product information depends on the product involvement (Sanjay & Sanjay, 2013). The factors which decide customers' involvement with a product or brand are the perceived risk of purchasing the product, customers' knowledge of the products characteristics/qualities and customers' view of its advertising. Customers' product involvement depends on the importance of the product and the reason for purchasing the product. (Khare & Rakesh, 2011)

2.3.2 High- and low involvement products

Customers are considered to be highly involved when they pay a higher price for a product, the product is personally important to them or if they are making a purchase decision on the behalf for someone else; such as buying a product for their work place. Because of the high importance of making the right decision for high involvement products, customers have an interest to search for additional information and spend more time in processing the information than for low-involvement products. In general, customers perceive consumer reviews as more believable than expert reviews because the consumer reviews comes from customers earlier experiences. (Goodstein et al. 2009)

When it comes to high-involvement products, customers spend more time searching for information and from a large amount of sources. The information search is higher for high-involvement products than for low involvement products because of the risk connected to the decision making of purchasing high-involvement products. (Sanjay & Sanjay, 2013) According to Khare & Rakesh (2011), the risk when purchasing high-involvement products is that these products are connected to a high degree of search- and experience costs. The search cost can be described as the purchase having to be delayed because of unsatisfying information findings. The experience costs can be described as the social, psychological, physical and financial risk that comes with an unsatisfying purchase. Customers spend more time for information search from opinion leaders and other sources because of the uncertainty and risk that comes with making purchase decisions for high-involvement products. (Ibid)

Low involvement products can be defined as frequently purchased non-durable and low-cost products with a low perception of risk (Khare & Rakesh, 2011). Customers' perception of low involvement products is that they are non-important products which are bought impulsively without comparing alternatives. Low-involvement products are non-expensive and personally insignificant products. This means that there is a low risk of making the wrong product decision. (Gbadamosi, 2009)

When it comes to the purchase of everyday products, bought out of habit and routine, customers experience less risk when not having to evaluate product alternatives. In the purchase of high-involvement products the risk is higher because of the uncertainty that

comes from the lack of product information and experience. When customers do not have any earlier knowledge of a product category there is a need to find the information from other sources. Customers often turn to personal sources such as friends or family and also to other customers who have earlier experience in the product area. (Khare & Rakesh (2011))

Customers of high-involvement products are more influenced of the arguments from earlier customers in online consumer reviews than customers of low-involvement products. Due to the fact that high-involved customers search for a large amount of product information, they perceive the information role of online consumer reviews as the most important one and they are not as interested in the recommender role which indicates product popularity. Low-involvement customers are more interested in the popularity of products than searching for a large amount of information and therefore they consider the role as recommender as the more important one. (Lee & Park, 2008)

3. Frame of Reference

This chapter presents the conceptualization of research questions and it describes the thesis main concepts of consumer buying behavior and buying process. This leads into the emerged framework.

The purpose of this study is to find out how online consumer reviews influence consumer buying behavior in the buying process. To reach the purpose of the study, the following research questions have emerged;

RQ1 How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

RQ2 How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

RQ3 How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

RQ4 How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

3. 1 Conceptualization

RQ1 How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

RQ2 How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

RQ 1 and 2 has been conceptualized based on Han, Lee & Park's (2007) research. In their research it is described that the major factors that define the characteristics of the online consumer reviews are; review quantity, quality and credibility. These factors are the most crucial ones for customers when evaluating the usefulness of online consumer reviews in the search for product information. High quality reviews can be defined as when reviews are thoroughly written with an argument that can be supported by facts and logic. Reviews of low quality are poorly written with an emotional content that does not give any facts about the product. (Ibid)

Han, Lee & Park (2007) describe that review quantity is connected to the product popularity; a large amount of positive reviews signal popularity. This reduces the feeling of risk and uncertainty of purchasing the product and influence customers positively into purchase decisions. Online consumer reviews are perceived as more credible than the information that comes from companies and this is because the reviews are written by earlier customers. The reviews describe earlier customers' honest experiences and opinions of products they have used and these reviews come from a large number of customers. (Ibid)

RQ3 How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

RQ4 How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

RQ 3 and 4 has been conceptualized based on Comegys, Hannula and Väisänen (2006) research where the research problem is to examine university students' online buying behavior in Kotler's (2009) five stage buying process. Comegys, Hannula and Väisänen (2006) present the five stage buying model in the context of a buying process where the Internet is used as a means of help in the buying decision. The need recognition occurs online because of external or internal stimuli or because the customer finds a solution to an earlier problem.

In the stage of information search the customer make an active search online in public sources for additional product information prior to purchase. The next stage is when the found alternatives are actively evaluated with the possibility of leading to a purchase decision. The purchase decision refers to when the customer decides for whether to purchase while online. The post-purchase behavior refers to if the customer is willing to buy the same product more than once depending on if the product met the expectations the first time and also if the customer is willing to leave product reviews online. (Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen, 2006)

Table 1 shows the conceptualization of online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior in the buying process and presents definitions of the main concepts in consumer buying behavior and the consumer buying process. The figure also shows measurements of the main concepts.

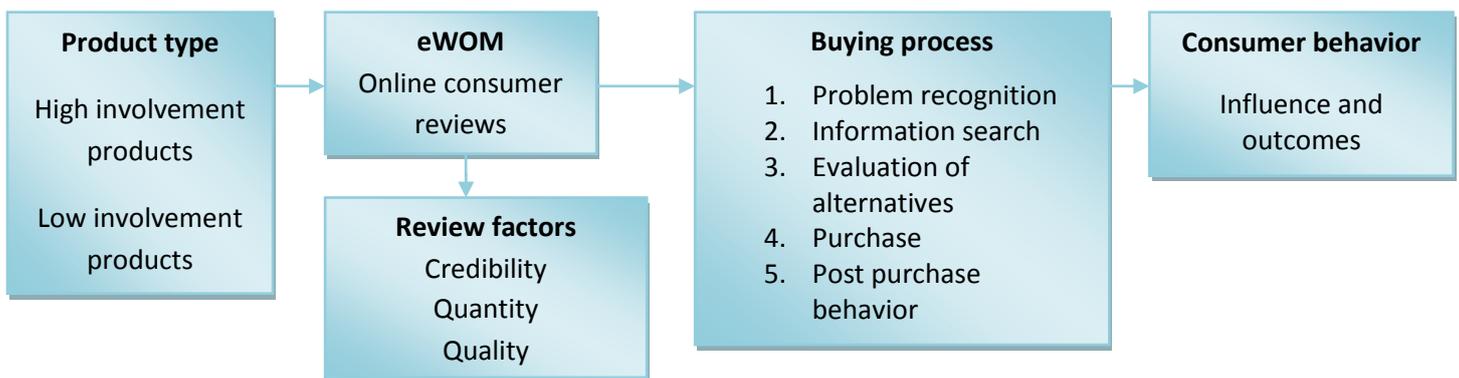
Table 1: Conceptualization of online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior in the buying process.

Conceptual area	Concept	Conceptual Definition	Measurement	Sources
Consumer Buying Behavior	C2C Interactions/ Electronic Word-of-Mouth	Customers share opinions and experiences of products and it can influence their attitude towards products. (Andreassen, Blazevic, Carl, Donthu, Garnefeld, Hammedi, Keiningham & Rust, 2013).	Positive or negative consumer reviews of a company's products.	Curran, McCabe & Meuter, (2013). Han, Lee & Park (2007).
	Consumer Buying Behavior	Related to the consumer's decision process, the explanation to purchase decisions. (Glock & Nicosia, 1964).	Consumer decision process.	Han, Lee & Park (2007).
	High-involvement Products	Products with higher perception of risk than low-involvement products. (Sanjay & Sanjay, 2013).	Degree of quality, quantity, usefulness and credibility of consumer reviews.	Han, Lee & Park (2007).
	Low-involvement Products	Frequently purchased non-durable and low-cost products with a low perception of risk. (Khare & Rakesh, 2011).	Degree of quality, quantity, usefulness and credibility of consumer reviews.	Han, Lee & Park (2007).
Consumer Buying Process	Need recognition	Realization of a problem created by internal or external stimuli (Kotler, 2009).	The possibility for need recognition online and possible discovery of solutions to already existing problems.	Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen, (2006). Kotler, (2009).
	Information Search	External and internal search for product information (Solomon, 2013).	Active search in online public sources for product information prior to purchase.	Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen, (2006). Kotler, (2009).
	Evaluation of Alternatives	Evaluation and comparison of available alternatives (Solomon, 2013).	Active evaluation of found alternatives online with the possible result of purchase decision.	Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen, (2006). Kotler, (2009).
	Purchase Decision	Transaction between customer and company (Frambach, Krishnan & Roest, 2007).	When customers make up their mind for whether to purchase while online.	Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen, (2006). Kotler, (2009).
	Post-purchase	Evaluation of purchase and decision if to repeat purchase in the future (Frambach, Krishnan & Roest, 2007)	Customers' willingness of repeat purchase and willingness to give product reviews online.	Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen, (2006). Kotler, (2009).

3.2 Emerged Framework

The emerged framework consists of the consumer buying process as it is described by Kotler (2009) and Comegys, Hannula and Väisänen (2006). C2C Interactions and eWOM is measured in the form of online consumer reviews. The major factors that define the characteristics of online consumer reviews are; review quantity, quality and credibility. These factors are the most crucial ones for customers when evaluating the usefulness of online consumer reviews in the search for product information (Han, Lee & Park, 2007). The emerged framework also contains high- and low involvement products; the two kinds of products the thesis is focusing on, in the context of consumer buying behavior. The influence online consumer reviews has on consumer buying behavior in the buying process, results in a certain outcome which will be presented in the empirical chapter of the thesis after the data collection is finished.

Figure 2: Emerged framework



4. Methodology

This chapter describes the thesis research methods and it consists of; research- purpose, approach and strategy, sample selection, data collection and analysis and finally the quality standards reliability and validity.

4.1 Research Purpose

Out of the three possible research purposes of descriptive, exploratory and explanatory, this study has a descriptive purpose as it describes how online consumer reviews influence consumer buying behavior in the buying process. Online consumer reviews is a relatively new research topic and this study addresses problems that previous research has not covered, therefore it is also exploratory. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2008)

4.2 Research Approach

The two possible methods when conducting research are the qualitative and quantitative approach. The purpose of the qualitative method is to get an understanding for a phenomenon's characteristics, find out what it is about and what it means. The method of quantitative research has the purpose of measuring quantities, finding connections and describing how often a phenomenon occurs. (Widerberg, 2002) As the purpose of the study was to examine how online consumer reviews influence consumer buying behavior in the buying process, the study has a qualitative approach with the research method of interviews. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study does not try to generalize, instead it aims for receiving a deeper knowledge of how online consumer reviews influence consumer buying behavior in the buying process. (Ibid)

4.3 Research Strategy

There are several different possible research strategies; survey, case study, experiment, history and archival analysis (Yin, 2009). There are three factors which need to be considered before choosing a research strategy; the research question, focus on contemporary events and control over behavioral events. The study's research questions seeks to answer how-questions as; *How* can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing high involvement products, be described? The study aims for understanding contemporary phenomena and does not need to have control over behavioral events. Because the purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how online consumer reviews influence consumer buying behavior in the buying process, the most suitable research strategy is the case study. (Ibid)

4.4 Sample Selection

It is the research problem that determines which respondents that should be included in the data collection. (Davidsson & Patel, 2013) The research problem of how online consumer reviews influence consumer buying behavior in the buying process, includes a certain category of people. In this case the category is limited into only including respondents within a certain age group. The age group of 16-25 was chosen because previous research (Findahl, 2013), described that people in this age group are the most frequent users of Internet and

social media to find product information. These Internet users gather on networks and interest communities to exchange advice and opinions, within an area of interest such as certain products. Within this group of Internet users, five out of ten post comments on open discussion forums and eight out of ten give comments on posts that others have published. (Ibid)

To give a description as broad as possible, eight respondents were interviewed; these eight respondents include men, women, students and those who work. All of the respondents were in the age group of 23-25. By choosing a larger amount of respondents the aim was to access a deeper picture when collecting data. Table 2 shows the variables that have been taken into consideration when choosing interview respondents.

Table 2: Sample Selection

Respondent	Gender	Age	Occupation
1	Female	23	Student
2	Female	23	Working
3	Female	24	Working
4	Female	25	Working
5	Female	25	Working
6	Male	23	Working
7	Male	25	Student
8	Male	25	Student

4.5 Data Collection

There are different kinds of data collection methods; observations, self-reporting, attitude scales, surveys, interviews or existing documents (Davidsson & Patel, 2013). Interviews were suitable as data collection method for this study because qualitative interviews are not standardized or structured. This is because respondents should be able to answer questions in their own words but still keeping the discussion within the subject of the research problem. It is important to prepare an interview guide before conducting the interview to keep to the interviewer's purpose of the interview and avoid letting the conversation lead away from the discussion of the research problem. (Ibid)

An interview guide was developed for the study, which is based on the conceptualization in the frame of reference and the major theories of the consumer buying process, C2C-interactions, eWOM, online consumer reviews and high- and low involvement products. The interview guide can be found in appendices and it describes the subject of discussion which is online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior in the buying process, and the sequence of the interview questions. (Hartman, 2004)

4.6 Data Analysis

The study's data analysis method was the abductive analysis and this is because neither the deductive nor inductive method is a suitable analysis approach. The deductive analysis method is when hypothesis from theory is tested against the empiri. The inductive analysis method on the other hand is when the analysis is built on only the empiri and this is the foundation for conclusions. The method of abduction is used because it is a mixture of using theory and empiricism when making conclusions in research. The empiricism is compared to theory to find out if something new has been discovered in the empiricism which can evolve the already existing theory. (Alvehus, 2013)

4.7 Quality Standards

The quality of research can be described by the reliability and validity. (Alvehus, 2013) Reliability measures how reliable research results are and it is considered to be of high reliability if the same research results are found when independent studies are conducted within the same subject and by using the same measuring method. Validity can be described as if the researcher has measured what was supposed to be measured. The study's reliability was improved by using the research method of interviews when there were meetings with respondents and discussions about questions that were prepared in advance. Respondents could speak freely in every question and when it was possible, follow-up questions were asked to get a more detailed answer. (Ibid)

The study's validity was improved because the interviews were kept to only involve prepared interview questions. This kept the discussions from switching to other topics and resulted in satisfying answers to questions. Respondents' interview answers are important to be able to draw a conclusion about differences and similarities to previous theory in the study's analysis chapter. It would have been more difficult to control the data collection if survey's had been chosen as research method. This is because of the risk of not receiving answers to all questions and surveys do not give any possibility to evolve discussions with respondents. (Hartman, 2004)

5. Empirical data

This chapter presents data collection results from interviews for each research question.

5.1 RQ1

How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

5.1.1 Use of online consumer reviews

Data collection results show that seven out of eight respondents were willing to read reviews for high-involvement products. These seven respondents described that the reason for reading reviews was because of the higher risk in economic costs, because these products were usually expensive. The respondents in general were motivated to read online consumer reviews to find additional information especially when it came to product categories that were unfamiliar to them. Two of the respondents read reviews every time when they were going to buy a product, no matter what kind of product it was. These two respondents described that it was because reviews provided them with useful information consisting of earlier customers product experiences.

The respondents in general felt the need to complement the information they found in reviews by asking social contacts for additional product information and experiences. This was to find out how popular the product was and if the brand was well-known, which would positively influence the buying decision. One of the respondents did not feel the need to read reviews, when it was possible to make a buying decision according to earlier knowledge and experiences.

5.1.2 Information usefulness

The respondents in general perceived review information as useful if it gave a description of other customers' experiences, product advantages and disadvantages and also if the information was clear and truthful.

5.1.3 Review Quality and Quantity

Four out of eight respondents thought that review quality was most important when reading reviews for high-involvement products. High-quality reviews were defined by respondents in general as informative, clearly written with a detailed text and written by people with good product knowledge. Three out of eight respondents valued both review quantity and quality. For one of the respondents, review quality and quantity did not seem to matter.

5.1.4 Review Credibility

The respondents in general considered reviews to be credible if earlier customers wrote about their own experiences, if the content was both positive and negative and if the reviews were presented in believable websites such as Price Runner and Amazon.

Table 3 shows the respondents' answers to interview questions related to RQ1 of how online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing high involvement products, can be described. Since the major factors customers use when evaluating the usefulness of online consumer reviews are; review quality, quantity and credibility, these factors were included in the table and also the respondents' answers related to them.

Table 3: Result of data collection for RQ 1 – High involvement products

Respondents	Use of online consumer reviews	Information usefulness factors of online consumer reviews	Quality or quantity of online consumer reviews	Credibility factors in online consumer reviews
1. Female, age 23	Often	Gives product information	Quality	Customers own experiences
2. Female, age 23	Sometimes	Clear and truthful	Quality and quantity	Positive and negative content
3. Female, age 24	Never	Seriously written	Quality and quantity	Compared to organizational information
4. Female, age 25	Often	Not always useful, opinions vary	Quality	Product opinions vary
5. Female, age 25	Often	Possible change of product opinion	None	Normal degree of positivity
6. Male, age 23	Always	Other customers' opinions	Quality	Many similar product opinions
7. Male, age 25	Often	Product advantages and disadvantages	Quality	Published on believable websites
8. Male, age 25	Always	Other customers' experiences	Quality and quantity	Published on believable websites

5.2 RQ 2

How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

5.2.1 Use of online consumer reviews

Six out of eight respondents were not willing to read reviews for low involvement products. These six respondents described that instead of reviews, product advice from social contacts and product popularity were seen as important factors for making a buying decision. Respondent six described that popular products were more attractive than unpopular ones. Respondent four thought that it became easier to make the buying decision if a lot of people recommended the product. Two out of eight respondents always read reviews no matter what kind of product it was, because it provided them with earlier customers' product experiences.

5.2.2 Information usefulness

When it comes to the usefulness of information in reviews, six out of eight respondents thought that product information that comes from social contacts and product popularity was more useful than the information from reviews. Two of the respondents thought that review information was useful because it provided them with earlier customers' opinions and experiences of products.

5.2.3 Review Quality

Two of the respondents thought that review quantity and quality did not matter. This was because these two respondents thought that it was possible to take a chance when buying low involvement products, which are usually sold to a low price. The two respondents who actually read reviews before buying low involvement products had different opinions of if review quantity or quality was most important; one thought that quality was important and the other valued quantity more.

5.2.4 Review Quantity

Four out of eight respondents thought that the quantity of information they received from social contacts and product popularity was most important. Review quantity and quality did not matter. Product popularity could be enough to lead into a buying decision. These four respondents thought that if it was a large amount of earlier customers who had good experience of a product, chances were good for the respondents to also be satisfied with the product.

5.2.5 Review Credibility

Respondents in general thought that review credibility for low involvement products was equal to review credibility for high involvement products; Reviews were credible if earlier customers wrote about their own experiences, if the content was both positive and negative and if the reviews were presented in believable websites such as Price Runner and Amazon.

Table 4 shows the respondents' answers to interview questions related to RQ2 of how online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing low involvement products, can be described.

Table 4: Result of data collection for RQ 2 – Low involvement products

Respondents	Use of online consumer reviews	Information usefulness factors of online consumer reviews	Quality or quantity of online consumer reviews	Credibility factors in online consumer reviews
1. Female, age 23	Never	Not useful	Quantity (product popularity)	Customers own experiences
2. Female, age 23	Never	Not useful	Quantity (product popularity)	Positive and negative content
3. Female, age 24	Never	Not useful	Quantity (product popularity)	Compared to organizational information
4. Female, age 25	Never	Not useful	Quantity (product popularity)	Product opinions vary
5. Female, age 25	Never	Not useful	None	Normal degree of positivity
6. Male, age 23	Always	Other customers' opinions	Quantity	Many similar product opinions
7. Male, age 25	Never	Not useful	None	Published on believable websites
8. Male, age 25	Always	Other customers' experiences	Quality	Published on believable websites

5.3 RQ3

How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

5.3.1 Use of online consumer reviews

For high involvement products, five out of eight respondents only read reviews in the information search stage of the buying process. Two of the respondents used reviews in two of the buying process stages; first to find information and then in the stage of post purchase for writing reviews. One of the respondents did not use reviews and instead preferred to ask social contacts for product information.

5.3.2 Activities in the buying process

Respondent one's activities in the buying process consisted of reading reviews and searching for product information in organizational websites. Respondents two and four read reviews and then compared product alternatives in product characteristics and price. Respondent three, who did not use reviews, turned to social contacts for product information. Respondents five, six and seven read reviews and compared products in price and brand on websites such as Price Runner. Respondent eight read reviews and compared alternatives according to earlier customers' opinions and price.

Table 5 shows respondents' answers to interview questions related to RQ3; How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing high involvement products, be described? The aim was to find out in which stages respondents used reviews as well as their activities in the buying process. Since the thesis is based on the buying process as it is described by Kotler (2009) and Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen (2006), the buying process consists of; need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post-purchase behavior.

Table 5: Result of data collection for RQ 3 – High involvement products

Respondents	Use of online consumer reviews in the buying process	Activities in the buying process
1. Female, age 23	Information search	Reviews, Organizational info
2. Female, age 23	Information search	Reviews, Compare alternatives
3. Female, age 24	No	Social contacts
4. Female, age 25	Information search	Reviews, Compare alternatives
5. Female, age 25	Information search	Reviews, Compare alternatives
6. Male, age 23	Information search, Post-purchase	Reviews, Compare alternatives
7. Male, age 25	Information search	Reviews, Compare alternatives
8. Male, age 25	Information search, Post-purchase	Reviews, Compare alternatives

5.4 RQ4

How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

5.4.1 Use of online consumer reviews

Six out of eight respondents did not read reviews before buying low involvement products. Respondent six and eight always read review in the stage of information search to find valuable product experiences from other customers. These two respondents also wrote reviews of their own in the stage of post-purchase. Respondents one and four chose to look for product popularity instead of reading reviews. Respondents two and three valued product information from social contacts instead of reviews. Respondents five and seven made their buying decision according to their own knowledge.

5.4.2 Activities in the buying process

The activities in the buying process for respondent one and four did not include reviews; instead product popularity was the major determination factor for buying products. Respondent one and four thought that a high degree of product popularity was a signal for high product quality. The buying process of respondents two and three consisted of asking social contacts for product information and evaluating products according to this. Respondent five made the buying decision according to earlier experiences. Respondent seven chose a couple of product alternatives and evaluated them according to price and quality. Respondent six and eight had similar buying process activities for low involvement products as for high involvement products. Respondent six read reviews and compared products in price and brand on websites such as Price Runner. Respondent eight read reviews and compared alternatives according to earlier customers' opinions and price.

Table 6 shows the respondents' answers to interview questions related to RQ4; How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

Table 6: Result of data collection for RQ 4 – Low involvement products

Respondents	Use of online consumer reviews in the buying process	Activities in the buying process
1. Female, age 23	No	Product popularity
2. Female, age 23	No	Social contacts
3. Female, age 24	No	Social contacts
4. Female, age 25	No	Product popularity
5. Female, age 25	No	Experiences
6. Male, age 23	Information search, Post-purchase	Reviews, Compare alternatives
7. Male, age 25	No	Price and quality
8. Male, age 25	Information search, Post-purchase	Reviews, Compare alternatives

6. Analysis

In this chapter the results from empirical data is analyzed and compared with previous research and conceptual framework. After analyzing the data, conclusions and implications will follow in the next chapter.

6.1 RQ1

How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

This thesis looks at how online consumer reviews influence consumer buying behavior in the buying process. The study has a focus on high and low involvement products. As it is described in the emerged framework in chapter three, the major factors which customers use to evaluate the usefulness of reviews are; review quality, quantity and credibility (Han, Lee & Park, 2007). The thesis is based on the buying process as it is described by Kotler (2009) and Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen (2006).

6.1.1 Use of online consumer reviews

Data support previous research (Sanjay & Sanjay, 2013) as seven out of eight respondents felt the need to search for further information in online consumer reviews when buying high-involvement products. This is because of the higher risk that comes with buying these kinds of products. (Ibid) As it is described in the basic elaboration likelihood model (Lee, Park & Han, 2007), the respondents were more motivated to search and put effort into processing logically written product information in review messages, when they were highly involved with the product. Lee and Park (2008) describe that customers of high-involvement products tend to be more influenced by the content and arguments in online consumer reviews and the informant role is seen as more important than the recommender. This is because the highly involved customer wants to search for complementary information before making a purchase decision, rather than relying on products popularity (Ibid).

6.1.2 Information usefulness

Goldsmith and Horowitz, (2006) describe that the reason that customers search for product information online is to find the opinions of others and thereby reduce the risk when making purchase decisions. The online search is a good source of information prior to purchase and it is an opportunity to compare product prices and quality. (Ibid) Seven out of eight respondents thought reviews were useful in the search for product information for high involvement products. These seven respondents described that reviews were useful because it gave them additional product information and other customer's experiences. They described useful reviews as clear, truthful and seriously written. One of the respondents thought that reviews were not always useful because opinions from earlier customers vary a lot which could give a confusing product picture.

6.1.3 Review Quality

Data support previous research (Han, Lee & Park, 2007) as five out of eight respondents thought that review quality was most important when reading reviews for high involvement products. Previous research (Han, Lee & Park, 2007) describe that review quality is important for customers who are highly involved in the product because they want to read reviews with well-written, logic content and well described product facts with convincing product arguments. Review quality was most important for five out of eight respondents because they wanted the reviews to be more thoroughly written in the description of the product. This was to get as much detailed information and facts about the product as possible. These five respondents thought the reviews were good and reliable if the person who had written them had good knowledge and a lot of experience of the product.

6.1.4 Review Quantity

Two out of eight respondents thought that both quality and quantity was important in reviews for high involvement products. These two respondents searched for thoroughly written reviews with detailed product facts, but they also thought that a larger number of positive product reviews increased the chance that the product was actually good. This meant an increased possibility that they would be satisfied with the product. One out of eight respondents did not read any reviews before making the buying decision and therefore review quantity and quality did not matter. Instead this respondent relied on earlier product knowledge and experience.

Lee & Park, (2008) describe that product popularity influence high-involved customers in their buying decision. Data supports this previous research as the respondents in general described that they were positively influenced when there were a large amount of positive product reviews. This was because they thought that if other customers had been satisfied with the product so would they be. Data supports previous research (Xue & Zhou, 2010), which describe that negative information in WOM messages influence high-involvement customers in a greater extent than low-involvement customers. This is because negative reviews had a strong influence on the respondents in general in their buying decisions. Respondent six said that in major buying decision such as hotel bookings, it was enough with one negative review among many positive reviews to create uncertainty in the buying decision. This was because of the high risk of making the wrong decision, both in terms of cost and convenience.

The respondents in general needed to complement information in reviews, by asking social contacts before making the final buying decision. This was because information that comes from social contacts was seen as more reliable than other information sources. Data supports previous research as Xue and Zhou (2010) describe that when it comes to the source of WOM, customers tend to be more influenced when the information comes from people they know than when information originates from advertising and organizational sources. (Ibid)

6.1.5 Review Credibility

Credibility was important to all of the respondents when evaluating reviews, because of the risk of false reviews. Previous research (Han, Lee & Park, 2007) describe that customers perceive reviews as believable when the content is logical and persuasive. Product information from reviews also becomes credible to customers if a large amount of earlier customers have given positive product comments (Ibid). The respondents in general described credible reviews as written with interest, by earlier customers who had good product knowledge. This would provide the reader with product facts and convincing arguments. One of the respondents described that credibility of reviews could be suspicious when there were a large number of reviews which were basically equal in content and if they were excessively positive.

Two out of eight respondents thought that credibility depends on what kind of website that provides customers with reviews. These two respondents described believable websites to be for example Amazon and Price Runner. One out of eight respondents described that blogs could be perceived as a doubtful information source because it is common that many bloggers are sponsored to write product reviews. This would make it difficult to determine if the opinions are truthful or only written as product advertisement. Previous research (Cheung and Thadani, 2012) describe that customers find eWOM more credible than traditional media such as TV advertisements, radio, personal selling and print ads. One out of eight respondents thought that product information in organizational websites could be questionable because these websites try to make the product look as good as possible. Also, the product description does not give any opinions or experiences from earlier customers who have tried the product.

6.2 RQ2

How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

6.2.1 Use of online consumer reviews

Data support previous research (Xue & Zhou, 2010) as six out of eight respondents did not spend any time on reading online consumer reviews before making decisions of buying low-involvement products. Sanjay & Sanjay, (2013) describe that customers do not think that there is a high risk with buying low-involvement products and therefore there is no need to spend as much time on searching for product information as it is for high-involvement products. Instead of online consumer reviews, these six respondents information source was social contacts that had earlier experience of the product. Two out of eight respondents read reviews for low-involvement products because it gave them valuable insight of earlier customers' product experiences and opinions.

6.2.2 Information usefulness

Previous research (Lee & Park, 2008) describe that low-involvement customers see the role of recommender in the online consumer reviews as more important than the informant role and can rely only on the popularity of a product to make a purchase decision. Six out of eight

respondents did not think that reviews were useful for low involvement products and this was because they did not spend any time on reading reviews before buying these kinds of products. Instead these six respondents relied on information from social contacts and product popularity. According to the elaboration likelihood model, low involvement customers are not motivated to process a lot of information. Therefore they process information via the peripheral route without any effort and by focusing on peripheral cues such as product popularity. (Han, Lee & Park, 2007) Two of the respondents thought that reviews were useful for low involvement products because it presented other customers product opinions and made the buying decision easier.

6.2.3 Review Quality

One of the respondents considered review quality to be more important than quantity. This was because reviews of high quality, written by believable sources and professionals who had good product knowledge, were more significant. It was not significant for this respondent to read reviews written by earlier customers who did not have the required product knowledge.

6.2.4 Review Quantity

Data supports previous research (Han, Lee & Park, 2007) as five out of eight respondents thought review quantity is most important for low-involvement products. Since these respondents preferred to ask social contacts for product information, they thought it was the quantity of information from social contacts that was important. This means that these four respondents relied on product popularity for low-involvement products rather than searching for additional information.

Previous research (Han, Lee & Park, 2007) describe that a large quantity of reviews of positive content can signal product popularity because it shows that a lot of customers have decided to purchase the product. Review quantity is important to low-involvement customers who do not have the motivation or ability to put effort and time into searching for a large amount of product information. For these customers, recommendations from other customers are enough to base the buying decision on. (Ibid) The respondents in general thought that if a lot of other customers had been satisfied with the product, there was a good chance that they would also be satisfied with it. A high level of product popularity and well-known brands were perceived by the respondents in general, as a reassuring factor of a good product. Two of the respondents did not think that review quantity or quality mattered because they made their buying decision according to their own knowledge and experience.

6.2.5 Review Credibility

The definition of review credibility for low involvement products was similar to the definition for RQ1, for reviews of high involvement products; respondents in general described credible reviews as written by earlier customers who had good product knowledge, which provided the reader with product facts and convincing arguments. Credibility also depended on what kind of website that provided customers with reviews. Examples of believable websites were Amazon and Price runner. Product information that came from social contacts was considered

to be more credible than information from online consumer reviews, because the information then came from people the respondents knew.

Han, Lee & Park, (2007) describe that online consumer reviews are considered to be less credible than product information that comes from social contacts. This is because online consumer reviews are written by unknown customers and traditional word-of-mouth is product information that comes directly from social contacts. This means that customers evaluate credibility in review messages according to its content. (Ibid)

6.3 RQ3

How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

6.3.1 Online consumer reviews in the buying process

Sanjay & Sanjay (2013) describe that the influence and significance of online consumer reviews is different according to customers' product involvement. Customers engage in information search in a greater extent for high involvement products. This is because of the risk that comes with the purchase of high-involvement products, which are often expensive and therefore demands greater consideration. (Ibid) Five out of eight respondents only used online consumer reviews in the stage of information search. This is because it helped them to find additional product information and to make a buying decision.

One of these five respondents described that the interest to write reviews in the stage of post-purchase was increased if the company from which the product was bought would offer a reward. These rewards could for example be discounts on products on the company's website. Two out of eight respondents used reviews in two stages of the buying process; information search and post-purchase behavior. This was to find earlier customers product experiences and opinions and to write reviews after buying the product, to share their own experiences with other customers. One out of eight respondents did not use reviews at any stage in the buying process, instead social contacts was used as a source of product information.

6.3.2 Activities in the buying process

According to Sakkthivel (2010), the buying process tends to be longer in the purchase of high-cost, products such as cars, TV's and jewelry. In this case the customer is not willing to choose substitute brands because of the high risk in the purchase of expensive products. (Ibid) In general, the respondents buying process was described to be more complex when buying high-involvement products. Every step was more carefully executed because more time and effort was spent on preparatory work before making the buying decision. The buying process for high involvement products also included more activities than for low involvement products.

Respondent one's activities in the buying process consisted of reading reviews and searching for product information in organizational websites. Respondents two and four read reviews and then compared product alternatives in product characteristics and price. Respondent three,

who did not use reviews, turned to social contacts for product information. Respondents five, six and seven read reviews and compared products in price and brand on websites such as Price Runner. Respondent eight read reviews and compared alternatives according to earlier customers' opinions and price.

An example of a complex buying process for high involvement products was described by respondent eight; it began with the stage of **information search** when this respondent read online consumer reviews to determine product needs and to find important product functionalities that focus on customer needs. Respondent eight described that sometimes it was possible to **recognize a need** when reading reviews; it could for example be product functionalities. The buying process continued with a selection of products alternatives online. The most important factor here was that the product alternatives complied with as many of the technical requirements as possible. It was also important that the products were within the reasonable price limits. The process continued with an **evaluation of alternatives** according to product characteristics, price and brand. Consumer reviews served as a further help for respondent eight in choosing a product and finally make a **purchase** transaction.

According to Comegys, Hannula and Väisänen (2006), the Internet can be seen as an important implement when customers are going through the stages of the buying process. Customers' use of Internet during the buying process is greatest at the stage of the purchase decision. (Ibid) Data have shown that the two stages in the buying process when the respondents in general mostly use online consumer reviews are for information search and post-purchase behavior. Five out of eight respondents described that they used online consumer reviews in the stage of information search.

It is described in previous research (Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen, 2006), that customers in the stage of information search make an active search online in public sources for additional product information prior to purchase. After searching for product information, the next stage for respondents in general is to evaluate available product alternatives. (Ibid) Two out of eight respondents described that they used online consumer reviews in information search to find product information and also in post-purchase to write reviews of their own. Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen (2006) describe that the post-purchase behavior refers to if the customer is willing to buy the same product more than once, depending on if the product met the expectations the first time. Post-purchase behavior also refers to if the customer is willing to leave product reviews online. (Ibid)

Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen (2006) describe that the stage of problem recognition occurs online because of internal or external stimuli or because of a found solution to a problem. Respondents in general did not describe if their need recognition occurred online or before, but respondent eight described that during the information search online it was possible recognize a need when reading reviews. According to Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen (2006), the stage of purchase decision refers to when the customer decides for whether to purchase while online. Data have shown that respondents in general complemented product information

in online consume reviews by asking social contacts for product opinions, before making a buying decision.

6.4 RQ4

How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

6.4.1 Online consumer reviews in the buying process

Previous research (Sakkthivel, 2010) describes that the length of the buying process is reduced in the purchase of low-cost products such as groceries or cinema tickets. In this case customers are flexible and willing to change to substitute brands if the purchase is a disappointment. Because of products low cost there is a low risk of making the wrong decision. (Ibid) For six out of eight respondents, the buying process for low-involvement products was not as complex as it is for high-involvement products. This was because they did not spend as much time and effort in gathering information for low involvement products.

Out of these six respondents, two preferred to ask social contacts for information, two evaluated products according to product popularity, one evaluated products according to price and quality and one made the buying decision according to earlier experiences. Data supports previous research (Han, Lee & Park, 2007) and the ELM model, as the respondents were not motivated to search and process meaningful product information for low-involvement products. Instead they focused on peripheral cues such as product popularity and amount of consumer reviews. (Ibid) Data have shown differences to previous research (Han, Lee & Park, 2007) as respondent six and eight were willing to put more time and effort to find information for low involvement products by reading online consume reviews.

6.4.2 Activities in the buying process

Data support previous research (Khare and Rakesh, 2011) which describes that low-involvement products are bought out of habit and do not require much planning ahead. Because of respondents low motivation of searching for information, low involvement products does not require the same effort to gather information as for high-involvement products. (Ibid) Six out of eight respondents did not read reviews for low involvement products. For respondent one and four it was product popularity that was the major determination factor for buying products. Respondent one and four thought that a high degree of product popularity was a signal for high product quality. A high degree of product popularity was the entire information respondent one and four needed to make a buying decision.

The buying process of respondents two and three consisted of asking social contacts for product information. Respondent five made the buying decision according to earlier experiences. Respondent seven chose a couple of product alternatives and evaluated them according to price and quality. Respondent six and eight always read reviews for low involvement products and had a similar buying process as for high involvement products. Respondent six and eight read reviews in the stage of information search to find valuable

product experiences from other customers. They also wrote reviews of their own in the stage of post-purchase.

Six out of eight respondents had a rather simple buying process for low involvement products because they were not motivated to spend a lot of time on searching for product information. These respondents buying process began with need **recognition** of low involvement products. In the **information search** stage these six respondents made their buying decision according to information from social contacts, product popularity, earlier experience or product price and quality. In the **evaluation of alternatives** stage the respondents in general were positively influenced if many of their contacts had positive experiences and recommendations of the product.

For respondent one and four, it was enough to know that a product had a high degree of popularity in order to **purchase** it. Respondent two and three made their purchase decision according to product information from social contacts. Respondent five made the purchase decision according to earlier experience. Respondent seven wanted to buy products to low prices and high quality. In the stage of **post-purchase** behavior, these six respondents were not motivated to leave any online consumer reviews on their own. This is because online reviews were not used as a source of information. The respondents in general did not want to spend time writing about low involvement products which did not have a high importance for them.

Data have shown differences to previous research (Comegys, Hannula & Väisänen, 2006) and the description of the buying process, as respondents in general did not use Internet and online consumer reviews as an information source for low involvement products. Only two out of eight respondents used Internet as an information source for low involvement products and had a similar buying process as for high involvement products. These two respondents mostly used Internet in the stage of information search and post purchase in their buying process. This was to find product information from earlier customers and to write online consumer reviews of their own after buying products.

7. Findings and Conclusions

This chapter presents findings and conclusions related to each research question. The chapter also presents ideas for further research within the subject of online consumer reviews.

How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

Data suggests that online consumer reviews are important as an information source for highly involved customers. Online consumer reviews helps customers to evaluate product alternatives and make a buying decision, because it provides them with earlier customers product experiences. Customers are motivated to search for additional product information because of the increased risk and increased costs of buying high involvement products. Customers perceive online consumer reviews as a more credible information source than organizational information and traditional media channels. Online consumer reviews can influence consumers' buying behavior positively if there is a large amount of positive reviews. Popular products and brands strongly influence customers to buy products.

Negative reviews has a significant impact on consumer buying behavior when it comes to major buying decisions for high involvement products. It creates hesitation in the buying decision if only a few negative reviews occur among a large amount of positive reviews. Highly involved customers search for reviews of high quality which they consider to be most efficient in providing them with accurate product information. Even though customers use online consumer reviews in a large extent to find product information, customers need to complement this with information from social contacts. This is because social contacts are even more influencing on consumer buying behavior than online consumer reviews.

Thesis Conclusions

- Customers put more effort and time in searching for product information for high involvement products.
- Customers perceive online consumer reviews to be useful when searching for product information.
- Review quality is considered to be the most important and influencing factor when customers evaluate reviews.
- Information in reviews needs to be supplemented by product information from social contacts.
- Because of the risk of untruthful reviews, credibility is one of the major factors for evaluating reviews.

How can online consumer reviews influence on consumer buying behavior when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

As it is stated by six out of eight respondents, online consumer reviews are not used as an information source for low involvement products. Instead, the source of product information is customers' social contacts that have product experience. Product information from social contacts is considered to be more credible than online consumer reviews. Low involvement customers are not motivated to spend time and effort in searching for product information in other sources than traditional word-of-mouth. This is because low involvement products are in-expensive and bought out of habit to a low risk in costs. Product and brand popularity has a strong influence on consumer buying behavior. A high degree of product popularity can be enough to influence customers to buy the product. It is the quantity of product information from social contacts that signals product popularity.

Thesis Conclusions

- Customers are not motivated to spend any time or effort in searching for product information in online consumer reviews for low involvement products.
- Product information in online consumer reviews is not considered to be useful. Instead customers rely on product information from social contacts and level of product popularity.
- It is the quantity of product information from social contacts that is the most important influencing factor of the buying decision.
- Product information that comes from social contacts is more credible than information that comes from online consumer reviews.

How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing high involvement products, be described?

Based on the literature, customers tend to use Internet as a source of product information mostly within the stage of the purchase decision, in the consumer buying process. The data suggests that Internet and online consumer reviews is used as an information source mostly within the stages of information search and post-purchase behavior. It is stated by the respondents that product information in online consumer reviews is supplemented with product information from social contacts. The buying decision is made outside of the Internet, after customers have received information from social contacts.

Thesis Conslusions

- The consumer buying process tends to be longer and more complex for high involvement products.
- Online consumer reviews are mostly used for information search and post-purchase behavior in the consumer buying process.

How can customers' use of online consumer reviews during the different steps of the buying process, when purchasing low involvement products, be described?

Data have shown that customers' use traditional word-of-mouth, which means information from social contacts, to find information for low-involvement products. Customers do not use online consumer reviews as an information source in the consumer buying process. It has to do with customers' low motivation of searching for additional product information for low involvement products. Product information from social contacts is considered to be more convenient, time-saving and reliable than other sources.

Thesis Conclusions

- The length and complexity of the consumer buying process is reduced for customers when buying low involvement products.
- Customers rely on product information from social contacts, in the information search stage of the consumer buying process.

Suggestions for companies

Companies should provide customers with the opportunity of exchanging product opinions in organizational websites. Giving customers the opportunity to share product information in online brand communities have been found to result in several positive outcomes for companies, such as possibilities of increased sale. Organizational product information alone is not perceived by customers to have enough credibility to base a buying decision on. Online consumer reviews are considered to be more credible than organizational product information and traditional media sources. If companies provide customers with online consumer reviews in organizational websites, it is possible for companies to manage the information flow in reviews and learn about their customers buying behavior. Customers use of eWOM to find product information is increasing and if companies are not providing customers with the opportunity to share product information, other websites will.

High involvement customers are willing to read online consumer reviews in the stage of information search and to some extent in the stage of post-purchase in the consumer buying process. A method of motivating customers in writing online consumer reviews in the post-purchase stage is to offer rewards, such as discounts. High involvement customers value reviews of high quality. It can be wise to include these kinds of reviews in organizational websites for high involvement products rather than a large quantity of reviews. It is not possible to reach low involvement customers through online brand communities, because these customers do not use Internet information sources. Low involvement customers rely on traditional WOM and choose products according to popularity.

7.1 Further Research

Suggestions for further research are to perform the same study of how online consumer reviews influence buying behavior in the buying process, but with a different method approach. This could for example be done with a quantitative study to see if this study's

results are able to be generalized. It is also possible to look at other kinds of sources than online consumer reviews which can also complement organizational product information for customers. The thesis data included a factor of online consume reviews which could need further analysis; it is possible to look further into how negative and positive eWOM influence consumer buying behavior.

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Appendix

Interview questions

Customer perception of online consumer reviews

- When you are considering to buying a product, how do you use online consumer reviews in your decision making?
- When you are considering buying a product, how do you perceive online consumer reviews as helpful in your decision making?
- When you are considering buying a product, how can reviews make you feel confident in your decision making?
- If you choose to not read online consumer reviews when considering buying a product, can you feel unsure and concerned that you made the right decision afterwards?

Quality of online consumer reviews

- Do you think the reviewers have adequate reasons to support their product opinion?
- Do you perceive every online consumer review as objective?
- What makes an online consumer review clear and easily understandable?
- How do you determine if an online consumer review is credible?
- What are the characteristics of an online consumer review of high quality?
- How important is review quality when it comes to high- and low involvement products?

Quantity of online consumer reviews

- How are you influenced in your buying behavior if there is a large amount of available reviews to read about the product you are interested in?
- How are you influenced in your decision making if there is a large quantity of review information for the product you are interested in?
- How important is the quantity of reviews when it comes to high- and low involvement products?

The influence of positive and negative reviews

- How is your buying behavior influenced of reviews which positively evaluate the product?
- How is your buying behavior influenced by reviews which recommend the product?
- How is your buying behavior influenced of reviews which negatively evaluate the product?

The influence of product popularity

- How are you influenced in your buying decision if it is a popular product?
- What difference is it in how you are influenced by product popularity depending on if it is a low-involvement or high-involvement product?

Information usefulness of online consumer reviews

- How do you perceived the product information in online consumer reviews to be useful in your decision making?
- How can the product information in online consumer reviews help you understand and learn about the product?

The company's/sellers product information

- Do you think the product information presented on the company's website is objective?
- Do you think the product information presented on the company's website is clear and easy to understand?
- How do you determine if the product information presented on the company's website is credible?

Use of online consumer reviews during the buying process

- When you are browsing online consumer reviews online, have you discovered products and/or services that you are interested in?
- How do you search for online consumer reviews of products you are interested in?
- How you use online consumer reviews to evaluate available product alternatives according to price, product characteristics and brand?
- Do you make your final buying decision online after reading online consumer reviews?
- Do you post your own opinions and experiences online after evaluating a product?