THE EFFECT OF EWOM COMPONENTS ON BRAND ATTITUDE AND PURCHASE INTENTION

A CROSS COUNTRY STUDY BETWEEN GERMANY AND SWEDEN

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Acknowledgement

This thesis is the last theoretical part to complete our studies. For Tabea this means the end of a European Double Degree in International Management at the University of Applied Sciences in Augsburg, Germany and Luleå University of Technology, Sweden. For Björn this thesis means the completion of the study program International Business Administration at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden. The research was conducted during the spring term of 2017, and the study provided deeper insight into the field of eWOM in the context of international marketing. This project has been challenging but has further enhanced our knowledge in business, academia and improved our personal skills.

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We are proud to have finally finished our Bachelor thesis.

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Björn Nyström & Tabea Baur
Abstract

In today´s technical environment people are surrounded by information. The revolution of the Internet provides consumers with different channels where product information can be found and consumed. But what makes consumers pick specific products online? Firms need to be aware of what influences consumers to read a specific information and to what end this information alter their opinion towards the product and the brand. eWOM has been recognized as an important marketing communication tool and needs to be included in the firms marketing mix. Thus, this study took a closer look at five, previously established components of eWOM and investigated their effect on brand attitude and purchase intention.

To gain a deeper understanding of eWOM components´ influence on brand perception, decision-making process and eWOM management, a qualitative research approach was taken. A single case study was conducted towards two different samples from two cultures (i.e. Germany and Sweden) to gather data to explore the topic further. The findings show that the five selected components cannot be seen uniquely but are connected to each other and depend on factors surrounding the component such as source trustworthiness. Furthermore, findings suggest that the opinion towards and effect of components depend on the recipient´s culture. However, further research is needed to examine this phenomenon from different perspectives.

Keywords: Components of eWOM, Brand Attitude, Purchase Intention, Culture, Channels, Information Type, Length, Valence, Inorganic eWOM, Perception
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1. Introduction

The following chapter grants an insight into the current stage of DSMM marketing and further into electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as an area of research. Moreover, a problem discussion follows which ties into the purpose of this thesis and the research questions. Finally, an overview of the entire thesis is illustrated.

1.1 Background

Due to technological revolutions, such as the internet, consumers can instantly and with ease communicate with one another (Yu, Roy, Quazi, Nguyen, & Han, 2017) at a low to no cost (Kucukemiroglu & Kara, 2015). Traditional means of marketing have lost their effectiveness as consumers’ trust in information has shifted from institutions to that shared by other users electronically (Shamhuyenhanzva, van Tonder, Roberts-Lombard, & Hemsworth, 2016). The Digital, Social Media and Mobile (DSMM) Marketing has evolved in conjunction with technologies and has now reached a point where it is no longer seen as a tool, but rather a transformative concept where consumers and marketers are shaped by the changes in technology (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).

The introduction of Web 2.0 technologies, and increasing practice of user-generated content (UGC), made the creation of electronic consumer networks/groups, build solely on trust and social ties, a possibility. Consumers then use these groups to share recommendations (eWOM) and act upon the information shared by others. (Amblee & Bui, 2011) The digital, social media and mobile (DSMM) evolution alongside the technological development (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016) has brought with it several media outlets such as blogs, discussion forums and instant messaging platforms that consumers now use to share their opinion regarding products, services, and brands (Yu et al., 2017).

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) as a subfield of DSMM (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016) is the sharing of information in terms of experiences made by individuals (Steffes & Burgee, 2009) that has been proven to be a powerful and effectual marketing tool (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarot, 2012). It does not only influence the attitudes of consumers, but also their beliefs and behaviour patterns (Abrantes, Seabra, & Lages, 2013). Today, consumers discuss all manner of products, services, experiences etc. in online settings where the concept of WOM has been termed
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‘electronic Word-of-Mouth’ or eWOM for short (Abrantes et al., 2013). “Any positive or negative statement made by […] (an individual) […] which is available to a multitude of people and institutions via internet” is regarded as eWOM (Henning-Thurau & Walsh, 2004, p. 39. Referred in Abrantes et al., 2013 p.1068).

The DSMM platforms have created bridges between consumers and producers where information and ideas can flow freely in all directions. Consumers thoroughly examine products presented to them and use the open line of communication to take part in business operations and in such co-create the value of the brand. (Kao, Yang, Wu, & Cheng, 2016) According to Kucukemiroglu and Kara (2015), more than a third of individuals online appreciate product reviews, post opinions frequently, and aid in the creation of user generated content. Customers then search for and rely on these online product reviews (eWOM recommendations), distributed by their peers, (Kucukemiroglu & Kara, 2015) before and during the decision-making process (Kim, Naylor, Sivadas, & Sugumaran, 2015).

Consumers are influenced by the information they consume, means that eWOM can alter the consumer behaviour in everything from the products they purchase to the activities they perform (Chen & Berger, 2016). But the eWOM also affect firms, just as Kao et al. (2016) argue “[…] listening to consumer ideas concerning the brand and listening to consumers’ exchange ideas one another had consistently delivered unexpected insights, from which various proposals could be developed” (p.147). eWOM is in such believed to replace traditional media as the preferred tool for influencing and interacting with customers (Yu et al., 2017). To capitalize on the influencing factor of eWOM, firms increase their emphasis on promoting and managing eWOM in their communication strategy mix (Kim et al., 2015).

A way of managing eWOM and its outcome was observed in the study by Xie, Zhang, Zhang, Singh and Lee (2015) who look at hotels’ performances based on their managerial responses to online written reviews. Xie et al. state that a “managerial response is highly effective in manipulating review behaviour of subsequent consumers” (p.2028) and that hotels who manage eWOM through managerial responses see an overall higher user review rating and volume than those who does not. Another example of eWOM management through the manipulation of the recommendations by providing incentives for the communicator and in such promoting inorganic eWOM (Kim et al., 2015). Kim et al. (2015) list several approaches to incentivized eWOM, such as monetary payments, providing the products free of charge or offering some sort of social currency. Kim et al. show in their study that a communicator’s attitude can be
changed to generate biased recommendations (by providing some sort of incentive) and that subsequent recommendations then draw upon these previous (inorganic) recommendation and state that proactive marketing strategies such as incentivized eWOM are in such common practice.

However, due to different consumer characteristics and cultural aspects, marketers cannot expect the responses to promotional activity to be homogenous across several markets (Tercia & Teichert, 2016). The social environment of today is modified due to the revolution of technology which offers new ways to communicate interactively and connect individuals across the globe (Gvili & Levy, 2016; Hodeghatta & Sahney, 2016). This influences for instance, information seeking, trustworthiness and decision-making of people (Tercia & Teichert, 2016). For example, cultural differences were observed in a study looking at the usage of Twitter. Where it was found that Twitter as a platform is used across the entire world for conversing about products, but the social media behaviour differs widely between countries and cultures. (Hodeghatta & Sahney, 2016)

The influence eWOM has on consumers has made the question of how to control this user-generated-content (UGC) a vital part of firms’ digital media strategy (Kim et al., 2015). The change in the marketing environment is encapsulated by Berthon, Pitt, Plangger and Shapiro (2012) that state “marketers used to seek people to consume their product; now they seek people to produce the value they seek to leverage” (p. 269). Just as Lamberton and Stephen (2016) suggest that a further area of research in the DSMM field is what key elements make up a successful social media strategy.


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1.2 Problem Discussion

Globalization has had a tremendous impact on business and changed the way marketing is conducted (Krueger & Nandan, 2008). This exposure to a global marketplace means that the number of companies competing for the same customers is increasing (Hillenbrand, Alcauter, Cervantes, & Barrios, 2013) while, at the same time, the influence of companies is no longer limited to just domestic and regional markets (Krueger & Nandan, 2008). Given the fierce competition for the consumers’ attention, the ability to retain and attract customers is seen as a strategic weapon (Yu et al., 2017).

Looking at how consumers process information online, studies show that information overload, i.e. situations where the cost of processing information is perceived to be higher than the value of the information, is a normally occurring phenomenon (Furner, Zinko, & Zhu, 2016). Consumers, in such, act contradictory to classical economics models and stop their information search before becoming ‘perfectly informed’. In cases where the consumer lacks the knowledge to properly evaluate the product, the consumer relies instead on the brand itself for the product to do its stated function. The decisions-making process is in such heavily influenced by eWOM, as the consumer is willing to substitute information with their perception of the brand. (Amblee & Bui, 2011) The power of the brand has in such been shifted from the marketing strategists to the now, by social media and networks, empowered customers (Berthon et al., 2012).

The question that then arises, is how firms should manage this user generated content, as it has taken such a pivotal role in the marketing environment (Kim et al., 2015). Previous research on eWOM show that several key features (i.e. components) of consumer recommendations exist such as “length, comprehensiveness, valence, argument quality, content equivocality, relevance and style of these reviews” (Lin & Xu, 2017, p.363).

Further studies looking at the managerial approach of inorganic eWOM find that it could further expand the penetration and credibility of the brand (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015). This aligns with the study of Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) which show that companies can (positively) influence brand attitude and thus purchase intention by leveraging user-generated recommendations on social networking sites. But Pongjit and Beise-Zee (2015) go on to state that a recommendation does not necessarily cause a positive impact on the brand perception, especially if further information search is needed or if the consumer already experienced the recommended product or service. The long-term effect of inorganic eWOM can be negative for a brand by harming the image and the trustworthiness (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015).
But there is also a limit to what can be managed, as argued by Furner et al. (2016) consumer behaviour is outside of the domains for the firms to change and should instead be catered to (Wang, Sun, & Peng, 2013). For instance, Gvili and Levy (2016) show the importance of selecting the right distribution channel, as “attitude toward eWOM communication significantly differs across various digital media channels” (p.1040). Further meta-analysis looking at the correlation between eWOM ‘volume and valence’ to sales, show that the outcome whether valence or volume play a more vital role within eWOM highly depend on the type of platform, type of product, and metric used in the study (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Furthermore, sales of novel, tangible goods, have the highest positive impact from eWOM. Studies are in such contradicting one another which provide useful insight for managers. At the same time, it highlights the need for further research that looks specifically at what makes up successful marketing strategies. (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016)

Presenting a problem for marketers, it is the adaptation of marketing towards different cultures (Tercia & Teichert, 2016; Epuran & Tescasiu, 2015). These differences occur because everyone has a specific pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting which is learned throughout one’s lifetime and is described by Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) as a mental program or software of a person. People belonging to one culture are programmed the same way what distinguishes them from other members of a group or category (Hofstede, et al., 2010). The Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) illustrates one of the most important differences for the context of this study and relates to how ambiguous, unknown situations and the resulted anxiety is handled in cultures (Hofstede, et al., 2010). Consumers in countries that score high on the uncertainty-avoidance index (UAI) seek marketing information from trusted personal sources and gain as much information as possible to feel fairly treated. A low UAI score implies a more spontaneous decision-making where other opinions are less relevant. (Tercia & Teichert, 2016)

This problem is present even between countries with a high level of economic integration, such as within the European Union, marketing must be adapted on some aspects (Epuran & Tescasiu, 2015), due to the cultural differences between the countries (Tercia & Teichert, 2016; Epuran & Tescasiu, 2015). Two such countries which are geographically close to each other yet show a large difference in the UAI are Sweden and Germany. Germany scores with 65 (out of 100) high on this dimension which means that Germans like to control the future (The Hofstede Centre, 2017). Germans prefer deductive approaches and a systematic overview is needed to proceed. However, Sweden scores only 29 (out of 100) and has therefore a more relaxed, flexible, and tolerant approach. (The Hofstede Centre, 2017)
Thus, given the number of contradicting managerial approaches and the cultural differences, it is therefore interesting to examine what components of eWOM are perceived differently to see if consumers are influenced differently by the components of eWOM. Furner et al. (2016) discuss the existance of fake reviews and argue that consumers are usually aware of these. This study does not consider fake reviews but focuses on the ‘real’ UGC.

1.3 Overall Purpose

The purpose of this thesis, based on the problem discussion, is to provide insight into how components of eWOM affect consumer’s brand attitude and purchase intention. To answer this overall purpose the study relies on the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do components of eWOM affect brand attitude?

**RQ2:** How do components of eWOM affect purchase intention?
1.4 **Overview of Entire Thesis**

This thesis will be built upon six chapters, as seen in the Figure 1-1 below. Starting with the introduction consisting of the background and the problem discussion, the research purpose and questions are defined, which leads into chapter two; literature review. In this chapter, current research in the field will be analysed and discussed to further build a framework for this study. Chapter three will be dedicated to Methodology; disclosing how the study was constructed and executed. The fourth chapter is dedicated to presenting the data, the fifth is for analysis and the sixth for discussing the findings and conclusions reached from the analysis.

![Figure 1-1: Thesis Overview](image-url)
2. Literature Review

This chapter presents further studies around the topic of electronic Word of Mouth. The chapter starts with looking at online shopping behaviour, decision-making process, current components of eWOM and generation Y. Finally, a conceptual framework is presented where the most important theories for this study are connected.

2.1 Electronic WOM

The invention of the Internet and the growth of social media changed traditional WOM by bringing it on an electronic level which transformed it into eWOM (Mishra & S M, 2016). This revolution of technology offers new ways to communicate interactively and connect individuals (Gvili & Levy, 2016). New channels are for example e-mail, online/discussion forums, blogs, wikis, recommendation sites, online comment boards, social networking sites, digital- virtual worlds, review sites, online e-retailers, and company’s own brand and product sites (Gvili & Levy, 2016; Mishra & S M, 2016). These digital channels make it possible to provide information in different forms such as text, picture, video, or animation (Mishra & S M, 2016).

A digital media strategy needs to be created which includes management of eWOM as a vital form of user generated content (Kim et al., 2015). The term eWOM refers to communicating and receiving information as well as advice on products and services within these media outlets (Abrantes et al., 2013) whereby communicator and recipient is separated in space and time (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Nowadays, eWOM is the most popular way to gather information about brands what can be used to impact product evaluations of consumers (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). This is supported by the fact that eWOM is not limited to geographical borders or time which facilitates the fast spread of eWOM (Mishra & S M, 2016) at low costs (Kucukemiroglu & Kara, 2015).

Due to the easy access and use of technology, people obtained a voice and are heard immediately. They express their opinions in a free and active manner worldwide and gain an impact on issues they are concerned about. (Kucukemiroglu & Kara, 2015) Consumers write about products, services, brands, or experiences and share it with further consumers (Kim et al., 2015). Online commercial sites, encourage user to generate reviews by provide special tools to easily complete this task (Lin & Xu, 2017). Consumers are in such not only able to seek
information, but are able to offer recommendations. Based on their consumption pattern this is possible via a variety of tools on a variety of social media. The described user-generated content reflects the active role customers have now in their purchase decisions. Online reviews help individuals in their decision-making process and increase sales at the same time. (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017) Around 50 percent of purchase decisions made in stores were impacted by these reviews (Lin & Xu, 2017). Hence, they act as “consumer-generated sales assistants” to facilitate consumers to find products suiting their needs and to forecast sales (Lin & Xu, 2017, p.362). In conclusion, these consumer reviews have become a significant tool of eWOM communication (Kucukemiroglu & Kara, 2015).

To understand how individual components of eWOM affect consumers, it is first paramount to understand the consumers and their behaviour.

2.2 Consumer Behaviour

Earlier research related to consumer behaviour, in terms of product selection decision, discussed the challenge (or optimization problem) consumers face with selecting a product that best suit their needs among a set number of alternatives. In a situation such as a product selection, consumers must solve the optimization problem even though they are uncertain as to each products ability to meet their needs. In such situations, the uncertainty reduction theory suggests that consumers actively, through information search, or passively, through observation, adapt strategies to minimize the uncertainty. (Furner et al., 2016)

When looking at how consumers act online, previous research suggest that the online shopping behaviour can be divided into two orientations; hedonic and utilitarian shopping (Bilgihan & Bujisicb, 2015). Hedonic shopping occurs when consumers entertain themselves while surfing the web looking at funny videos, quotes etc. Shopping is done for the experience itself rather than for a specific purpose and websites have been adapted to this by making the experience easy, fast paced, and fun. Utilitarian shopping, in contrast, is when consumers have specific goals with their online shopping and in such aim to find specific and reliable information from the seller to buy the specific product at a low price. (Bilgihan & Bujisicb, 2015; Radionova & Praude, 2016) How the consumer reacts to the offered product depends on how the website fulfils the utilitarian or hedonic needs (Radionova & Praude, 2016).
2.2.1 eWOM as a Decision Aid

The fact that eWOM affects most consumers while making a purchase decision has already been established (Mishra & S M, 2016) where decision aid refers to how eWOM is used by consumers to support their decision-making (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Table 2-1 provides an insight into the various stages of the Purchase Decision Process and how eWOM impact the customer at these points.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Example of eWOM Touch Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem/Need Recognition</td>
<td>External stimuli-ads on websites, personalization, and recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Search</td>
<td>Search engines, social media, product websites, e-retailers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of Alternatives</td>
<td>Websites with compare options, social media for feedback, online review, and rating websites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Decision</td>
<td>Channels (e-commerce websites), discussion and feedback on social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-purchase Behaviour</td>
<td>Review sites, social media, online ratings and reviews, feedback on social media or product sites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The usage of eWOM depends on both the product’s and the consumers’ characteristics (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). The individual’s motivation and ability to process information dictate how likely they are to engage in thoughtful and effortful processing of arguments (Park & Lee, 2008). Park and Lee (2008) describe that if motivation or ability lack, the individual relies on methods such as looking at the number of arguments or other shortcuts to process the information. If individuals are highly involved, the argument strength is the primary influencing factor whereas the review quantity is shown to more greatly influence those of low involvement. Furthermore, the aim of the product plays a significant role; while positive reviews are convincing in terms of products with promotion consumption goals, negative reviews are more appreciated for products linked to prevention consumption goals. (Lin & Xu, 2017)
Mishra and S M (2016) discuss in their paper the Information Adoption Model which suggests that just as individuals “form intentions towards adopting a behaviour or a technology they similarly form intentions towards adopting particular advocated ideas and behaviours” (p.224). The Information Adoption Model aids in understanding how different messages have different effects on people and how their intentions towards eWOM are formed (Mishra & S M, 2016). As shown in Figure 2-1 the perceived usefulness of the information is based on both the argument quality and the source credibility.

![Information Adoption Model](source: Sussman and Siegal (2003). Adapted from Mishra and S M (2016, p.224))

However, as eWOM recommendations for a product can be based purely on self-selection biases, early adopters of a new product can through biased recommendations spark an early positive or negative trend. The effects of this trend however disappear quite fast. (Mishra & S M, 2016) There is in such an argument against using a newly introduced product for observing how the components of eWOM affect recipients of eWOM, as to avoid self-selection biases.

**2.2.2 eWOM and its Influence Consumer Behaviour**

According to Park and Lee (2008), eWOM recommendations can be classified into either simple-recommendations reviews or attribute-value reviews, based on the information type. The *simple-recommendations review* consists of primarily normative, subjective, and emotional ideas that lack ground for argumentation, while the *attribute-value review* provides the recipient with specific and factual information about the product. Generally, a high volume
of attribute-value reviews means that there are many arguments for the product whereas simple-recommendations reviews provide a large number of different opinions and biases. However, as the number of reviews for a product goes up the perceived informativeness of a single review goes down. (Park & Lee, 2008)

Consumers oftentimes determine their behaviour based on the expectations of others, just as they are easily influenced by the opinion of those close to them. As consumers find the need to justify purchases amongst each other they are often led to pick the choice of the popular opinion, i.e. the choice most sought after by the many. (Park & Lee, 2008) Park and Lee (2008) discuss previous research that identified two main types of processes that influence consumer behaviour; information influence and normative influence. Normative is where the consumer conforms to the expectation of another individual or group whereas the informational influence occurs when an individual accepts information from others as true or facts that reflects reality. (Park & Lee, 2008)

This way of conforming to normative information can be observed when consumers look at overall positive reviews. This can lead the consumers to believe the product to be desirable without reading the reviews themselves, but rather due to conforming to the masses of consumer that bought the product before. (Park & Lee, 2008) In contrast, when the reviews are all negative, the consumer is willing to reject the product as “disagreeing with others is likely to cause psychological discomfort” (Park & Lee, 2008, p.387). Products with many reviews are perceived as popular due to the considerable number of individuals who previously bought it, and this is in turn used by consumers to rationalize their own purchase intention (Park & Lee, 2008).

2.3 Electronic Word-Of-Mouth Components

The following section uses previous literature to provide an insight into the several components making up eWOM recommendations, both from a communicator and recipients perspective.

2.3.1 Channels

With the onset of Web 2.0, new concepts such as creative consumers have meant that most of the value-added content on social media is now user-generated (Berthon et al., 2012). According to Berthon et al. (2012), the importance of distinguishing between the platform and
the communicator, is often overlooked, as the two are in many cases seen as interchanged. As stated by Lamberton and Stephen (2016) “we are rapidly entering a “post digital” world… where digital marketing is just marketing, simply because almost all marketing activities … have some kind of digital aspect” (p.168).

The described digital environment offers channels based on a variety of technologies (Gvili & Levy, 2016). As this study considers channels as one of the components of eWOM which may influence brand attitude and purchase intention, it is important to get a deeper understanding of differences across these eWOM channels. Different channels of eWOM show different capabilities, characteristics, and application (Gvili & Levy, 2016). Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) categorize social media into three categories based on purpose; network-oriented, collaboration-based and entertainment-based social media. The network-oriented purpose includes communication with acquaintances through websites such as Facebook and YouTube. Collaboration-based social media focuses on exchange of non-personal information through blogs, wikis, forums etc. and entertainment-based social media such as games and contests that often imply a diversion for the consumer. (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017) Kudeshia and Kumar (2017) further argue that given the distinct characteristics and audiences of each social media platform, the way firms interact and engage their audiences differs widely.

Channels of eWOM can be categorized into four different classes. First, specialized eWOM describes customer reviews provided on comparison-shopping or rating websites but which do not engage in product selling. Second, affiliated eWOM relates to customer reviews associated with retail websites such as Amazon or eBay. Third, social eWOM refers to brand/product information exchanged on SNSs. Finally, miscellaneous eWOM refers to brand/product information exchanged on further online social media platforms (e.g. blogs and discussion boards). (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017)

However, little knowledge exists about differences across these channels in their role as eWOM facilitators. Some channels are characterized as immediate and intimate such as chats or text messages whereas another approach is the sharing and distribution of information among user groups (e.g. social networking sites and online communities). Another factor is the source of the communicator which can be recognized or can be anonymous. This facilitates or makes it more complicated for the recipient to judge the credibility of the message. Thus, it is suggested that a differentiation exists in the delivery of the message across different communication channels. This can result in different attitudes towards digital eWOM channels, where attitude
Literature Review

is defined as a psychological tendency which is shown through evaluations of specific entities. (Gvili & Levy, 2016)

One way to examine the attitude towards different eWOM channels is to use “five perceptual antecedents of attitude toward traditional as well as digital advertising” which are informativeness, entertainment, irritation, value, and credibility (Gvili & Levy, 2016, p.1032). Informativeness describes the degree of informational content in the message. Entertainment refers to the fulfilment of the audience’s needs for escapism, diversion, aesthetic enjoyment, or emotional release. Both, informativeness and entertainment are two distinct elements of eWOM and describe online consumer behaviour. The next antecedent – irritation – refers to characteristics such as annoying, offensive, insulting, or the perceived level of over-manipulation of the message. The evaluation of this received message is conducted by each recipient individually which reflects the relative worth or utility and describes the value of the message. Finally, the credibility of the WOM message relates to the extent of the recommendation or review to be perceived as believable, true, or factual. This credibility acts as a mediator and as well as an antecedent of general attitude toward eWOM. (Gvili & Levy, 2016)

Figure 2-2 illustrates the described model applied by Gvili and Levy (2016).

---

Figure 2-2: Attitude toward eWOM Channels
Source: Adapted from Gvili and Levy (2016, p. 1034)
2.3.2 Inorganic eWOM

Because previous studies show that eWOM has the potential to influence recipient’s attitude and recipient’s behaviour, marketers encourage the promotion and management of eWOM in their strategy for their communication mix. Organizations became aware of the effect of eWOM what leads them to the use of proactive strategies such as inorganic eWOM which means that individuals are incentivized to provide eWOM for the firm. By developing inorganic (incentivized) eWOM companies try to gain an impact on the attitude and choice of people who read these recommendations or reviews. (Kim et al., 2015) In general, the effectiveness of incentivized WOM can be summarized with two factors. First, the probability of a recommendation rises and second, the probability of compliance by the recipient of the incentivized recommendation is ensured. (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015)

Any kind of reward, or incentive, provided to the communicator can be seen as inorganic WOM. Monetary (i.e. cash) or non-monetary rewards (e.g. free product samples or discounts) are two options that result in different customer responses. Monetary rewards are expected to lead to a more extrinsic motivation compared to non-monetary or symbolic rewards. The latter can help to decrease unfavourable consumer response in WOM. Monetary awards are immediately recognized as an incentive based on their preference neutrality and often perceived as more effective than non-monetary rewards. However, within social relationships non-monetary presents are more likely to be accepted on the right occasion than money. A violation of social rules and etiquette could harm a relationship. Therefore, incentivization can also lead to a negative impression of the brand because the incentivization strategy violates the norm. (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015)

Another strategy of inorganic eWOM is to also reward the recipient as well as the communicator, which refers to a reward both program. Both parties can be rewarded in an equal or unequal way. (Tercia & Teichert, 2016) Tercia and Teichert (2016) look at this from a cultural perspective and mention that Western consumers, characterized as highly independent and self-construal dislike unequal incentives due to their attitude based on ‘getting what I deserve’ and their sense of fairness.


2.3.3 Social Ties

Another component of eWOM which is shown to have an impact on word-of-mouth behaviour is social ties (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Looking at social networks a social structure can be observed where different relationships between people exist. These interpersonal ties connect the ‘social actors’ in social networks or on webpages, help them to exchange information, and show different levels in their strength. (Abrantes et al., 2013) Tie strength can be defined as how intense a social relationship is or as the level of overlap within a friendship (Steffes & Burgee, 2009).

The strength of these ties depends on several factors such as time, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal services forming the tie (Abrantes et al., 2013). Strong, primary ties, on the one hand, are relationships between family members, close friends, and colleagues (Abrantes et al., 2013; Steffes & Burgee, 2009). These ties are generated within specific groups and describe in-group communication (Abrantes et al., 2013). Weak ties, also referred as secondary ties, exist between people which have rarely contact (Abrantes et al., 2013; Steffes & Burgee, 2009). This kind of relationship links individuals of different groups and refers to out-of-group communication (Abrantes et al., 2013). The last form of ties are the ones with strangers and are named non-existing ties (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). However, both types of ties are promoted in eWOM context because the combination ensures a widespread information diffusion from a small group to a larger, cohesive social segment (Abrantes et al., 2013).

2.3.4 Source Trustworthiness and Expertise

In the context of eWOM reviews the source trustworthiness component is the primary determinant of the effects of online consumer reviews (Lin & Xu, 2017). This is due to the perception of user-generated eWOM which is described as more trustworthy and reliable compared to company-generated reviews (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015).

Communicators can be categorized into “regular consumers, human experts, and expert systems such as recommender systems” where the customer is likely to choose recommendations and ratings from unknown customers or experts as well as reviews of friends (Amblee & Bui, 2012, p.93). Source expertise refers to the perception that the source of the recommendation is an individual who has integrity, is familiar towards, and has previous knowledge about the topic.
the message is based on (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015). It helps a recommendation to be perceived as more believable and truthful (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015) because it is perceived as unbiased and accurate (Amblee & Bui, 2012). Amblee and Bui (2012) discuss that experts receive a specific degree of authority and can serve consumers with professional advice. Another benefit is that expertise helps the recommendation to be passed on and followed (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015).

The perceived credibility of the communicator strengthens the positive brand attitude of the recipient and influences the recipient’s purchase intentions (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015; Lin & Xu, 2017). It is proofed that the higher the credibility of online reviews is perceived by potential consumers, the stronger is the intention to purchase (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Therefore, source credibility is positively related to the credibility of the WOM review itself. For example, the providing of identifiable information of the communicator such as the name and place of residence, strengthened the perceived credibility of online hotel reviews. (Lin & Xu, 2017).

Individuals who are appreciated due to a high level of expertise or their knowledge are called ‘opinion leaders’ who obtain the message first. Their task is to decode or interpret the content for other consumers which depicts a critical situation because they have power to influence others. Thus, the opinions of individuals are formed and influenced by these influencers which describes the Multistep Flow Model. Marketers should use this concept to decide whom to target first to generate and spread a message. Moreover, opinion leaders writing online product reviews are influenced as well by other opinion leaders. (Mishra & S M, 2016)

2.3.5 Valence

Another component of eWOM is valence of the review which has an impact on the purchase decisions as well (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). The valence relates to the nature of the message/review which is positive, neutral, negative or mixed (Amblee & Bui, 2012). Although for some products negative reviews are more appreciated and seen as more accurate and informative than positive ones (Schindler & Bickart, 2012), on eWOM platforms, products with overwhelming positive reviews are more recommended to friends than products with primary negative reviews (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Lin and Xu (2017) discuss that while negative objective reviews are “most useful for purchase-decision making, both an objective and subjective positive review significantly increase product-related attitude and purchase intention” (p.364). Positive eWOM not only strengthens the connection between the
consumer’s trust on an emotional level and the purchase intention but improves consumers’ perceived integrity (Lin & Xu, 2017). According to Amblee and Bui (2012), this results in favourable brand attitude, whereas if consumers gain negative experiences and switch brand, their friends will be discouraged from buying the product.

As discussed by Mishra and S M (2016), the brand equity plays a moderating role in the effectiveness of eWOM. It is shown that both positive and negative eWOM have a stronger effect on weak brands than on strong brands. The established brands are in such more resilient against the negative effects of eWOM. Positive eWOM can further be used to support the development of a weak brand to a strong one. (Mishra & S M, 2016) However, given the appeal of two-sided advertising, an excessive amount of only positive reviews should be avoided (Schindler & Bickart, 2012). A deeper insight into the relationship between positive eWOM, brand attitude and purchase intention, ensures the model shown in Figure 2-3 applied by the study of Kudeshia and Kumar (2017).

**Figure 2-3: Relationship Model - Positive eWOM, Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention.**  
*Source: Adapted from Kudeshia and Kumar (2017, p.315)*

**Positive eWOM and Brand Attitude**
In this model *brand attitude* is defined as “consumer’s overall evaluation of a brand” (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017, p. 315) and is the most significant predictor of consumer behaviour regarding products and services. eWOM is the most popular way to gather information about brands and can be used for influencing product evaluations of consumers. A positive brand attitude based on its evaluation does not only lead to continuous brand preference of the consumer but has also a positive impact on the intention to purchase. (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017)
Positive eWOM and Purchase Intention

The *purchase intention* is defined as the implied promise to purchase the product when the chance is available. The use of intention to purchase is reasoned by online reviews which provide information and recommendations and make a significant impact on purchase intention and actual buy. (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017)

Brand attitude and Purchase Intention

The connection between *brand attitude and purchase intention* is reasoned by the fact that a customer’s brand attitude has an important impact on its intention to purchase, because brand attitude is the most important key driver of purchase intention. Furthermore, the attitude toward the performance of the behaviour is one of the important predictors of intention to purchase. (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017)

2.3.6 Communication Style

The communication style component of eWOM is limited by the number of available cues to express its style. Therefore, the specific wording choices of the communicator form the style which have a strong impact on the impression generated by an online message. (Schindler & Bickart, 2012) Schindler and Bickart (2012) characterize the review’s style according to the specific wording choices made within single statements of the review. Schindler and Bickart state that some stylistic wording choices illustrate *low statement strength or impact* such as “misspellings, bad grammar, the use of inexpressive slang, the use of qualifications, and repetition” (p.236) and that these wording lower the value of the review as they make it difficult to understand the content and lessen perceived competence of the communicator.

Conversely, some may depict *high strength or impact of the statement* such as first-person pronouns and emotion words. These first-person pronouns combined with personal information formulated in a self-effacing way could help the recipient to perceive the review as more authentic and to feel an increased confidence about the provided information. Emotion words, on the other hand, contribute to a delivery of excitement and enthusiasm or in contrast dissatisfaction about a product which facilitates the decision-making of the recipient. The use of expressive slang and humour may create an informal tone that could help the recipient to establish a connection with the communicator. (Schindler & Bickart, 2012)
2.3.7 Length

The last component of this study is the length of the user-generated review. Schindler and Bickart (2012) look at the content of a review by dividing it into component statements which are word groups presenting a unique thought. The characterization of the review was then based on the number (i.e. the length) and types (i.e. positive or negative in valence and description of the product or communicator) of these statements. Previous literature states that longer reviews receive higher helpfulness ratings. However, regarding WOM messages, a review can be too long. Based on the maxim of quantity, a main rule in conversations is that the speaker delivers only information necessary to make a point to avoid confusion. (Schindler & Bickart, 2012)

With the onset of the information age consumers are exposed to information rich environments with an abundancy of inputs from several sources (Furner et al., 2016). This abundancy of information overwhels the consumer and causes adverse purchase decision-making (Park & Lee, 2008). Products that are popular receive a larger number of reviews and in such impose a larger burden on future customers (Park & Lee, 2008). Information overload being exposed to information that exceeds one's processing ability have been shown to make consumers low quality decision with low confidence, however if receiving too little information the consumer may feel as though they do not have enough information (Furner et al., 2016). The cost of processing additional information is seen as higher than the value created from the information (Furner et al., 2016).

Consumers can also be influenced by reviews presenting many arguments either for or against the product simply by seeing the number of arguments. An individual that lacks the resources or ability to process a review and has the attitude of ‘more is better’ accepts, in accordance with the Cognitive Fit Theory, the message without evaluating those arguments. The individual is in such relying upon the peripheral route of processing the information. If individuals are highly motivated and have ability to process the information, they make a cognitive effort to process the information, i.e. using the central route. (Mishra & S M, 2016)

To process vast quantities of information, consumers adapt skimming methods or other strategies to catch general ideas of randomly encountered reviews. As consumer are aware of the skimming strategies they are resorting to, they are more concerned about information they might miss and in such become less confident about the purchase. In line with previous studies, the effectiveness of the consumers suffers when exposed to an overwhelming amount of information. (Park & Lee, 2008) Park and Lee (2008) argue that even though the reviews are
all positive, consumers want to moderate the quantity and might even blame the seller for the confusion caused by the information overload. Previous studies state that information overload occurs when the information is complex, uncertain or novel and that the “factors of information such as information formats or types” (Park & Lee, 2008, p.388) impacts the overload.

Consumers looking to purchase a product would, in accordance with the uncertainty reduction theory, seek to reduce the uncertainty by amassing more information. However, previous research in information overload shows that after a certain point of providing more information, the decrease in effectiveness due to overload outweighs the increased decision effectiveness. Previous research confirms this diminishing relationship between information provided and decision quality. (Furner et al., 2016) Furner et al., (2016) argue that even though some studies have either “demonstrated a linear relationship between size of review and consumer outcome” (p.792) recent studies have supported the findings of the diminishing relationship.

2.4 Generation Y

The literature defines Generation Y, Gen Y or Millennials as individuals typically born between the 1980 and early 1990s (Aruna & Santhi, 2015), although some articles include people born in the early 2000 (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016) while others state Gen Y as those born after 1981 (Zhang, Omran, & Cobanoglu, 2017). For this paper, individuals born between 1980-2000 are referred to as the Gen Y segment. The generational cohort of Gen Y is unique in that it is the first generation raised in the environment of computers (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016). They describe themselves as wasteful and impatient but are often seen as caring and openminded about different lifestyles. The segment follows technology and media very closely and are due to exposure of consumption and brands (since adolescence) likely to dislike aggressive selling and find companies manipulative. (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016)

Gen Y individuals are generally defined by behavioural patterns such as materialistic desires, attachment to possession, brand-oriented and high-risk attitude (Aruna & Santhi, 2015; Solka, Jackson, & Lee, 2011). They are eager to pay a surplus for brands that are perceived to offer higher quality, but at the same time are willing to switch out the brand without valuing the durability (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016). The Gen Y segment is introspectively and self-expressively motivated, and while generally being hedonistic have a different shipping behaviour than previous generations (Aruna & Santhi, 2015; Solka et al., 2011). They are concerned with the brand image of the products they purchase, are interested in up-scale brands
and seek to use the brands to define themselves and exemplify their personal image (Solka et al., 2011). As Aruna and Santhi (2015) state “… they are interested in their personal lives, the parties they go to and the clothes they wear” (p.23).

Gen Y individuals are more likely to provide feedback on the products they use and previous research shows that Gen Y members in the US are more than twice as likely as any other generational cohort to be influenced by other suggestions in decision-making. As the future usage of social media and sharing of information will be shaped by this generation, studying Gen Y could in such provide insight into how consumers will behave in the future. (Zhang et al., 2017) This highly heterogenous group now represents the largest consumer segment in developed countries, but only limited knowledge about this segment is available. (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016; Zhang et al., 2017).

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Lamberton and Stephen (2016) look in their study at the evolution of Digital, Social Media and Mobile (DSMM) Marketing between the year 2000 and 2015, where the concept of WOM is herein considered as a subfield. The article looks at the various aspects of DSMM marketing and how these have gained or lost prominence in research and how they have evolved over time. WOM research, discussed in the context of decision aid, was among the earliest in the DSMM domain and is still prominent due to its longevity. (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016) Lamberton and Stephen argue that given the number of citations generated from UGC related work, a framework should have emerged from these domains, but has been absent.

This section presents and justifies a piece of literature that is answering our research questions, and provides a connection to how this study gathers primary data. Existing theories and models significant for this study are emphasized to ensure a connection to this study. The aim of this conceptual framework is to provide a theoretical base that is applied for data collection, analysis, and to deliver a respond to the research questions and the overall purpose.

The focus of this study is to examine how components of eWOM affect brand attitude and purchase intention. Therefore, it is important to understand the term eWOM which describes “any positive or negative statement made by […] (an individual) […] which is available to a multitude of people and institutions via internet” (Henning-Thurau & Walsh, 2004, p. 39. Referred in Abrantes et al., 2013 p.1068). Due to the offer of various electronic channels,
consumers conduct an active approach and write about products, services, brands, or experiences and share it with further consumers (Kim et al. 2015). One form of eWOM are online product reviews (Kucukemiroglu & Kara, 2015), also referred as online consumer reviews (Lin & Xu, 2017) which are searched before the purchase decision is made (Kucukemiroglu & Kara, 2015).

Looking at social ties and source trustworthiness (and expertise) imply focusing not only on the individual, but the group and the social ties of/to the individual. It also would imply looking at the recipient’s relation, experiences and familiarity towards communicator and channel. These components of eWOM, although important, are not examined due to being outside the scope of this study. The component of style is in this study not examined by itself but rather as a part of information type as the two groups (simple-recommendations and attribute-value review) of this component make it easier to measure.

This study specifically looks at the Information Search, Evaluation of Alternatives and Purchase Decision stages of the Purchase Decision Process (see Table 2-1) when looking at how the eWOM components influence the consumers. Consumers are university-aged members of the Gen Y segment as not only as argued by Gözükara and Çolakoğlu (2016) due to their high spending power, but due to their closeness to social platform. It will also rely on the categorization of consumers into hedonic and utilitarian-shoppers to not neglect differences between consumers.

### 2.5.1 Electronic Word-Of-Mouth Components

One component considered in this study is the eWOM channels which can lead to various consumer attitudes due to a differentiation in the delivery of the message (Gvili & Levy, 2016). The perceived value and credibility of the message vary which form the general attitude toward eWOM. These channels, where eWOM is shared and consumed upon, show different characteristics and are used differently by consumers. (Gvili & Levy, 2016) Therefore, it is important for this study to examine if and how brand attitude and purchase intention are affected by the choice of channel and how the decisions and outcomes differ between consumers. For this study, channels are categorized according to the four classes of eWOM applied by Kudeshia and Kumar (2017): specialized eWOM, affiliated eWOM, social eWOM, and miscellaneous eWOM. Specialize eWOM includes comparison-shopping or rating websites, affiliated eWOM refers to retail websites, social eWOM contains SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram,
and YouTube is also taken into consideration, finally miscellaneous eWOM relates to blogs, discussion boards, forums, and wikis.

Due to enabling marketers to impact consumers attitude, choices, and behaviour, the eWOM management strategy of inorganic eWOM is commonly adopted (Kim et al., 2015). Companies deliver monetary or non-monetary rewards to communicators in exchange for eWOM or especially recommendations. These are effective as brand recommendations provided by consumers are more appreciated by other consumers than firm-generated messages, as they are perceived as more relevant, credible, reliable and unbiased. (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015)

Previous research has shown that different cultures expect different incentivization approaches by firms, where a differing factor is the degree of balancing of incentivization between communicator and recipient (Tercia & Teichert, 2016). Although for this study only the communicator will be rewarded due to the definition of incentivized WOM by Pongjit and Beise-Zee (2015) i.e. “any kind of rewards for recommenders of a brand can be referred to as incentivizing WOM” (p.721). As the study by Gözükara and Çolakoğlu (2016) discusses Gen Y individuals are prone to dislike aggressive selling and find firms manipulative. This study will in such look at the perceptions inorganic reviews has on the brand attitude and purchase intention, and how and if these perceptions change based on the different ways of incentivization, i.e. monetary and non-monetary.

A further component of eWOM taken into consideration is the valence (i.e. the nature of the review which is positive, neutral, negative or mixed) (Amblee & Bui, 2011) which has a significant impact on purchase decision (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Several studies confirm that positive eWOM should be used (Mishra & S M, 2016) and results in a favourable brand attitude (Amblee & Bui, 2012) and impacts intention to purchase (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Both negative and positive valence of a review will be considered in this study as stated in the article by Schindler and Bickart (2012) “for some products, consumers find a negative review more accurate, informative, and useful than a positive” (p.235).

The information type of review is an important component that needs to be considered for this study. Further examining if the Gen Y individuals tend towards preferring either attribute-value or simple-recommendations reviews, as per defined by Park and Lee (2008), and to examine if and how these factors affect the brand attitude and purchase intention.

Finally, the component of length is examined due to the several different opinions on how it should be formed. Longer reviews are generally perceived as more helpful but the WOM
message can also be too long (Schindler & Bickart, 2012). The Cognitive Fit Theory reasons that it depends on the motivation and ability of the person looking for information (Mishra & S M, 2016). Thus, it is interesting for this study to see the effect of the length of a review on brand attitude and purchase intention.

There is a link between brand attitude and purchase intention because a positive brand attitude has a positive effect on purchase intention. Brand attitude is a determinant of behavioural intention and thus purchase intention as well. If the attitude toward the performance of the behaviour is favourable, a high purchase intention is the result. Therefore, the attitude toward performing the behaviour is an important predictor of intention to purchase. (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017)

Figure 2-4 outlines this study’s conceptual framework based on the eWOM components above.

Figure 2-4: Conceptual Framework
3. Methodology

In the following chapter, research strategy and methods used for this study are described and reasoned. Different methodological perspectives are provided in order to ensure the reliability and validity of this research. All methodological approaches are selected in purpose to gain a deeper insight into the area of interest and to enable the answering of the stated research questions. Finally, a summary of the methodology is provided.

Figure 3-1 illustrates the methodological path followed by this thesis. Six steps have been taken which will be explained further in this chapter. During all steps, the validity and reliability of the research needed to be ensured and checked.

![Methodological Path Diagram]

*Figure 3-1: Methodological Path*
3.1 Research Purpose

Methodology can be defined as “a way of thinking about and studying social phenomena” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.1). The research purpose depends on the way the research questions were stated which describe either an exploratory, descriptive or explanatory research (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). A brief overview of the three natures of a research is provided in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1: Natures of Research Purposes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploratory</th>
<th>Descriptive</th>
<th>Explanatory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Ask open question to discover what is happening</td>
<td>- Receive a proper profile of events, persons or situations</td>
<td>- Establish causal relationships between variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gain an insight into the field of interest</td>
<td>- Precursor for exploratory or explanatory research</td>
<td>- Explain these relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Clarify the understanding of a problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Saunders et al. (2012, pp. 171-172)

To answer the overall purpose of this study, several methodical choices have been made. This research has been of a descriptive and exploratory nature. This nature is reasoned due to the aim of this study to explore and describe how Swedes and Germans perceive different components of eWOM (i.e. channels, length, inorganic eWOM, valence, and information type) and how their perceptions affect brand attitude and purchase intention. What helped us to discuss managerial implications as an outcome.

There are several ways of conducting an exploratory research such as a search of the literature, interviews with experts of this field, in-depth individual interviews or focus groups. Based on the exploratory nature, interviews are unstructured and the quality of the contributions are significant. The benefit of exploratory research is its flexibility and the adaption to change. (Saunders, et al., 2012) This study has made use of in-depth individual interviews where the participants have been from two different cultures (i.e. Sweden and Germany) to examine their perceptions in the area of interest. The selection of the interviewees will be further explained in section 3.5 Sample Selection.
Methodology

3.2  

**Research Approach**

There are two research approaches to use regarding a scientific problem: deductive or inductive. Two different ways are illustrated of how existing theory is applied and linked to new collected data. Furthermore, it is important to decide if primary data is collected in a quantitative or qualitative way. (Saunders, et al., 2012) The following section further explains and describes the mentioned possibilities and reasons which choices have been made.

3.2.1  *Deductive or Inductive*

When research is conducted, there are two approaches to choose from: deductive or inductive. A deductive approach is used if a research begins with theory, which is based on previous literature, and a research strategy is designed in order to verify the theory. In contrast, an inductive approach is applied if the research begins by collecting data with the aim of exploring a phenomenon and theory is generated or build, usually by providing a conceptual framework. (Saunders, et al., 2012)

For this study, a **deductive approach** has been used. This kind of research approach has the aim to explain causal relationships between concepts and variables (Saunders, et al., 2012). Previous literature was developed to formulate the research questions which were stated to test theory. The conceptual framework was established after analysing existing theories and models and was applied to the data collection and data analysis. The interview guide was designed through the conceptual framework to answer the research questions. The aim of this research was to gain a deeper insight into the field of interest by examining the relationship between the independent (i.e. eWOM components) and dependent (i.e. brand attitude and purchase intention) variables.

3.2.2  *Qualitative or Quantitative Data Collection*

The research design explains the general plan of how data is collected to answer the research questions. One way to distinguish between a quantitative and qualitative research design is the nature of the data is based on; numeric or non-numeric. In the data collection or analysis of a quantitative research numerical data is used or generated whereas a qualitative research is used to collect or analyse non-numerical data. (Saunders, et al., 2012)
Methodology

For this study, a **qualitative research design** has been used. This research design is based on an interpretive philosophy because the task is to make sense of subjective and socially constructed meanings about the field of interest (Saunders, et al., 2012). Thus, a qualitative research allows to get access to the inner experiences of participants, to examine how meanings are formed through and in cultures, and the focus is more on discovering variables than testing them (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The aim of this approach is to obtain an in-depth understanding and to generate a richer theoretical perspective than already existing in previous literature. Data is collected in a non-standardised way to enable questions and procedures to modify and emerge during a research process which is naturalistic and interactive. (Saunders, et al., 2012)

There are three main techniques of gathering qualitative data: observation, interviewing, and material culture (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). The method used for this study has been individual interviews, which according to Crabtree and Miller (1999) is also referred to as depth interviews, used to examine the perspectives of individuals from two different cultures. Depth interviews generate narratives and are personal and intimate (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). For this study, the purpose of interviews was to gain a deeper understanding how Swedes and Germans perceived different components of eWOM and how this affected their brand attitude and purchase intention.

### 3.3 Research Strategy

The research strategy is the roadmap to the set goals of the research, in other words, the means to which the goal of the research questions will be answered. It can therefore be termed as the plan that researchers use to answer the questions and is based upon previous knowledge, available time, and resources. There are several different research strategies that has evolved from different research traditions. Some of these strategies are more linked with quantitative research, some qualitative whilst other focus more on a mixed method approach. Although some strategies are inherently made from inductive or deductive research, no strategies are mutually exclusive and can be mixed and matched so that the strategy best answers the research question while matching the research purpose and approach. (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016) Saunders et al. (2016) discuss eight different types of research strategies, as outlined in Table 3-2 below, where the focus of this study will be on case studies.
### 3.3.1 Case Studies

A case study looks at a real-life scenario or a case to provide an in-depth investigation into a topic or phenomenon. The case in case study can refer to many things, such as a person, an organization, an event, or a process. Given that research is conducted within the parameters of the ‘case’, choosing the right case and correct boundaries are key factors. Unlike other types of research, case-studies are often used when the boundaries between phenomenon and context of the case are not always apparent. (Saunders, et al., 2016)

The main reasons of doing case study research is when the research questions are ‘how’ or ‘why’, when there is almost no control to be had in terms of behavioural events and when focus of the study is a contemporary phenomenon. (Yin, 2014)

Through case studies it is possible to generate empirical description and development of theory. Such in depth research presents the possibility to identify what is happening and why. (Saunders, et al., 2016) To achieve this, case studies often rely on both quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods, (Saunders, et al., 2016) however as previously stated, this study focused on qualitative methods. Yin (2014), as referred to in Saunders et al. (2016), discusses that case studies can be used not only for exploratory research but also for descriptive and explanatory ones.

When designing case studies there are several factors to keep in mind, one such is the need to distinguish between the usage of a single case versus multiple cases. A reasoning for multiple

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**Table 3-2: Research Strategies and Design**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Design</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival Analysis</td>
<td>Quantitative / Qualitative / Mixed-Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>Quantitative / Qualitative / Mixed-Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Research</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Inquiry</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Saunders et al. (2016, p.178)*
Methodology

cases is to see if the findings can be replicated, whereas a single case can be selected to observe a specific phenomenon. (Saunders, et al., 2016) As this study aimed to gain deeper insight into the field of interest rather than to generalize, a single case study has been observed. In such it is important to define the case correctly (Saunders, et al., 2016). Another reasoning for using single-cases is when the case is an everyday occurrence or common, studying the case can in such provide a deeper insight into the process related to theory (Yin, 2014).

Beyond looking at a single or a multitude of case studies, it is also important to be aware of whether the case study is holistic or embedded. When the case study looks only at one unit of analysis it is considered holistic, but if the case study instead looks at several units of analysis it is instead seen as embedded. (Yin, 2014) Given as this study only looked at one unit of analysis, the individual person and how (s)he perceives the case, the study has been considered holistic.

3.4 Data Collection

After the research strategy has been selected, the next step was to collect empirical data. There are two different types of data; primary and secondary data. Primary data are new collected data for a specific purpose while secondary data have been collected before for another purpose. The latter are raw data or published summaries which are analysed again from another perspective (Saunders, et al., 2012). This study used secondary data of several journal articles and other literature. Furthermore, primary data has been collected to answer the research questions, to gain more knowledge about the field of interest and to better understand existing theory and models. The primary data was gathered through interviews with students from Sweden and Germany.

Interviews are the purposeful conversation which contain decisive questions and concentrated listening to provided answers to explore these further. There are different types of interviews. They range from highly formal and structured to informal and unstructured. In between there are semi-structured interviews. A structured interview uses questionnaires with predetermined standardised questions and normally pre-coded answers. These are so called interviewer-administered questionnaires and are useful for a quantitative research. Regarding a more qualitative research, semi-structured or in-depth (unstructured) interviews should be used. (Saunders, et al., 2012) Table 3-3 describes the three forms of interviews.
Table 3-3: Different Types of Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structured</th>
<th>Semi-Structured</th>
<th>Unstructured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Questionnaires with predetermined standardised questions and normally pre-coded answers</td>
<td>- List of themes and key questions which need to be captured</td>
<td>- Informal and non-standardised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interviewer-administered questionnaires</td>
<td>- Use and order of questions vary from interview to interview</td>
<td>- In-depth interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Useful for a quantitative research</td>
<td>- Additional questions are may necessary</td>
<td>- No predetermined questions and order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Useful for qualitative research</td>
<td>- Have a clear idea what to explore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Interviewee talks freely about the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Useful for qualitative research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Saunders et al. (2012, pp.374-375)*

For this study, a *semi-structured interview* has been used. Key questions have been designed in advance but each interview was conducted uniquely. Additional questions were asked dependent on the interviewee’s answers and the flow of the conversation. There was a discussion on the topic which was audio-recorded. Moreover, questions to open or close the discussion have been prepared. The interview guide (see Appendix A, B, and C) includes predetermined questions as well as more unstructured questions. The unstructured questions were used for clarification to ensure a fluent conversation and discussion.

A further possibility to categorize interviews is the nature of the interaction between the researcher and the participants. This study conducted the interviews on a one to one basis where the interviewee was met either in person or called via Skype. The reason for ensuring personal contact is that a higher response rate is expected than sending out questionnaires (Saunders, et al., 2012). Participants are more sceptical providing sensitive and confidential information to a person they are not familiar with. The lack of trust is another issue regarding the usage of the collected data. Moreover, participants are may not willing to spend much time on questionnaires especially when there are open or unclear questions. (Saunders, et al., 2012) Figure 3-2 depicts an overview of different forms of interviews. The dark blue boxes represent the choices made for this research, and the bright blue boxes illustrate further possibilities which were not considered.
To ensure that the questions were clearly formulated and that the interviewees were able to answer them, the first two interviews were used as pilot interviews. One pilot interview was conducted in Swedish and the other one in German to test the questions. These pilot interviews were important for the study to make sure that the questions were understood, are in the right order and to realize when additional questions or explanations were necessary (Merriam, 2009). Possible upcoming problems were noticed what needed an agreement between the two researchers to communicate and lead the conversation in the same way. Furthermore, these pilot interviews were important to make sure that the interviews were conducted in a limited time and to increase validity of the study (Merriam, 2009). To ensure that the participants could understand the questions the interviews were carried out in the mother tongue. Therefore, half
of the interviews were conducted with Swedes in Swedish and the other half with Germans in German. This facilitated the interviewees to express themselves what results in a more reliable result.

In the beginning of the interview the purpose of this research was described and a scenario was provided. This main scenario included the search for online product reviews with the aim to purchase a laptop. The electronic good was picked because students are familiar with this good and have gained experiences with the purchase of a laptop before. A more expensive good was reflected which ensured the need to look for product information. In addition, consumers rely on online reviews for purchasing electronic goods (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). To avoid that loyalty or image influenced the perception of the scenario no brand was named. This way the scenario was illustrated in a more neutral and objective way. Within this introduction, product reviews were defined as “experiences left by other consumers about a product or service”. This was important to build a common base (Merriam, 2009) for all participants and to make sure that the topic and the following questions were understood.

Afterwards, the respondents were asked to describe their internet usage habits. This was important to receive a picture of the participants and to categorize them. The main part of the research was investigated according to the five components of eWOM (i.e. channels, information type, valence, length, and inorganic eWOM). The order of the components was based on a possible procedure when looking for and reading online reviews. The questions leaded the participants step by step from one component to the other and helped them to imagine the provided scenario from different perspectives. Thus, each component depicted a category of the interview. The procedure within each category was as follows: first, questions were asked regarding the component itself and finally the interview questions were connected to the research questions.

Regarding the length, an image (see Appendix D) was shown which contained three reviews with three different lengths. The short one included roughly 250 words, the medium one around 500 and long one 1000 words. This way it was easier for the participants to describe their preferences and to pick a length. For the last component, inorganic eWOM, the given scenario was extended. It was explained that the participants read a positive online review about the laptop and the communicator recommended to purchase this laptop. Afterwards, the opinions toward monetary (i.e. cash) and non-monetary incentivization were examined. The product (i.e. the laptop) was given to the communicator as a non-monetary reward.
The questions were formulated without the use of certain terms to enable that questions were understood the same way by participants and the interviewer (Saunders, et al., 2012). Every participant should have been able to follow the discussion regardless of the level of knowledge in this field. Moreover, it was important for this study to listen carefully and pay attention to the responses of the participants. Therefore, the interviews were audio recorded and afterwards transcribed (Saunders, et al., 2012) what provided a good database for analysis (Merriam, 2009). This will be explained further in section 3.6 Data Analysis.

3.5 Sample Selection

There are two ways to categorize sampling techniques; probability or non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is useful when statistical conclusions are made from the sample about characteristics of a population. In contrast, a non-probability sampling generalizes rather about theory and not about a population. (Saunders, et al., 2012) Qualitative researches do not aim to generalize on a statistical ground but discover what happens and examine relationships (Merriam, 2009). Thus, non-probability sample is preferred for qualitative researches (Merriam, 2009) and was also applied for this study.

There are further sampling techniques to choose from. One possibility for a non-probability form is a purposive sampling which was used for this study. This strategy determines selection criteria to choose participants (Merriam, 2009) who will best answer the research questions, thus it depends on the researcher’s judgment (Saunders, et al., 2012).

The selection of Sweden and Germany was reasoned through the observed difference of the UAI, which in turn affects consumer behaviour. Germany was picked to represent a culture with a high UAI (65) and Sweden a low UAI (29) (The Hofstede Centre, 2017). Although both countries are located within the European Union this study examined differences and common grounds. Moreover, the selection of these cultures was supported by the nationalities of the researches and thus the application of the mother tongue in the interviews.

The choice of students was reasoned first, because the consumer perspective was investigated, second by the same age range, and third by the change in information gathering and the revolution of the internet. To ensure the purposive sampling it was important that participants were familiar with product reviews and the usage of internet as a tool for information gathering. In addition, the participants needed to be Millennials or also referred as Generation Y, born
between 1980 and 2000. This generation have grown up in a consumption driven society and perceives technology and media as important aspects of life (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016). They represent a large part of the internet users regarding social media and other online platforms where eWOM is created and searched. The university-age members represent an interesting segment due to their high spending power. This depicts a huge potential for marketers and branding professionals. Furthermore, they reflect the biggest consumer segment in almost all developed countries. (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016)

The Swedish participates are students at a Swedish university, whereas the German participates are enrolled at a German university. The researchers used their connections in their respective country of origin to get in contact with both nationalities. Besides the nationality and age, both genders and study programmes were taken into consideration to create a sample consistent of a variety of individuals with unique background and personalities, this to provide a broader insight into the topic at hand.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Analysing qualitative data is a process that starts at the point of data collection. Therefore, it is important to plan the data analysis before starting with the data collection. This is in large due to qualitative data being subjective and based on such as when and where the data collection took place. (Saunders, et al., 2016) Thus, when collecting the empirical data, field notes of factors surrounding the interview such as thoughts or observations were collected to later aid in the data analysis by adding another level of understanding to why or how the interviewees responded.

As argued by Yin (2014), there are few established frameworks or guidelines for how qualitative data is to be analysed and the outcome is highly dependent on the researchers empirical thinking. However, before analysing the data it first had to be prepared. The first step in this process was to digitally transcribe the interview audio recordings, where the process of transcribing employed in this study was **data sampling**, i.e. only the parts of the interview that were deemed relevant for the study, alongside alternatively discussed themes and sub-topics were transcribed.

To aid in the analysis, documents were created where the main components and themes of each interview was summarised on its own, in a so-called **transcript summary** (Saunders, et al.,
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2016) The interviews could through this be easily observed and the data could be linked with notes taken during the interview. A further summary was made of all responses from the Swedish sample and the German sample. The individual summaries were searched for patterns and themes to explain the individual’s response, while the summaries of the German and Swedish sample were to enable a cross case analysis.

The theory and models of the conceptual framework were applied to analyse the empirical data. Each component of eWOM was examined based on the different categories described in the conceptual framework, followed by analysis of their connection to brand attitude and purchase intention.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

To provide a measure of quality to the research, there are two main constructs used that serve as central judgements of the research’s quality (Saunders, et al., 2016). According to Yin (2014), four tests are commonly used for checking the quality of empirical social research, seen in Table 3-6.

Table 3-4: Tests of Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Phase of Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construct Validity</td>
<td>Primarily Data Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Validity</td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Validity</td>
<td>Research Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Data Collection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Yin (2014, p. 45)

The construct validity aims at identifying the measurements of the concept being studied, internal validity seeks to establish a causal relationship and was in such not applicable for this descriptive /exploratory study, external validity looks at in what domain the findings can be generalized, and reliability shows that the procedures and results of the study can be replicated. (Yin, 2014)
3.7.1 **Validity**

Validity represents how well what is aimed at being measured is measured. What measurements were picked, how well the analysis of the data was conducted and what the findings represents (Saunders, et al., 2016). When conducting this study, it was important that the operational measurements used had previously been established by earlier research. This implies that others have observed and made the same matches (Yin, 2014), which is the case for the theoretical framework, although not in the same context.

The validity of the study was directly influenced by the source of evidence used in this study. From the usage of interviews emerged strengths such as being able to directly focus on the case and further being able to receive insightful comments from the correspondents through personal explanations and personal views (Yin, 2014). By discussing around the questions, asking for clarifications and building upon the interviewees earlier responses it is, as discussed by Saunders et al. (2016), possible to ensure a higher degree of validity.

One such clarification all interviewees were given at the beginning of each interview was a pre-determined definition of a review, to avoid answers being skewed by level of previous knowledge or biased perception. Further using open questions to lead the conversation followed by probing questions to understand the reasoning. To avoid that external factors, such as location, time, or our appearance influence the interviewees, locations and times were based on the interviewees’ preference and an appropriate appearance, in relation to the setting of the interview, was selected.

Conducting the interview in the mother tongue of the correspondents presented a double-edged sword against the validity of this research. While it meant that correspondents could relay their thoughts in a more relaxed fashion, it also presents an issue given that interviews conducted in German and Swedish were to be translated into English before any data analysis could be done. Given that the authors of this study are from Sweden and Germany, although positive for the data collection, the validity of the translation and interpretation of the answers to English could have suffered as neither author have English as their mother tongue. However, to increase the validity field notes were taken of each interview alongside the recordings and these were compared multiple times when doing the **data sampling** transcription.

As this study did not seek to generalize but rather to provide a deeper insight into the ‘how’ and ‘why’ factor and have relied on a single case study the **external validity** is low.
3.7.2 Reliability

How consistent the research is and the ability to follow its steps to reproduce the research with consistent findings, is what defines its reliability (Yin, 2014). As discussed by Saunders et al. (2016), semi-structured interviews are due to their flexibility used to examine complex questions, and the data is dependent on factors such as when and where it was collected. It is such highly unlikely to be able to replicate the research to find the same answers. A factor which strengthens the credibility is the sample selection, although non-probability, the interviewees where all in their early to mid-twenties i.e. fulfilled the criterion of belonging to Gen Y and were all university students. The interview guide being available both in English, German, and Swedish (see Appendix A, B, and C) offer the possibility to conduct further interviews. Although being a guide, the questions were all to be answered unless an answer could not be given.

The interviewees where thanked for taking their time to participate in the interview, offered a coffee or similar and were all given a short introduction to the study of which they were to participate in. Before starting the recordings, the interviewees were asked if they had any objections to this and it was made clear that no personal information would be collected and that data would be presented anonymously. Beyond the point of introducing the scenario of purchasing a laptop all interviews took their own path.

This is an established problem of conducting semi-structured interviews. Even factors such as the gender and educational background of the interviewer might have affected the answers given by the interviewees. However, to uncover how the components of eWOM affect the consumers differently there was a need for such unstructured flexibility.
3.8 Summary of Methodology

Figure 3-3 below provides an overview of the methodological choices which have been made for this study. The dark blue boxes illustrate which strategies have been applied while the bright blue boxes represent further possibilities which were not taken into consideration.
4. Empirical Data

This study gathered primary data by conducting interviews with Swedish and German students. This chapter presents the collected data to answer the stated research questions. The empirical data is divided into six sections which reflect the structure of the interview guide, and treats the stated research questions as well as the overall purpose. The data is presented in tables to provide a clear picture and to gain an overview.

To see if primary data can answer the overall purpose, the research questions are stated below:

The purpose of this study was to examine how components of eWOM affect consumer’s brand attitude and purchase intention. To answer this overall purpose two research questions have been outlined:

**RQ1:** How do components of eWOM affect brand attitude?

**RQ2:** How do components of eWOM affect purchase intention?

The semi-structured interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via Skype. The researchers have been on campus to ensure a quiet and convenient environment. The meetings were scheduled based on the preferences of the interviewees. The following tables present the empirical data and have the same structure than the interview guide (see Appendix A, B, and C). Questions to the different components of eWOM were asked, the answers collected and summarized.

**Interview Samples**

Based on the described Sample Selection procedure from the Methodology Chapter, the following samples were interviewed to gather the data further presented in this chapter. Table 4-1 outlines the German interviewees, their ages and study programmes and Table 4-2 shows the Swedish interviewees, their ages and study programmes. The tables show that the sample variety, as discussed in the Methodology, is obtained through individual with differing genders, ages and study programmes. The mean age for the German sample is 22,6 and for the Swedish sample 23,6.
Empirical Data

Table 4-1: German Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Nr.</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Study Programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>International Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>International Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>French &amp; Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Business Administration &amp; Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Environmental &amp; Process Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Environmental &amp; Process Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Material Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-2: Swedish Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Nr.</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Study Programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Industrial Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Social Science, Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Industrial Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Business Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Medical Science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As per accordance to the answers given by the respondents, all the interviewees came from different parts of Sweden and Germany and had all lived in their country of origin for most of their life.
4.1 Internet Usage Habits

In the beginning of the interview, the interviewees were asked about their internet usage habits and shopping behaviour to enable categorization. Table 4-3 below presents the questions in the left most column, where the question number corresponds to the asked question in the interview guide (see Appendix A, B, and C), followed by the German and then the Swedish answers in the right columns.

Table 4-3: German & Swedish Answers: Internet Usage Habits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Summary of German Answers</th>
<th>Summary of Swedish Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Do you shop online?</td>
<td>The respondents shop online on a regular basis of several times a month.</td>
<td>Shopping online is a frequent act among the respondents. Their definition of frequently is loosely defined as something between a few times a month to a few times a year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How would you describe yourself as an online shopper?</td>
<td>The respondents mainly search for things they need and some shop for fun. Product reviews are read and are a main factor in the decision-making process.</td>
<td>All respondents make online purchases in response to a need. However, half of the interviewees primarily shop online for the sake of having fun, or to see what products are available. Both groups rely on product reviews for their decision-making process, although those who primarily shop for fun find them less important and more as a general guideline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 4.2 Channels

The first component of eWOM which was discussed in the interview was channels. The interviewees were asked to mention their preferred websites and their opinion toward suggested channels. As seen in the interview guide (see Appendix A, B, and C) four different categories were used. Table 4-4 below presents the key words of the questions in the left column and the German and Swedish answers in the two columns on the right.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Summary of German Answers</th>
<th>Summary of Swedish Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. What websites do you go to when you want to evaluate a product?</td>
<td>Retail websites are used the most followed by comparison-shopping or rating websites. However, Google is often used first to get some websites proposed.</td>
<td>In general, Google is used to find websites with product information. Retail websites are most used due to their convenience, but are generally not trusted. In such looking at several sources is important to form a fair image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Comparison-shopping or rating websites</td>
<td>These websites are very popular because an overview of different products is provided. On the one hand, the communicator and the website reflect expertise knowledge, tests are conducted and results presented. These websites do not engage in selling the product what establishes trust. On the other hand, not to have the possibility to buy the product is perceived as inconvenient and the website’s expertise and for not themselves selling the products.</td>
<td>These websites are used to evaluate products more deeply as they are seen to offer a broader analysis made by an expert. It is common to turn here when looking for specific information, uncover problems yet thought of, and to evaluate alternatives. These websites are trussed due to the expertise and for not themselves selling the products. However, these websites are seen as time consuming as specific information can be hard to find or...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reliability is sometimes questioned because reviews can be selected or be inorganic. understand, which deters a lot of people from using them. The trustworthiness of the websites within this category is questioned due to their perceived ability to manipulate reviews or content.

| 7.2 Retail websites | Retail websites are the most popular channel for the German interviewees. These websites offer a huge variety of different products, a comparison but also the investigation of one specific product is ensured. The product can be bought right away which is seen as convenient and saves time. In general, source trustworthiness is perceived as high. | The reviews on retail websites are used just before making a purchase when other sources have been checked. It is used as the only source of information when time is highly valued. The retail website would be used more if the product is cheaper, but for when purchasing a laptop, it is mostly used at the last stage of the decision-making process. The information is seen as concise and easily navigated and in such time saving. Although easy and time saving the content of the reviews is not trusted. The reviews themselves (due to valence and number) give of the impression of them being manipulated and in such the trustworthiness is perceived as low. |
| 7.3 Social Networking Sites | SNSs are not used by the interviewees because they either do not think of it when they want to read reviews, are not that active on SNS or the trustworthiness is missing. | SNSs are rarely used due to the lack of familiarity towards this channel. On SNSs the trustworthiness towards the communicator is low. If a friend recommends something, that |
The respondents link advertising, product placement, and manipulation of reviews to SNSs. YouTube receives a slightly better image because the video makes the review more visual. However, it depends on the communicator if he is seen as an expert or if product placement is suspected. Recommendation will be valued. However, there is too large of an incentive for strangers on these websites to promote themselves by “acting in a certain” or “saying specific things” so the information they provide is biased. YouTube is used as it easily displays the info sought for, but the low credibility leads consumers to turn to only familiar or expert communicators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>7.4 Blogs/Forums/Wikis</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The main reason the interviewees do not use this channel is due to the unfamiliarity with blogs, forums, or wikis. In addition, too much information is provided which is not seen as helpful or perceived as inorganic. They are only selected when Google proposed it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Forums are used quite often, but it is not a channel that is actively chosen. Most are unfamiliar with the channel and find that the information is presented badly or is generally hard to find; in such takes a lot of time to process. However, the information is seen as rich and seen as stemming from more experienced users. As the channel is used to find likeminded individuals the information is perceived as trustworthy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>8. Influence of channels on brand attitude (yes / no)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The perception of the brand is mainly influenced how familiar or trustworthy the communicator and the website are seen. Which information is provided and how it is presented plays an important role. The more the German</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most interviewees see no connection to the brand, based on what channel the information exist upon. It just shows that people are discussing the product. However, to some degree it reflects the target segment of the product where information on forums reflects a
Empirical Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Summary of German Answers</th>
<th>Summary of Swedish Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Content of reviews (personal opinions vs facts)</td>
<td>Facts are searched when online reviews are read. They are used first to select a few potential products and for the final decision personal opinions are used.</td>
<td>When purchasing a computer both facts and personal opinions play an equal part. Facts as they state how the product performs and personal opinions as they act as an indicator to how well one can relate to the communicator. If the opinions of the communicator match with oneself, then the content of the review is likely to be relevant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 **Information Type**

The second component of eWOM which was discussed in the interview was information type. The interviewees were asked which content they prefer in reviews. Two different types of information were used to describe the content: facts versus personal opinions. Table 4-5 below presents the key words of the questions in the left column and the German and Swedish answers in the two columns on the right.

Table 4-5: German & Swedish Answers: Information Type
### Empirical Data

The content of the review must reflect the validity of the product and the experiences of the communicator. This is to show that either the product lives up to stated functions or to find problems that might occur later in the product’s lifetime. However, this depends on the product itself. Cheaper products mean that personal opinions are more valued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Influence of content on brand attitude (yes/no)</td>
<td>The majority is more influenced by opinions than facts which form their perception of the brand. Often the problem is a lack of knowledge and facts are not understood. Personal opinions are then used for explanation and to see if the product performs as intended. Facts are the same on each website and thus individuals seek for personal opinions. However, a good quality of the product is perceived when a lot of facts are provided.</td>
<td>No. There the perception of the brand of the product being sold is not influenced by the way the communicators write their reviews. However, this depends on the content of the reviews. If the communicator shares bad experiences with the company then it would reflect a negative perception of the brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Change of purchase intention</td>
<td>Most German interviewees use personal opinions for their final stage of the decision-making process and are more inclined to buy the product when these opinions are read.</td>
<td>Personal opinions that are linked to the functions of the product are more influential than pure facts. These are used to see if the product matches the consumer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 Valence

The third component of eWOM which was discussed in the interview was valence; the nature of the review. Interviewees were asked which valence they prefer and how their perception of the review changes. Table 4-6 below presents the key words of the questions in the left column and the German and Swedish answers in the two columns on the right.

Table 4-6: German & Swedish Answers: Valence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Summary of German Answers</th>
<th>Summary of Swedish Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13/14. Preference of positive and/or negative reviews</td>
<td>The majority wants to read negative reviews to be informed about possible defects. The content of the negative reviews need to match their lifestyle to take them into consideration. Furthermore, the amount and especially the ratio of positive and negative reviews are important. More positive than negative reviews are preferred.</td>
<td>A majority prefer to read positive but fair reviews, where fair refers to how the communicator looks at both side of the argument. Almost all respondents actively look for negative reviews, as these tend to outline the products shortcomings. Through this it is possible to see if the product matches their lifestyle. In general, finding negative reviews is very important, and low trust is given towards the products with only positive reviews. A common viewpoint among the Swedish interviewees is that all products have faults and as consumers they do not want to be surprised. The respondents all preferred a large number of positive- and a handful of negative- (or mixed) reviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Influence of valence on</td>
<td>Only positive reviews influence the perception of the brand</td>
<td>The answers from the interviewees split in two. One side prefers the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>brand attitude</strong></td>
<td>Positively but the validity of the available reviews is seen as sceptical because every product has problems to some degree. If the interviewees read only negative reviews they perceive the product/brand more negatively.</td>
<td>Positive side due to wanting to justify their purchase. They further think that only positive is good as it means that the company/brand knows what it is doing. The other group thinks that only positive reviews give of the impression that the company has manipulated the reviews by removing comments; which results in a lowered trust towards the brand and the product. A good mixture of positive to negative reviews, on the other hand, lead to the insight that the brand offer a good product and this way of thinking might even extend across product lines (depending on content). Common to both groups are that purely negative reviews influence their perception of the brand negatively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(only positive vs only negative)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **16. Change of purchase intention** | Respondents are more inclined to buy the product when a mixture of positive and negative reviews are provided with the tendency to more positive reviews. Only negative ones hinder them from buying the product. But as mentioned earlier, the content of the negative reviews need to match their lifestyle and are otherwise neglected. If negative | The respondents lean more towards positive reviews, although most prefer a mixed review, i.e. a positive review that brought up both pros and cons about the product. |
reviews do not match their lifestyle they can also make them more inclined to buy the product.

4.5 **Length**

The fourth component of eWOM which was discussed in the interview was the length of the review. An image was shown (see Appendix D) illustrating three sizes of a product review: short (250 words), medium (500 words) and long (1000 words). This helped the respondents to describe their preferences and opinions. Table 4-7 below presents the key words of the questions in the left column and the German and Swedish answers in the two columns on the right.

**Table 4-7: German & Swedish Answers: Length**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Summary of German Answers</th>
<th>Summary of Swedish Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17. Reading (first lines vs entire text)</td>
<td>First, the first lines are read to see if the content and style match, if this is ensured the majority continues to read the entire text. A few skims through the text or stop when they are satisfied what depends on the length of the review.</td>
<td>The Swedish interviewees read the first couple of lines to either see if the text is relevant or to find an answer to a specific question. They read the entire text if it is interesting. If ratings of the review itself are available, some are more likely to read the entire review. It also depends on the valence where some are more inclined to read the entirety of negative reviews (given that the content is relevant) as they wish to uncover flaws.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Size of the review (short, medium, long)</td>
<td>Short and medium length reviews are preferred by the German interviewees. The information is The Swedish interviewees prefer the short to medium length reviews as they are easy to process and do not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Empirical Data

<p>| <strong>medium or long</strong> | bundled and especially when the selection process is in the beginning they are useful to obtain an overview. In particular, the medium length is preferred because enough information is provided but does not contain unnecessary content. Half of the interviewees also consider reading the long review because the laptop illustrates an expensive product and more information are needed for the final stage of the decision-making process. | take up too much time. But this is dependent on the information within the reviews themselves and the channels which they are posted upon. The short/medium length reviews are preferred on retail websites and forums, whereas the long reviews are only completely read if they were very interesting or written by an expert. Some think that the long review would be good given the nature of the purchase as they themselves feel a lack of knowledge in the field of electronic and in such hoped that the long review could help them to understand the laptop. |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <strong>19. Influence on perception of product and brand from long reviews</strong> | Roughly half of the interviewed Germans receive a positive perception if only long reviews are provided. These respondents have the opinion that positive as well as negative content is included in the review or the communicator was an expert. They need a lot of information for their decision-making and hence like long reviews. The remaining associates negative content (i.e. defects, complains etc.) with long reviews and perceive the product/brand in a negative way. | Overall long reviews lead to the perception that there is a lot to say about the product. This does not have to be either positive or negative as it could imply that the product is just more advanced or that only expert reviews, which tend to be longer, are available. But could at the same time imply that there are lots of problems with the product or that it is convoluted to use. Some feel that the long reviews provide a better foundation for making an informed decision which is useful for buying a laptop, but state that it is important that the review is written and structured |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Empirical Data</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| **20. Influence on perception of product and brand from short reviews** | If mainly short reviews are provided the majority of the interviewees see this as negative what negatively influences the brand perception. Too little information is provided and the communicators lack of knowledge. Consumers do not take a close look at the product, are not interested in it or have no technical expertise. However, a few associate positive arguments with a short review and their brand perception is thus positively influenced. | Only short reviews leave the impression of the product being more user friendly, and some propose that this also suggests a brand that advocates user friendliness. The consensus is that it heavily depends on the content of the reviews. If they are short, concise and informative then it is positive. However, if the short reviews are all positive and mostly subjective, then it could imply that they are fake and in such lower the trust. Though easy to read positive reviews are sought after. |

| **21. Change of purchase intention** | The majority is more inclined to buy the product when they read long reviews. In particular, for the final stage more information is preferred and reasons why long or at least medium length reviews are sought after. | Depends on the product and what it means for the consumer. If expertise is missing then a long descriptive review can be just as effective as a short informative yet subjective review. If the reviews are just used for the final stage of the decision-making process then short positive reviews are better as they just help justify the purchase. |
4.6 Inorganic eWOM

Finally, the last component of eWOM reflects the incentivization of eWOM, i.e. inorganic eWOM. This proactive strategy can be conducted by using monetary or non-monetary rewards. The interviewees were asked what their opinion is when the communicator was paid by cash (i.e. monetary) or how they think differently if the product (i.e. the laptop) was presented to the communicator as a non-monetary reward. Table 4-8 below presents the key words of the questions in the left column and the German and Swedish answers in the two columns on the right.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Summary of German Answers</th>
<th>Summary of Swedish Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22./23. Influence on</td>
<td>If the interviewees know the fact that a communicator was paid to provide the review, the brand perception is negatively</td>
<td>Most react negatively towards the information that the communicator was paid to provide the review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perception of brand and</td>
<td>influenced and the trustworthiness of the brand is questioned.</td>
<td>Most disregard the review and have a slightly more negative attitude towards the brand in general. While some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purchase intention (monetary)</td>
<td>However, the majority treat this inorganic review as not existing and pretend that they have not read it. They</td>
<td>go so far to say they will not buy the product and be very cautious about buying from that brand in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>look for further (organic) reviews on this or other websites to form their opinion because they are aware that a lot</td>
<td>The opposite reaction is to say it is to be expected as most companies, if not all, rely on similar strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of companies use this strategy nowadays. They still consider buying the product. In addition, it depends on how</td>
<td>However, common among all interviewees is that they believe the conflict of interest, experienced by the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>many reviews of this product/brand are inorganic. A few receive a totally negative brand perception and do not</td>
<td>communicator, to make the review biased. The fact that the communicator was paid should have been disclosed first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>consider buying the product</td>
<td>not last.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-8: German & Swedish Answers: Inorganic eWOM
Empirical Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>24. Influence on perception of brand and purchase intention (non-monetary)</th>
<th>anymore. This depends on competitors as well. and this would have mitigated some damage.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For the majority, there is no difference between a monetary and a non-monetary reward. However, a few think that a non-monetary reward is better. They assume that the communicator receives the product to test it or is sponsored by the company but he still has the possibility to form his own opinion and he provides the positive review voluntarily. The interviewees see this as his own honest opinion.</td>
<td>For the most part this makes slight difference towards the purchase intention. However, more are in favour for this approach towards the brand. It is seen as a valid approach to get your product out there and in such there is less of a negative impact on the brand perception. However, the conflict of interest is still there which makes the process more time consuming and in turn lessen the purchase intention.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Data Analysis

This chapter provides an analysis of the collected empirical data by interpretation through the conceptual framework in order to answer the research questions. The primary data was collected through interviews of Germans and Swedes. The chapter follows the chronological order of the conducted interviews, starting with an analysis of internet usage habits, followed by the five components of eWOM as seen in the conceptual framework (Figure 5-1 below).

The stated research questions for this study are as follows:

**RQ1:** How do components of eWOM affect brand attitude?

**RQ2:** How do components of eWOM affect purchase intention?
5.1 Internet Usage Habits

As discussed in the literature review online shopping can be divided into two categories of hedonic and utilitarian shopping. The utilitarian shoppers are more price aware, set out to become more perfectly informed and conduct online shopping for a reason whereas the hedonic shoppers tend more to shop for the experience itself (Bilgihan & Bujisic, 2015; Radionova & Praude, 2016). For this study, it was in such important to get an understanding of the interviewees shopping behaviour. Consumers from the Gen Y segment further tend to lean more towards being hedonic shoppers as they have a high spending power and value time (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016).

By analysing how often the interviewees said they conducted shopping online and what their main motivation is for shopping online, it is possible to draw a conclusion to whether the person leans more towards a hedonic or utilitarian behaviour. From interviewing the German and Swedish students it became apparent that most believe they shop online with a reason, i.e. for a product they need which reflects a utilitarian shopping behaviour. However, a minority admit to shop for the leisure or look online for products that might be of interest, where Swedish interviewees make up a majority of this group.

The reliance of reviews is not depended on nationality as both cultures see reviews an essential element of their decision-making process. This extend to the hedonic as well as the utilitarian shoppers. However, some Swedish hedonic shoppers explain that the nature of the purchase, where they lack knowledge about the good, is the reason for relying upon reviews. These hedonic shoppers agree that a laptop would constitute as a good they would rely upon reviews for purchasing.

5.2 Channels

The first component of eWOM discussed was channels. Here, the interviewees were asked questions about the four different classes of eWOM channels, these categories are specialized eWOM, affiliated eWOM, social-eWOM and miscellaneous-eWOM (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). These channels have their own capabilities and characterises (Gvili & Levy, 2016) and due to the need for firms to specialize their way of interacting and engaging their audience (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017) the interviewees were asked how they would perceive information on these channels.
Data Analysis

The German

Interviewees prefer to use specialized eWOM such as comparison-shopping or rating websites. The reason behind it is the channel’s function. A lot of products can easily be compared and an overview is received about price and capabilities of the product. Ratings such as stars help to evaluate products and aid in getting an overall impression of the product. These types of aid were mainly preferred by the few hedonic shoppers. Expert reviews are appreciated on this channel and reflect the perception of the website and of the communicator. Scepticism towards this channel comes forth in the form of perceived inconvenience for not being able to buy the product from the website itself and some perceive a lack of trustworthiness.

The most appreciate channel is affiliated eWOM due to the channel’s relative ease of use, high perceived trustworthiness, high convenience while requires little time. The channel includes retail websites which are seen as practical due to the ability to purchase the product right from the website and offer a large selection of several products. Most utilitarian shoppers of the German sample rely on this kind of channel at some stage of the decision-making process.

Social eWOM is not used by the German respondents because of their unfamiliarity towards this kind of channel. Respondents are either not that active on the websites or do not think of this channel when looking for product reviews online. The main factor against the use of this channel is the lack of the source trustworthiness. The respondents know that advertising and product placement is taking place and therefore do not rely on these websites. YouTube is used as it provides a visual representation of the product, but the problem of low trustworthiness persists. All in all, the trustworthiness on SNSs depends on the communicator if he is familiar and to which degree he is seen as an expert. This opinion is represented by the utilitarian as well as the hedonic shoppers of the German sample.

Miscellaneous eWOM refers to blogs, forums, wikis etc. The reason why the German interviewees do not rely on these websites is due to the unfamiliarity towards the channel. They do not know any specific blog, forum, or wiki and perceive the website as inconvenient due to information overload. This refers also to time because the majority does not want to search for extra information and thus prefer the retail websites. If this channel is used then only due to a proposal by Google which is a very popular tool to find websites by both utilitarian and hedonic shoppers of the German sample.

The most important factors for the German interviewees are trust towards the website and the communicator, the website’s functions (i.e. comparison or purchase options, offer of products),
Data Analysis

the *ease of use* (i.e. how easy the handling of the website is), the *time* it takes to gather information and make the purchase, and the channels *convenience*. The latter refers to the purchase of the product on the website and the want of having all information provided from one channel.

According to the German interviewees, the *brand attitude* is influenced by the channel. Reviews on websites that are perceived as trustworthy and honest have a high influence. These reviews are used for forming the opinion towards the product, but in the end also towards the brand. However, it depends on the preference of the channel, what is used the most and hence individuals are more likely to be convinced on some websites and subconsciously form or change their brand attitude.

The source trustworthiness is also an important factor for the *purchase intention*. The purchase intention rises when the respondents trust the channel and the communicator. This is mainly ensured on channels providing specialized and affiliated eWOM.

**The Swedish**

Interviewees are spread out across most types of channels. Recurring theme is that hedonic shoppers tend to prefer those channels that offer the fastest way of seeing and processing reviews (i.e. valued *time*), whereas utilitarian shoppers tend more towards those channels that are perceived as trustworthy and have high informativeness.

The *specialized eWOM* channels are sought by the more knowledgeable interviewees due to the perception that reviews on this channel stems from knowledgeable communicators (expert reviews). Another pro is that the channel makes comparison of alternative easy and is in such generally perceived as offering a fair image of the product. On the other hand, those with less expertize or those who generally do not rely on this channel, argue that the channel is convoluted, tends to present and overflow of information and information is hard and takes too much time to find.

*Affiliated eWOM* such as retail websites are used by most respondents as some point or another. Those who think that specialized eWOM poses too much of a hassle also tend to find this channel preferable. Time and ease of use are two major factors for reading the reviews on these channels. Those individuals who usually tend towards other channels say that they do not trust these reviews, as they are perceived as easily manipulated. However, many read them out of
their convenient placement, just as a final ‘check’ before making the purchase; when information from other sites have already been gathered.

**Social eWOM** are not trusted or the interviewees were not familiar with these sites to the point where they do not know that they could find product reviews on these websites. The low trust stems from the perception that communicators on these websites have agendas to promote themselves in certain ways, instead of providing a fair product review. YouTube is nevertheless often used as it presents visual feedback of the product in question. However, Swedes commonly perceive communication on social eWOM channels as simple and lacking in information, and only when the recommendation comes from a friend or familiar communicator it is trusted.

**Miscellaneous eWOM** is sometimes used by the Swedish respondents. By those unfamiliar with the channel it is often perceived as being convoluted, time consuming and the data is hard to find. Most use the channel only when brought to these websites by a search engine (exclusive answer is Google). Those who primarily rely on the channel do so due to high trust in the communicator, which they are also able to relate to.

According to the Swedish interviewees, the most important factors in the choice of channel are the trust towards the communicator and channel, time it takes to find the information and ease of which information is found. Where trust, time and ease of use in turn depend on factors such as the product, prior knowledge of the product, and prior familiarity with the channels.

According to a majority of the Swedish interviewees, there is no connection to be seen between the channel and the brand attitude. However, some respondents suggest that the website reflects the perceived target audience of the product and through this influences the brand attitude. A majority agree that the purchase intention is influenced by the choice of channel whereas the influencing factor depends on the availability of reviews on the interviewees preferred website. If the content is not available on the desired channel or takes a long time to find, then it negatively affects the purchase intention.

Figure 5-2 illustrates the WHAT-Factors which make the respondents more likely to use certain channels and the HOW-Factors demonstrate how brand attitude and purchase intention are affected. The $G$ shows if the brand attitude and purchase intention of the German respondents is modified and the $S$ depicts the change for the Swedish sample.
5.3 Information Type

This segment covers German and Swedish interviewees’ preferences for the second component of eWOM, information type; the content within the review. Breaking it down into simple-recommendations reviews, that are normative, emotional and subjective, or attribute-value reviews that instead focus on specific and factual information (Park & Lee, 2008). This also allows for conclusions to be drawn on how likely the interviewees are to either be influenced by normative ideas and in such conform to the group or if informational influence, where facts are accepted as truth, are more likely to occur (Park & Lee, 2008).

The German

The German interviewees prefer to first read attribute-value reviews. Factual information is used to select a few potential products and thus help to narrow down the search from a variety of products. The facts are less likely to lie and are the same on different channels and create the impression that the communicator of this is likely to be an expert. However, although facts are preferred in the start, some respondents need explanation of facts due to their lack of knowledge. In such simple-recommendations reviews with more subjective opinions are used for the final stage of the decision-making process. They differ, explain facts or experiences, and individuals can identify themselves with the communicator to see if the given normative ideas are relevant to them. In general, on some channels attribute-value reviews or simple-recommendations reviews are more expected.

The brand attitude is influenced by both normative as well as informational ideas. When attribute-value reviews are read, the product is seen as qualitative and therefore the brand is
also perceived as professional. However, the brand attitude is more influenced by simple-recommendations reviews because they are used for the final decision. Looking at the brand attitude from the hedonic and utilitarian perspective, the hedonic shoppers illustrate that normative ideas (i.e. simple-recommendations reviews) are more influencing towards their brand attitude. Conversely, almost a half of the utilitarian shoppers are influenced by factual information (i.e. attribute-value reviews) and half are influenced by subjective opinions.

Attribute-value reviews influence the \textit{purchase intention} for some due to objective and technical perspective. The purchase intention of the majority depends on simple-recommendations reviews where normative and subjective information are provided as this information helps them to recognize if the product fits their lifestyle or not.

\textbf{The Swedish}

Respondents prefer the \textit{attribute-value reviews} for evaluating their options, as long as the content within these reviews is not too convoluted and reflected some experiences of the communicator. They feel as though these reviews tend to share information that has not been considered and can in such help avoid a bad purchase or find the product that best suits one’s need. This is highly dependent on the type of product as this type of precise information searching is only relevant with more expensive products. The respondents that tend more towards hedonic way of shopping and highly value time say they prefer \textit{simple-recommendations reviews}. Most prefer a mixture of both where the subjective ideas are fair rather than biased.

Common among the interviewees is that they want to see if the product lives up to their expectation. For this to be a possibility many feel that they must rely on the personal opinions of the communicator. These are used by interviewees as a guide to see whether the communicator shared their normative ideas. If there is a match, then they feel that the product and the review is more compatible with their life and they are more likely to read the review.

A minority of the Swedish respondents find that their \textit{brand attitude} is influenced based on the information type in the available reviews. However, many of the interviewees state that if only short and purely subjective recommendations, that are perceived as biased, are available then the \textit{trust} towards the product decreases, as they are unable to find the information they seek. But in general, they find that the company behind the product is not responsible for the comments written.
**Purchase intention** is positively influenced when the review is a mixture of attribute-value and simple-recommendations reviews. The preferred review contains more normative elements than it does factual, as facts about the product can be found independently of the reviews. The simple-recommendations reviews serve as a guideline to show if they match the consumer’s lifestyle.

Figure 5-3 illustrates the WHAT-Factors which make the respondents more likely to look for a certain type of content in the reviews. The HOW-Factors demonstrate how brand attitude and purchase intention are affected. The $G$ shows if the brand attitude and purchase intention of the German respondents is modified and the $S$ depicts the change for the Swedish sample.

![Figure 5-3: WHAT and HOW-Factors: Information Type](image)

### 5.4 Valence

The third component of eWOM is valence which relates to the nature of the message/review which is positive, neutral, negative, or mixed (Amblee & Bui, 2012). The interviewees where asked regarding their preferences of positive or negative reviews and in which way their perception changes. The analysed data looks at why the respondents prefer a specific valence and if the preference is shifted with the quantity of available reviews and why.

**The German**

Most German interviewees prefer to read **negative** reviews. They want to be aware of possible defects and to know if they can be avoided. However, the choice of negative or positive depends on the content of the review, if the complaint/praise is relevant and matches their lifestyle then the review is more likely to be read and influential. **Both**, negative as well as positive reviews...
are important because only negative reviews hinder them from considering the product. Positive reviews are appreciated but if mainly or only positive reviews are provided it is seen as sceptical which refers to the source trustworthiness of the channel and the communicator. Therefore, more positive than negative reviews should be available. In general, informational influence and normative ideas should be included in the available positive and negative reviews.

The brand attitude is in such influenced by the amount of the available reviews. The ratio between positive and negative reviews plays a key role. Positive reviews influence the brand attitude positively and negative reviews have the opposite effect.

The purchase intention is strongly influenced both when positive and/or negative reviews are read. But the German respondents are more likely to buy the product when they read positive reviews or when there are many positive reviews and only a few, constructive, negative ones. The positive reviews give them a sense of security, confirm that it is an excellent product and convince them to buy the product.

The Swedish

The Swedish interviewees prefer a mixture of both positive and negative reviews. They primarily prefer if there are many positive reviews, but always want that some negative reviews are available. Only positive reviews most often lead to the impression that the reviews have been manipulated by the company, as no product is perfect. The best reviews, as discussed by the Swedish respondents, are those that take both sides (positive and negative) into account, a so called mixed review. The respondents use the negative aspects as a way of outlining the limitations of the product and to see if the product, with its limitations, are compatible with them.

The brand attitude is influenced negatively when all reviews are negative, and only somewhat positively when all the reviews are positive. When there is a lot of positive information available this positive view of the product can be reflected over to other products of the same brand.

The effect of purchase intention depends highly on the product. In the situation where the product is cheaper several of the respondents suggest a lowered need for knowing the limitations and in such preferred only positive reviews. In the situation where they want the product and are mentally prepared for an impulse purchase, then purely positive reviews are seen as the best. However, when purchasing a laptop or another expensive product the respondents say that a mixture is important.
Figure 5-4 illustrates the WHAT-Factors which make the respondents more likely to read a certain type of review. The HOW-Factors demonstrate how brand attitude and purchase intention are affected. The $G$ shows if the brand attitude and purchase intention of the German respondents is modified and the $S$ depicts the change for the Swedish sample.

![Figure 5-4: WHAT and HOW-Factors: Valence](image)

## 5.5 Length

The fourth component of eWOM is length. For this study, the impact of the length of the review was measured using a sample review of three different lengths (see Appendix D). In accordance with previous research long reviews should be perceived as more helpful (Schindler & Bickart, 2012) and when looking to buy a product, consumers should seek to reduce their uncertainty, where more should be considered better (Furner et al., 2016). As Gen Y individuals see themselves as impatient (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016) it is such of interest to see how the length influence their purchase intention and brand attitude. The data is analysed based on preferred length and what factors influence the choice of length and then further how these different lengths affect the brand attitude and purchase intention.

### The German

The choice of length for the German interviewees depends on the **content, style, information type** of the review, i.e. simple-recommendations reviews or attribute-value- reviews, and on the preferred **channel**. The content needs to match with themselves to motivate them to read further which they judge by relying on the peripheral route of processing information. In addition, it depends **how expensive** the good is. For this study, a laptop was chosen and therefore the majority wants to read long reviews for their final decision to feel totally informed about the product. However, when the interviewees are asked which length they prefer, the short and
medium length reviews are picked most frequently. The reason behind this is that the shorter versions are preferred for the beginning to receive an overview of how various products are evaluated.

The *brand attitude* is positively influenced when long reviews are read. The preference of the long review for the final decision by the German interviews aligns with Tercia and Teichert (2016) who state that a culture with a high UAI gains as much information as possible to feel fairly treated. Another reason is that some assume the communicator to be an expert who wrote an attribute-value review with an informational influence. However, subjective opinions modify the brand attitude more and hence normative ideas are also expected in a long review. Moreover, it is assumed to be more of a mixed review (i.e. containing both positive and negative aspects). Especially for interviewees who need a lot of information the brand attitude is positively formed. However, almost a half of the respondents thinks that negative content is reflected in long reviews and thus have a negative perception towards the product which relates to a negative brand attitude. Short reviews are seen as negative because there is a lack of knowledge on the side of the communicator. This refers to a simple-recommendations review including normative ideas. For the majority of the respondents, short reviews influence the brand attitude in a negative way. Nevertheless, some still associate positive content with short reviews. These are the hedonic shoppers who appreciate the short or medium length and do not have the need to look for a lot of information on different channels.

Long reviews do make the majority of the utilitarian shoppers more inclined to buy the product and increases the *purchase intention*. Factual information i.e. attribute-value reviews are assumed when a long review is given and are important for the beginning of the selection process. However, for the final decision, subjective opinions are decisive and thus it can be claimed that a long review needs to include normative ideas as well to convince the respondents. For the few hedonic shoppers, on the other hand, the purchase intention rises when short or medium length reviews are provided.

**The Swedish**

The choice of length for the Swedish interviewees heavily depends on the *information type*, *channel* the review is posted upon, the price of the good, the *ability to rate the reviews*, the *style* in which it is written and the *communicator*. If the information is posted by an *expert* on a *specialized eWOM* channel and the respondent is inclined towards reading reviews on this channel, then the long review is preferred. However, the long review is not read if found on an
affiliated eWOM or miscellaneous eWOM channel. The opposite tends to be true for those who prefer affiliated eWOM channels, where they look for short reviews. Although many say they read the long review they also say that they only read a maximum of one or two. Most also state they skim the first few lines of the review to get a perception of who the communicator is and to see if the content feels relevant to them and if the communicator’s normative ideas match theirs.

The brand attitude is in general not affected by the length of the review, although several respondents suggest that they never read the long ones and further think the product as convoluted or riddled with problem. This could unconsciously suggest a change of towards the brand, however is not definite. The interviewees find that the influence on purchase intention depends on the price of the product, when in the decision-making process they read the review, and how well the review matches their lifestyle. In the end of the decision-making process, when the review is used to justify the product or as a final check (such as on retail websites) then it is important that the review is short and concise.

In Figure 5-5 the WHAT-Factors illustrate what makes the respondents more likely to read different lengths of reviews. The HOW-Factors demonstrate how brand attitude and purchase intention are affected. The G shows if the brand attitude and purchase intention of the German respondents is modified and the S depicts the change for the Swedish sample.

Figure 5-5: WHAT and HOW-Factors: Length
5.6 Inorganic eWOM

The fifth component of eWOM in this study is inorganic eWOM. It is due to the potential of influencing recipient’s behaviour that marketers promote and manage eWOM through the usage of incentives. Nowadays, individuals are paid or by other means incentivized to write reviews for companies (Kim et al., 2015). Given that Gen Y individuals more than any other generation find companies manipulative and dislike aggressive selling tactics (Gözükara & Çolakoğlu, 2016) it is interesting to see how this affects Swedes’ and Germans’ brand attitude and purchase intention if they are aware of the incentivization.

The Germans

Most of the respondents skip the incentivized review and move on to other organic reviews. They are aware that this strategy is commonly adapted by firms and often applied. The affect it has on them depends heavily on how frequently this strategy is applied. Therefore, their purchase intention does not change or depends on other reviews they read. Only a few do not longer consider buying the product in the future. Although the respondents pretend that their purchase intention is not influenced, the competition plays a vital role. If a substitute product is available, then they tend to buy this one instead. In general, it does not make a difference if it is monetary or non-monetary. A non-monetary reward is socially accepted by a few of the respondents. Thus, if cash is provided some interviewees think that the company forced the communicator to write the recommendation. In contrast, if the communicator receives a product for free, they assume that the firm only hopes that a recommendation is written but does not actually order this.

In general, the inorganic review receives a negative perception. The respondents obtain the feeling that the product or brand is not good enough by itself and feel betrayed. Although the negative effect is minor because the inorganic reviews are skipped, the brand attitude is negatively influenced to some degree and the trustworthiness is harmed. It can be stated that the website providing the inorganic review suffers as well.

The Swedish

Most respondents react negatively towards the incentivized review. Due to the perceived conflict of interest (between providing an accurate review and pleasing the company that sent the product) of the communicators, the interviewees lack trust in the review content. The
negative view of the review is also reflected in their view of both the company and product. However, although they are negative towards the product, some respondents state they just look past the incentivized review and continue reading. Two of the respondents argue that although it might make them not trust the review itself they find the practice to be fair as companies just want to get their product into the marketplace. One correspondent takes another approach and say it is good to incentivize reviews as this creates a larger influx of reviews on the market as more communicators are able to review the product, but that they should disclose the fact that they have been incentivized in the beginning of the review.

The brand attitude is negatively affected by most individuals. Only the minority that thinks the practice is fair or good does not have a shift in this regard. However, almost all interviewees purchase intention is lowered after hearing about the incentivization.

The change from monetary to non-monetary incentivization lessen the negative impact on the brand attitude as more people think this is a fair method of having the product tested. This does not change their purchase intention as the conflict of interest is perceived as still there.

Figure 5-6 illustrates the WHAT-Factors which make the respondents to modify their perception of the brand and the review. The HOW-Factors demonstrate how brand attitude and purchase intention are affected. The G shows if the brand attitude and purchase intention of the German respondents is modified and the S depicts the change for the Swedish sample.

![Figure 5-6: WHAT and HOW-Factors: Inorganic eWOM](image)
5.7 **Overview of Connections**

Figure 5-7 depicts an overview of the five components of eWOM and the identified HOW-factors surrounding these components. It also shows which connections these HOW-Factors influence, be it brand attitude or purchase intention, and which of the two samples (cultures) these connections were observed in. The model of the conceptual framework serves as a basis and the empirical data is used to develop it. $S$ reflects a connection that is only represented for the Swedish sample and $G$ represents a link only for the German sample. $S \& G$ means that the influences were observed in both samples, although how they are influenced is not always the same.

The arrows between the individual components of eWOM indicate observed connections between the components themselves. For example, the choice of length component was influenced by the choice of channel.
Figure 5-7: Observed Connections between Components of eWOM
6. Findings & Conclusions

The aim of this chapter is to summarize the most important results, and present the findings and conclusions. The overall purpose of this thesis was to provide an insight into how different components of eWOM affect consumer’s brand attitude and purchase intention. To be able to answer that, two research questions were outlined which are further discussed in this chapter. Finally, limitations and suggestions for further research within this field end this chapter.

6.1 Conclusions for Research Questions

In this section, the two research questions will be answered based on the analysis drawn in Chapter 5. Conclusions will be drawn regarding the components’ effect on the German and Swedish sample.

6.1.1 RQ1: How do components of eWOM affect brand attitude?

This study examined five different components of eWOM: channels, information type, valence, length, and inorganic eWOM. Table 6-1 contains a summary of the interviewees responses whether they perceive a connection to exist between the brand attitude and the eWOM component.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection to Brand Attitude</th>
<th>Germans</th>
<th>Swedes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Type</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valence</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inorganic eWOM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings & Conclusions

**Channel**

According to Gvili and Levy (2016), little knowledge exists about differences across channels in their role as eWOM facilitators. Therefore, this study examined how brand attitude is affected by channels. The channels influence the brand attitude of the German interviewees in the way that the trust of some website is perceived higher which makes the available reviews more reliable. The opinions are then based on these reviews which subconsciously alters the brand attitude. The Swedish interviewees, on the other hand, see little to no connection to the brand attitude, however they argue that the channel can reflect the target audience of a product. This could in turn suggest that they subconsciously perceive a product in a certain way based on the channel.

**Information Type**

Consumers oftentimes determine their behaviour based on the expectations of others, just as they are easily influenced by the opinion of those close to them (Park & Lee, 2008). This is the reason why the brand attitude of the German respondents is mainly influenced by simple-recommendations reviews. Subjective opinions are valuable and trusted. Therefore, the information type affects the brand attitude of the German interviewees, first by informational influence and in the end brand attitude is strongly affected by normative ideas. The Swedish find that their brand attitude is not affected by the information type of available reviews. Brands should not be held responsible for the way consumers decide to write their content.

**Valence**

The valence relates to the nature of the message/review (Amblee & Bui, 2012) and for some products negative reviews are more appreciated than positive ones (Schindler & Bickart, 2012) where both positive and negative have outcome on the consumer’s brand attitude (Amblee & Bui, 2012). The valence of the review affects the brand attitude of the German interviewees. Only positive reviews, although seen as sceptical, they believe the product to be of high quality, whereas only negative reviews mean the product to be inept and this further extends into their view of the brand. However, a few negative reviews do not harm the brand attitude but rather seems to provide an honest picture of the product and the brand. The Swedes see a similar connection between the valence of available reviews and the brand attitude. Only positive reviews give of the impression that reviews are manipulated and in such lowers the trust towards the brand, and only negative reviews indicate a brand that delivers goods of low quality. The
decrease in trust when all reviews are positive makes it so the optimal valence of available reviews are a majority of positive reviews and a handful of informative negative reviews.

**Length**

Previous literature states that longer reviews receive higher helpfulness ratings. A main rule in conversations is that the speaker delivers only information necessary to make a point to avoid confusion. (Schindler & Bickart, 2012) This opinion is reflected by the German interviewees which need more information to feel secure and prepared. For the final decision, long reviews that are often perceived as expert reviews influence their brand image in a positive way. The same outcome cannot be observed with the Swedish interviewees, where long reviews are initially perceived as convoluted, requiring technical expertise, or that the product is riddled with problems. Although the Swedish interviewees say they see no connection between length and brand attitude, their response towards negative reviews suggests it can indirectly/subconsciously influence their brand attitude.

**Inorganic eWOM**

According to Kudeshia and Kumar (2017), companies can (positively) influence brand attitude when inorganic eWOM is used as a strategy. However, this strategy may show in the short run a positive effect but in the long run the brand can suffer (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015). Looking at the responses from the German interviewees, the brand attitude is not altered because the incentivized review is skipped. Although the Swedish interviewees respond that they also would skip the review and continue their information hunt, they see a strong connection to the brand attitude. Their loss of trust in the communicator due to the conflict of interest is often reflected onto the company behind the product. Even though the German interviewees present no connection to the brand attitude, the negative perception of the review itself can to some degree subconsciously harm their brand attitude.
6.1.2 RQ2: How do components of eWOM affect purchase intention?

It is well known that the attitude toward the performance of the behaviour is one of the important predictors of intention to purchase (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Thus, the brand attitude influences purchase intention that is reflected in research question two. Table 6-2 contains a summary of the interviewees responses whether they perceive a connection to exist between the purchase intention and the eWOM component.

Table 6-2: Interviewees’ Responses towards RQ1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection to Purchase</th>
<th>Germans</th>
<th>Swedes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Type</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valence</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inorganic eWOM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Channels

Due to the connection of brand attitude and purchase intention, channels do affect the purchase intention as well. The reason for the German respondents to be more inclined to buy the product is again reasoned by the source trustworthiness. Channels which obtain a high level of trust rise the purchase intention. The Swedish interviewees find that there is a strong connection between the choice of channel and their purchase intention. The channel’s influence often depends on their trust towards channel and communicator, the channel’s ease of use, and the time it takes to find the sought-after information. Convoluted channels often affect the respondents negatively.

Information Type

Although factual information is first used by the German interviewees, in the end simple-recommendations reviews affect the purchase intention and are the main source used for the final decision. The Swede's purchase intention is positively influenced when the review is a mixture of attribute-value and simple-recommendations review. Pure facts make it too hard to judge if the product suit them whereas only subjective opinions do not show if the product lives up to its requirement. In such this component heavily influences the purchase intention.
Findings & Conclusions

Valence
The German respondents appreciate negative reviews and want to read them. However, in the end positive reviews convince them to buy the product and influence their purchase intention. According to the Swedish interviewees, the effect valence has on purchase intention highly depends on the product. For more expensive products, such as the laptop, purchase intention is positively influenced when there are mostly positive reviews and a handful of concrete negative reviews.

Length
Most of the German sample are utilitarian shoppers who think they strive to become perfectly informed before the purchase. Therefore, long reviews are appreciated for the final stage of the decision-making process and affect their purchase intention. The Swedish respondents state that the length does affect their purchase intention. When purchasing a laptop, they prefer longer reviews as these are perceived as more informative. However, it is always important, for both Germans and Swedes, that the review is well written regardless of length.

Inorganic eWOM
Only a few of the German respondents do no longer consider buying the product when the review was incentivized. The majority pretend that the review was not read and continue to look for other reviews which means that their purchase intention is not affected. However, it depends how many inorganic reviews are available of the product. If incentivization is an established strategy of the company, it harms the brand attitude and thus decreases their purchase intention. The Swedes found that both monetary and non-monetary incentivization substantial decrease their purchase intention due to lack of trust in the review content. Although the perceived conflict of interest stemming from incentivization is lowered when the communicator receives a non-monetary incentive the review itself is still rejected.
6.2 General Conclusions

Although previous literature states that Generation Y is primarily made up of hedonic shoppers (Solka et al., 2011), the German and Swedish interviewees often expressed themselves as utilitarian. The respondents reason this by claiming that they search only for products they need and shop with a specific purpose in mind.

Even though not all the respondents say that there is a clear connection to the brand attitude and the factors of eWOM, it is still clear that the outcome of well managed eWOM is beneficial both for the firm behind the product and the channel which the eWOM is consumed upon. The Swedish respondents commonly express a need for easily accessible information and would switch channel or look for alternative products if the information needed was not found.

Looking closer at the choice of channel, Google often comes up as a heavily relied upon tool in the early stages of the decision-making process. The results of the Google searches then dictate which channels will be used for consuming eWOM. A pattern that emerged from analysing the data is that the German interviewees tend towards relying on affiliate eWOM channels whereas the Swedish interviewees are more likely to consider several different channels in their search for information. This could be an effect of the differences between the Swedish and German cultures, where Germans, in accordance with their high uncertainty-avoidance index seek marketing information from trusted personal sources and in such choose to rely upon familiar websites, whereas Swedes are more likely to be spontaneous in their decision-making and in such rely upon a larger range of different channels.

Regarding the management of eWOM Channels there is a slight contradiction towards management of SNSs between this study and the one by Kudeshia and Kumar (2017). According to Kudeshia and Kumar (2017), brand attitude and purchase intention are significantly (positively) influenced by SNSs. Respondents of this study do not think of SNSs when looking for product reviews and the trustworthiness towards social eWOM channels is very low. For both the German and Swedish sample neither brand attitude nor purchase intention are affected by SNSs. However, this study, unlike Kudeshia and Kumar (2017), did not look at the recipient’s view of SNSs as a support tool for the brand.

Information type is a component of eWOM that is of importance to both the German and Swedish samples. The respondents use the simple-recommendations aspects, such as normative, subjective, and emotional ideas, of a review to see if they can relate to the
characteristics of the communicator. This, in turn, provides the recipients with a mental picture of who the communicator is and is used to determine if the content of the review is relevant to them. However, the preference towards either a simple-recommendations or attribute-value review depends on when in the decision-making process the eWOM is consumed. In the earlier stages of the process the respondents look more for attribute-value reviews and later, simple-recommendations reviews are used to justify the purchase.

Although positive eWOM should strengthen brand attitude and purchase intention (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017), this effect is limited to some degree. This study has shown that negative reviews are appreciated, if not a necessity, and that only positive reviews fosters an impression that the firm manipulates the available reviews. A common viewpoint among both samples is that all products have some sort of problems, and this should be reflected in the reviews. This aligns with Schindler and Bickart (2012) who state that an excessive amount of positive eWOM should be avoided.

When comparing the result of the Swedish sample to previous research in information overload that suggests that reviews should be of a moderate length of under 1000 words (Furner et al., 2016) a difference can be observed. The Swedish sample tends towards the reviews of 250-500 words (short-medium), as the longer ones of around 1000 words are perceived as providing too much unnecessary information, which in turn triggers the reliance of the peripheral route for information processing. This study suggests in such that reviews should be of a moderate length of under 500 words. It is only the respondents who know they can rely and relate to the communicator consider fully reading the long review.

Nowadays, incentivization is commonly practice and appreciated by companies’ due to the significant effect of eWOM (Kim et al., 2015). This study has shown that the negative effect of inorganic eWOM is minor for the Germans but major for the Swedes. The reactions seem to depend on the culture and established norms of the recipients. Regarding the incentivization, non-monetary rewards are to a degree more socially accepted by some, which is in conjunction with the study by Pongjit and Beise-Zee (2015). However, the non-monetary rewards still negatively affected the purchase intention and brand attitude.
6.3 **Theoretical Implications**

The overall purpose of this study was to gain an insight into how different components of eWOM affect brand attitude and purchase intention. To explore and describe this phenomenon, two research questions were stated and answered by analysing the empirical data based on the conceptual framework.

Many previous studies in the field of eWOM and online product reviews focused on specific components. Kudeshia and Kumar (2017), for example, focus on the valence (positive social eWOM) on Facebook, Schindler and Bickart (2012) on content and style, and Pongjit and Beise-Zee (2015) on inorganic eWOM. This study investigated eWOM on a broader perspective and took five components of eWOM into consideration.

In general, the findings of this study correspond with previous literature regarding the potential of eWOM. This study showed that the extent to which brand attitude and purchase intention are affected, or if they are affected at all, depends on the culture and the individuals perceived importance of the variables of the components of eWOM. This study looked at these variables of eWOM components and how they influenced the consumers’ choices and perceptions. The outcome of this was that the variables such as trust, functions, time and expertise all weighed into the outcome of independent variables (eWOM components) had on the dependent variables (brand attitude and purchase intention). This study also showed that there were links between all five interdepend variables and the two dependent variables.

The contribution of this thesis is in the connection to culture, where it is seen that different cultures have differing preferences when it comes to the formation of eWOM. It further highlights the importance of not excluding components of eWOM, as these, such as Source Trustworthiness and Expertise, Style, and Social Ties were recurring answers by the participants of this study although these components were not investigated.
6.4 Managerial implications

eWOM is a strong influencer concerning the evaluation of a product and can be very convincing in purchasing the product (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). For managers looking to manage eWOM in their strategy mix it is important, as shown in this study, to make sure the information is available on the correct channels, providing the right information type (or ability to sort by type of communicator), valence, and length. Several components need to be considered to leverage the effect of eWOM successfully.

Special functions that both cultures look for include methods of sorting reviews, an easy overview of reviews, and rating of the reviews themselves, and making sure that negative reviews are available. This study in such suggests strict management of negative reviews. If incentivization is conducted as a strategy, companies need to pay attention to the valence. Too much positive eWOM is perceived as untruthful. Mixed reviews as well as positive and negative reviews should be provided. The best ratio is more positive than negative reviews.

To provide more specialized insight, advise a summary for both nationalities is provided:

The Germans first lean towards short reviews with factual information to receive an overview of the product and to compare it. The review is preferred when an expert is chosen as a communicator or the communicator gained experiences in the field. The decision of the length is thus influenced by the communicator, the content, and stage of their decision-making process. Long reviews are in such needed for the final decision and facts as well as normative ideas should be included. The channel plays a role as well when a review is picked. Germans value time, convenience and experiences of the website. This makes mainly retail websites to a favoured channel.

The Swedes lean more towards the short reviews as it allows for more information to be discovered quickly. It is only when the review is written by an expert, a familiar communicator or the recipient has expert knowledge, that the recipient considers reading the long reviews. The decision of length is in such further influenced not only by channel, but by how the review is written, where the Swedes prefer a mixture of normative ideas and facts. Given that the Swedes value highly time, it is also important that the reviews are written well, easily and that the key information can be found quickly. This makes it so that retail websites are favoured, even though the trust towards these reviews is low. This depicts the huge potential of affiliated eWOM for both cultures.
In general, this study reached the impasse that no component of eWOM stands alone, nor that there is yet a universal approach to how each component can and should be managed. What insight this study can offer is that a consumer’s preference for one component dictates how (s)he will feel to another. If a consumer cannot find the sought-after information in the manner they wish to find it, a negative impact towards both product, brand, and channel can be expected. In such a managerial implication would be to automatically tailor the eWOM experience for each consumer, so that they find reviews that suit them on all components.

6.5 Limitations

The following limitations are important to keep in mind for this study.

- The study did not include the eWOM components of source trustworthiness and expertise, social ties, and review style. The excluded components of eWOM were always present in the answers given by the interviewees, although there were not measured nor asked for. Thus, these components should have been included.
- The interviews could have gone more in depth to further explore the reasoning behind the answers.
- The interviewees expertise about electronic goods was not assessed prior to the interviews.
- The non-monetary reward was limited to a product sample and further options such as discounts or vouchers were not taken into consideration. A product can easily be sold and converted into cash. This may influence the answers of the respondents regarding their opinions towards monetary and non-monetary incentivization.
- When examining the incentivization, this study did not check the interviewees’ opinions of the review prior to revealing that the review was inorganic.
- In several cases did the interviewees experience difficulties with the answering questions, often not in relation to the question itself, but rather on how to reason their answers. In such interviewees were lead to some common differences in the area to further uncover why they gave the answer they did. This meant that some answer, to a degree, were influenced by the interviewer. This could be worked around by using computerized scenarios where respondents are tested for how they react instead of how they answer or by breaking down questions into smaller segments.
Although the same interview guide was followed, the interviews themselves were conducted differently based on being conducted by two different interviewers.

**6.6 Future Research Suggestions**

As this study focused on a broader perspective of eWOM (considered five components) and its effect on brand attitude and purchase intention, not all components and cultures could be covered. Further research could examine the following:

- Conducting this research with countries outside of the EU
- Generalize the results by quantitative research
- Conduct the same study with an alternative good
- Look at the possibility of studying a service instead of a good
- Further study the relationship between Information Type and Length
- Further study how components of eWOM affect the preferred choice of Length
- Further explore the area of relatability towards the communicator

In general, based upon the mentioned research avenues a further suggestion is to study the relationship between the components themselves rather than how brand attitude and purchase intention is affected, see Figure 5-7 which is an overview of the connections.
7. References


### 7.1 Secondary Sources

Appendix A - Interview Guide English Version

Background

1. What is your country of origin?
2. How old are you?

Introduction:

We are looking at how product reviews affect consumers differently. We are providing a scenario where you are going to buy a laptop and are looking for some reviews online. And we want to know how you are going to do this. Where a review is defined as experiences left by other consumers about a product or service.

Internet usage habits

3. Do you shop online? (never, sometimes/it’s an exception, usually, always)
4. How would you describe yourself as an online shopper?
   4.1. Are you looking for products you need or are you looking just for fun?
   4.2. Do you read product reviews?
   4.3. How important are previous product reviews for you when you consider buying a product?

We will ask WHY/WHY NOT after each question.

Channels

5. What websites (everything online) do you go to when you want to evaluate a product?
6. Why are you specifically relying on these websites?
7. Why are you not relying on other websites to evaluate products?

Explanation and discussion on these types:

7.1. Why are you not looking at customer reviews on comparison-shopping or rating websites which do not themselves engage in product selling?
7.2. Why are you not looking at customer reviews provided on retail websites such as Amazon and eBay?
Appendix

7.3. Why are you not looking at SNS’s where you can find information about products or brands? (Brand/product information exchanged on SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube)

7.4. Why are you not looking at Brand/product information exchanged on other online social media platforms such as blogs, discussion boards/forums (website designed specifically for discussions), Wikis (website where the content is not only read but can be changed), etc.

8. Is your perception of the company/product influenced by the website the information is available on?

9. Does information from certain websites make you more inclined than others to buy a product?

**Information Type**

10. What are you looking for when reading online reviews?

10.1. Do you want them to tell you something specific?

10.2. Is it important to you that the author shares their opinion of the product or do you prefer the author to just provide facts about the product? (Subjective and emotional information vs. Facts)

11. Does the content of the available reviews influence your perception of the company/product?

12. Does certain content make you more inclined to buy a product?

**Valence**

13. When you are reading reviews online, is it important for you to read both positive and negative reviews?

14. Do you prefer positive or negative reviews?

14.1. Does it depend on the number of available reviews?

15. Would your perception of the company/product change if there’s only positive or negative reviews?

16. Does a positive or negative review make you more inclined to buy a product?
Appendix

**Length**

17. When reading online reviews do you aim to read the entire text, only the first couple of lines or only until you feel satisfied with the information?

*Show three images of short, medium and long length*

18. Which length do you prefer; short, medium, long?

*Say you go online to read reviews about the laptop and you see that most of the reviews are long.*

19. What does it mean for you if the laptop has mainly long reviews?

*It is not about the content / you're are scrolling through reviews seeing they are long*

19.1. Would you say this influences your perception of the laptop in a positive or negative way?

19.2. What does this tell you about the brand?

20. What does it mean for you if the laptop has mainly short reviews?

20.1. Would you say this influences your perception of the laptop in a positive or negative way?

20.2. What does this tell you about the brand?

21. Does a short or a long review make you more inclined to buy a product?

**Inorganic eWOM**

*Scenario:*

*You are going to buy a laptop and are evaluating options through the usage of online reviews.*

*You are reading a review that states some facts about a product and the author shares some positive opinions about it, and further recommends others to purchase the product.*

22. How would your perception of the company/product change if you know the author was paid in cash to write this review?

23. Would you still buy the product when you found out that the author was paid?

24. Would any of your answers change if the author was instead given the product for free to write the review?
Appendix B - Interview Guide German Version

Hintergrund

1. Was ist dein Herkunftsland?
2. Wie alt bist du?

Einführung


Internetgewohnheiten

3. Kaufst/Shoppst du online? (nie, manchmal/Ausnahme, gewöhnlich, immer)
4. Wie würdest du dich als einen Online Shopper beschreiben?
   4.1. Suchst du nur nach Produkten die du brauchst oder suchst du nur zum Spaß?
   4.2. Liest du Rezensionen?
   4.3. Wie wichtig sind diese Rezensionen für dich wenn du überlegst ein Produkt zu kaufen?

Wir fragen nach jeder Frage WARUM/WARUM NICHT

Kanäle

5. Welche Webseiten (alles online) rufst du auf wenn du ein Produkt bewerten/einschätzen möchtest?
6. Warum berufst du dich speziell auf diese Webseiten?
7. Warum benutzt du nicht andere Webseiten, um das Produkt zu bewerten?
   Erklärung und Diskussion über diese (anderen) Möglichkeiten
   7.1. Warum suchst du nicht nach Kundenempfehlungen auf Vergleichsportale oder Bewertungs-/Rating Webseiten, die nicht auf das Verkaufen von Produkten aus sind?
   7.2. Warum suchst du nicht nach Kundenempfehlungen auf Webseiten von Einzelhändler z.Bsp. Amazon oder eBay?
Appendix

7.3. Warum suchst du nicht nach Informationen über das Unternehmen/Produkt/Marke, die auf Sozialen Netzwerken ausgetauscht werden: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram oder YouTube

7.4. Warum suchst du nicht nach Informationen über das Unternehmen/Produkt/Marke, die auf weiteren/anderen online Social Media Plattformen ausgetauscht werden wie Blogs, Diskussionsforum/Forum (Webseite, die spezifisch für Diskussionen erstellt wurden), Wikis (Webseite bei der der Inhalt nicht nur gelesen, sondern auch verändert werden kann)

8. Wird deine Wahrnehmung/Eindruck über das Unternehmen/das Produkt beeinflusst von der Webseite auf der die Informationen verfügbar sind?

Neigst/Tendierst du bei manchen Webseiten mehr dazu das Produkt zu kaufen als bei anderen?

Informationart

9. Nach was halst du Ausschau/suchst du, wenn du Rezensionen online liest?
   9.1. Möchtest du etwas Bestimmtes beschrieben haben?
   9.2. Ist es wichtig für dich, dass der Autor seine eigene Meinung über das Produkt teilt oder bevorzugst du es, dass nur Fakten über das Produkt wiedergegeben werden? (Subjektive Informationen und Infos über Emotionen/Gefühle/Empfindungen gegenüber Fakten)

10. Beeinflusst der Inhalt von diesen Rezension deine Wahrnehmung/Eindruck über das Unternehmen/Produkt?

Neigst/Tendierst du bei manchen Inhalten mehr dazu das Produkt zu kaufen?

Positiv oder Negativ

11. Wenn du online Rezensionen liest, ist es für dich wichtig positive als auch negative Empfehlungen zu lesen?
12. Bevorzugst du positive oder negative Rezensionen?
   12.1. Ist dies abhängig von der Anzahl der verfügbaren Rezensionen?
13. Würde sich deine Wahrnehmung/Eindruck über das Unternehmen/Produkt verändern, wenn du ausschließlich positive oder ausschließlich negative Empfehlungen hättest?

Neigst/Tendierst du bei einer positiven oder bei einer negativen Rezension mehr dazu das Produkt zu kaufen?
Länge

14. Wenn du Rezension onlineliest, liest du den ganzen Text, nur die ersten paar Zeilen oder bis du das Gefühl erhältst befriedigt zu sein/genug Informationen zu haben?

Bild mit unterschiedlichen Längen wird gezeigt

15. Welche Länge bevorzugst du: Kurz, mittel oder lang?

Du gehst online um Bewertungen/Empfehlungen über den Laptop zu lesen und du siehst hauptsächlich lange Empfehlungen

16. Was bedeutet dir das/was denkst du darüber wenn der Laptop nur lange Empfehlungen erhält?

Es geht nicht um den Inhalt/du rollst nur runter und siehst, dass sie alle lang sind

16.1. Würdest du sagen, dass deine Wahrnehmung von dem Laptop positiv oder negativ beeinflusst?

16.2. Was sagt dir das über das Unternehmen/die Marke

Nun hast du nur kurze Empfehlungen über den selben Laptop

17. Was denkst du darüber wenn der Laptop nur kurze Empfehlungen hat?

17.1. Würdest du sagen, dass deine Wahrnehmung von dem Laptop positiv oder negativ beeinflusst?

17.2. Was sagt dir das über das Unternehmen/die Marke

18. Neigst/tendierst du bei einer kurzen oder langen Empfehlung mehr dazu das Produkt zu kaufen?
Appendix

Anorganische elektronische Mundpropaganda

Szenario:
Du bist dabei einen Laptop zu kaufen und wägst verschiedene Optionen ab mit der Hilfe von online Rezensionen. Du liest eine Empfehlung, die einige Fakten über ein Produkt beinhaltet und der Autor teilt positive Ansichten/Meinung mit. Zudem empfiehlt er das Produkt zu kaufen.

19. Wie würde sich deine Wahrnehmung/Eindruck über das Unternehmen/Produkt verändern, wenn du wüstest, dass der Autor bezahlt worden ist (mit Geld), um diese Empfehlung zu schreiben?

20. Würdest du trotzdem/immer noch das Produkt kaufen, wenn du wüsbest, dass der Autor bezahlt worden ist?

21. Würde sich eine deiner Antworten ändern, wenn der Autor anstatt Geld das Produkt umsonst bekommen hätte, um die Empfehlung zu schreiben?
Appendix

Appendix C - Interview Guide Swedish Version

Bakgrund

1. Vilket land kommer du ifrån?
2. Hur gammal är du?

Introduktion:
I denna studie tittar vi närmare på hur produktrecensioner påverkar konsumenter olika. Mer specifikt vill vi se hur du tänker kring vissa aspekter av dessa recensioner. Vi definierar en recension som en återberättelse av en konsuments upplevelse av en produkt eller tjänst, d.v.s. en kundrecension. Vi kommer utgå från ett scenario där du ska köpa en bärbar dator och du vänder dig till recensioner online för att utvärdera datorn i fråga.

Vanor kring användning av internet

3. Handlar du varor online? (Aldrig, ibland, ofta, alltid)
4. Hur skulle du beskriva dig själv som en konsument online?
   4.1. Handlar du med ett specifikt mål efter varor du behöver, eller är du ute efter att ha kul?
   4.2. Läser du recensioner?
   4.3. Hur viktiga är tidigare recensioner för dig när du utvärderar produkter som du avser att köpa?

För samtliga frågor nedan frågar vi VARFÖR / VARFÖR INTE efter varje fråga

Kanaler/Plattformar/Hemsidor

5. Vilka hemsidor (samtliga som finns online) använder du dig av när du vill utvärdera en produkt?
6. Varför förlitar du dig specifikt på dessa hemsidor?
7. Varför förlitar du dig inte på andra hemsidor för att utvärdera produkter?
   7.1. Varför tittar du inte på recensioner på jämförelsesajter som jämför eller betygsätter produkter utan att själva sälja något?
   7.2. Varför tittar du inte på recensioner återförsäljare?
Appendix

7.3. Varför tittar du inte på sociala nätverk där du kan hitta information om produkter och märket?

7.4. Varför tittar du inte efter produkt-/märkes-information som delats genom informationsutbyteskanaler så som bloggar, diskussionsforum (hemsidor specifikt designade för att möjliggöra diskussion), Wikis (hemsidor där innehållet inte bara kan läsas men också ändras), etc.?

8. Skulle du säga att din uppfattning av märket av produkten influeras beroende på vilken typ av hemsida informationen finns tillgänglig on?

9. Skulle du säga att du blir mer benägen att köpa produkten av recensioner du hittar på XX än på XX?

Typ av information

10. Vad är det du letar efter när du läser recensioner online?
   10.1. Är det något specifikt du vill att dom berättar för dig?
   10.2. Är det viktigt för dig att skribenten (författaren) av recensionen delar sin personliga åsikt om produkten eller föredrar du att skribenten bara delar med sig om fakta kring produkten?

11. Skulle du säga att det innehållet i recensionerna influerar din syn på företaget/märket i fråga?

12. Skulle du säga att visst innehåll i recensionerna gör dig mer benägen att köpa produkten?

Recensionens riktning (Positiv / Negativ)

13. När du läser recensioner online, är det viktigt för dig att läsa både positiva och negative recensioner?

14. Föredrar du positiva eller negativa recensioner?
   14.1. Skulle du säga att det beror på mängden tillgängliga recensioner?

15. Tror du din uppfattning av företaget/märket i fråga ändras om det bara finns positiva eller negativa recensioner?

16. Gör en positiv eller negativ recension att du är mer benägen att köpa produkten?

Längd

17. När du läser recensioner online, läser du då hela texten, bara de första raderna eller tills det att du känner dig nöjd med informationen du söker?

Om vi tittar på denna bilden - 3 olika typer; Liten Mellan Stor. Givet att du ska köpa en bärbar;
18. Vilken av dessa längder skulle du säga att du föredrar?

Låt oss säga att när du går online för att läsa recensioner på webben av den bärbara datorn så ser du att majoriteten av alla recensioner är långa.

19. Hur skulle du uppfatta den bärbara datorn som produkt om majoriteten av dess produktrecensioner är långa?

Viktigt att påpeka att vi inte tittar på innehållet just nu.

19.1. Skulle du säga att detta influerar din uppfattning av produkten på ett positivt eller negativt sätt?

19.2. Vad säger dig detta om märket? Vilken uppfattning får du om märket?

Låt oss istället säga att när du går online för att läsa recensioner på webben av den bärbara datorn så ser du att majoriteten av alla recensioner är korta.

20. Hur skulle du uppfatta den bärbara datorn som produkt om majoriteten av dess produktrecensioner är korta?

20.1. Skulle du säga att detta influerar din uppfattning av produkten på ett positivt eller negativt sätt?

20.2. Vad säger dig detta om märket? Vilken uppfattning får du om märket?

21. Skulle du säga att långa eller korta recensioner gör dig mer benägen att köpa produkten eller spelar det ingen roll?

Inorganisk recension

Scenario: För att avsluta så har vi ett litet scenario inom scenariot. Du ska som sagt köpa en bärbar dator och använder dig av recensioner online för att utvärdera dina alternativ. Du läser en recension där författaren skriver ut några fakta om produkten, delar några (av sina) positiva åsikter om datorn och följaktligen rekommenderar andra att köpa produkten.

22. Hur skulle din uppfattning av märket/företaget ändras om du efter detta fick reda på att författaren av recensionen var betald (i kontanter) av företaget för att skriva denna recension?

23. Skulle denna informationen bidra till att du är mer eller mindre villig att köpa produkten?

24. Skulle någon av dina svar ändras om du istället fick reda på att skribenten fick produkten gratis för att skriva en recension istället för att bli betald i kontanter?
Appendix D - Review Length Image