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The Influence of Type of Implicit EWOM on Purchase Intention

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THE INFLUENCE OF TYPE OF IMPLICIT EWOM ON PURCHASE INTENTION

by

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Glossary

Affect as Information Model (AIM): Affective reactions provide information about value or valence. Both positive and negative affects dimensions impact cognitive functioning by influencing attention, which in turn may influence judgments, decision making, and memory. (Clore & Storbeck, 2006)

Elaborated Likelihood Model (ELM): Information may be processed centrally or peripherally depending on the nature of the message and the receiver of the message. (Petty, 1984)

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM): Any positive or negative statement made by customers based on experiences or thoughts about a product or company which is made available to a mass of people and institutions using the Internet. (Hennig-Thurgau et al., 2004)

Emoji: Pictorial representations of facial features, animals, and objects are included to clarify and strengthen the message between the sender and receiver. (Derks et al., 2008)

Emoticon (emotional icon): Facial expressions represented by keyboard characters. (Shang et al., 2017)

eWOM adoption: Acceptance of information from eWOM and the impact of the acceptance on purchasing decision. (Aghakhani et al., 2018).

Explicit eWOM: Textual eWOM such as product reviews, blogs, or wikis. (Aghakhani & Karimi, 2014)

Facebook Friend: An individual who has mutually agreed to associate with another individual on Facebook in some capacity. (Facebook, 2020)

Foote, Cone, and Belding Grid Model (FCB): Products are classified on two intersecting dimensions, creating a grid with four cells: thinking-feeling and high involvement-low involvement. The order of the cognitive response, affective response, and actions to the

product will vary with the quadrant in which the product falls. Developed as a planning model for advertising. (Vaughn, 1980, 1986)

Graphic Interchange Format (GIF): A computer file that is used on the internet for sending static or moving images. GIF allows moving, endlessly looping images without using the bandwidth required for videos. (Jou et al., 2014)

Implicit/Symbolic eWOM (IeWOM): eWOM using paralinguistic cues including likes, thumbs up, pictures and hashtags among other things. (Aghakhani & Karimi, 2014)

Level of Engagement: "The extent to which the attitudinal issue under consideration is of personal importance." (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979, p. 1915)

Normative Influence: Normative influence refers to the influence of group members on an individual. Normative influence may be value expressive utilitarian. Value expressive normative influence refers to a situation in which an individual wants to identify with a certain group and build her or his self-image. Utilitarian normative influence is defined as accepting information about brands or products from others as valuable and accurate. (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975)

Paralinguistic Cues: One-click cues used to communicate online without use of words - e.g., Like, Favorite, Thumbs up, +1, UpVote, emoticons emojis, and GIFs. (Carr et al., 2016)

Purchase Intention (Dependent variable for Studies 1 and 2):

Conceptual Definition: Cognitive and affective attitudes related to willingness to purchase a product.

Operational Definition: Four questions were used to measure purchase intention. Sources for the questions are provided. (Fang, 2014; Lu et al., 2009; Mullet & Karson, 1985; Shang et al., 2017; Watson & Clark, 1988)

Social Presence Theory (SPT): Social presence (the extent to which a sender is perceived as "real," having a high degree of immediacy and not being psychological distant) will impact affect and the effectiveness of a communication. (Short et al., 1976)

Word-of-mouth (WOM): Any positive or negative statement made by customers based on experiences or thoughts about a product or company using other than electronic means. (Mosely, 2017)

The Influence of Type of Implicit eWom on Purchase Intention

Abstract

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Electronic Word-of-mouth (eWOM) helps shape consumers' purchasing decisions and companies' marketing choices. Researchers and practitioners have extensively studied textual or word-based eWOM in online reviews, blogs, e-mails, and product sites. The effect of implicit eWOM, eWOM using paralinguistic cues, on consumer behavior has been infrequently studied even though marketers often seek to use implicit eWOM to influence consumers. On Facebook, the most popular social networking platform in the world, three of the most frequently used forms of implicit eWOM are the emoticon, the emoji, and the GIF. A comparison of the effect of types of implicit eWOM on the purchase intention of eWOM receivers was made in two studies. Four theories, specifically, (Social Presence Theory, Short et al., 1976), Affect as Information Theory, (Clore & Storbeck, 2006), the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984) and the Foote, Cone, and Belding Grid Model (Vaughn, 1980, 1986), were used to frame the studies. In Study 1, four independent groups were shown product reviews that were text only, text plus emoticon, text plus emoji, or text plus GIF. Half of each group were shown a product review of candy and half were shown a product review of a computer. The products represent different levels of engagement and cognitive/affective processing. Study 2 included four independent groups shown product reviews that were text only or text followed by either an emoticon, an emoji, or a GIF. Each participant was shown reviews of three products (candy, a chair, or a computer), chosen to represent different levels of engagement and cognitive/affective processing. All pairs of groups were compared using an independent groups t-test. No significant increase in purchase intention due to implicit eWOM was found in either study. In two comparisons between text only and 1) text plus emoticon and 2)

text plus emoji, purchase intention was higher for the text only review than for the review that included a paralinguistic cue.

Keywords: Electronic word of mouth, Implicit eWOM, Purchase intention, Engagement, Consumer behavior

Chapter 1: Introduction

Social Media, Marketing, and eWOM

Social media have been defined as internet technology platforms designed to facilitate social interaction between individuals, groups, and organizations and to enable many-to-many social dialogues rather than the one-to-many monologues that characterized broadcast media (Mills, 2012). The first internet-based social media site, Six Degrees, emerged in 1997 and, at its peak, had nearly 3.5 million users (Ellison, 2007). As smart phones rose in prominence, social media sites transformed into social media platforms which encompass full sites, mobile sites, applications for mobile devices, and applications for other electronics such as smart TVs. Interest in social media platforms has continued to rise to the point that, in 2015, over 70% of adult internet-users were on at least one social media platform and more than half were on two or more (Duggan et al., 2015). In 2019, Pew found that 69% of U.S. adults used Facebook with nearly three-quarters of those users logging in daily.

Social media applications are now recognized as a technology that impacts many aspects of people's lives. Alalwan et al. (2017) identified the following areas of study on the impact of social media on consumer behavior: advertising, client relationship management, commerce, customer behavior (particularly purchasing and intent to purchase), recommendation and relay-of-information decisions, brand development, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) generation and impact. The focus of the present study is on one of these areas: the impact of eWOM on consumer behavior on social networking sites, a hallmark of which is consumer-to-consumer communication (Mills, 2012).

Hundreds of studies of eWOM have been published in the last two decades (see reviews by Alalwan et al., 2017; King et al., 2014; Wilke & Rossmann, 2017). Most of the research has

focused on product review sites, blogs, or wikis. Much less research has been devoted to the role of eWOM on social media sites, which allow multi-way communication and relationship building, features not found in other media. In addition, a preponderance of eWOM research has focused on text-based eWOM, specifically product, service, or experience reviews on review sites. However, in addition to text-based eWOM, paralinguistic cues (e.g., symbols, images, and punctuation) are used in communication among users as symbolic or implicit eWOM. The use of symbols as eWOM has not been well-studied, leaving a gap in the academic literature that this paper addresses. The focus of this paper will be on the use of paralinguistic cues as eWOM (symbolic or implicit eWOM).

Overview of Key Framing Factors for Research Questions

Marketing in a Complex, Information Rich Environment

Marketing involves a sender, a message, a channel of communication, and a receiver. In the early conceptualizations of marketing (Shannon & Weaver, 1949), there were only three main problems to consider: the technical problem (accuracy of message transmission), the semantic problem (understanding the message), and the effectiveness problem (impact on behavior). Research by psychologists, communication specialists, marketing researchers, and practitioners has shown a much richer, nuanced, and complex set of variables that impact marketing with a strong focus on the consumer as the "center of the universe" (Keith, 1960). Marketing involves sending messages to consumers who 1) have their own personalities and needs (Kassarjian, 1971; Oliver, 1990); 2) construct meaning from the message (Bandura, 2001) based on direct and indirect experiences and beliefs about the source of the message (Aaker, 1997); 3) receive messages on the same topic (product) from multiple channels (Lobaugh et al., 2015) ; 4) make both rational and irrational decisions to act or not act on the message (Ariely,

2008) ; 5) are influenced by direct experience (Bandura, 2001) and by the social networks to which they belong (Dasari & Anandakrishnan, 2010); and 6) who may become part of the communication and marketing process through consumer-to-consumer communication (Cruz & Fill, 2008). As will be detailed in Chapter 2, there are many characteristics of both the sender and the receiver of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) that influence how or whether eWOM has an impact on the receiver.

Word-of-mouth Marketing and Electronic Word-of-mouth Marketing

Word-of-mouth (WOM) has been recognized as an effective mechanism for influencing purchase behavior for decades (Campbell, 2013). Researchers have concluded that one factor that influences WOM effectiveness is whether the potential consumer trusts the source of the recommendation (Brown & Reingen, 1987). In the mid-2000s, consumers began to report an increasing distrust for explicit advertising and the media by which those ads were promulgated, while simultaneously expressing an increase in the trustworthiness of their friends and family (Trusov et al., 2009). An increasing distrust of advertising, coupled with a perceived increase in the trustworthiness of friends and family, suggests that WOM and eWOM, particularly consumer-to-consumer communication, will become increasingly important in marketing (Villanueva et al., 2008). In fact, the hallmark of social networking sites, including Facebook, is consumer-to-consumer communication (Dasari & Anandakrishnan, 2010).

Comparison of WOM and eWOM

While there are many similarities between WOM and eWOM, there are also some important differences. These differences are summarized in Table 1.1 below:

Table 1.1

Comparison of Characteristics of WOM and eWOM

Characteristics	WOM	eWOM
Communication Medium	Talk, letter, telephone, meeting	Discussion forums, blogs, wikis, text, chat, product websites, social networking sites
Form	Oral or written communication	Written text or symbols
Synchronicity	Synchronous	Synchronous and asynchronous
Type of Interaction	Direct, real-time interaction	Virtual interaction
Ease of Transmission	More strenuous, more effortful	Straightforward, less effortful
Relationships	Sender and receiver are familiar, defined receiver pool, social ties	Virtual social bonds, may be anonymous, receiver pool not well defined
Focus	Persuasive	Persuasive, diffusive, impression building

Note. Modified from Hoffman and Novak (1996, p. 12).

As Table 1.1 indicates, eWOM may include both written text and symbols. The focus of eWOM research has been on written text, particularly online consumer reviews presented on review sites, even as the use of symbols in online communication has increased dramatically (Carr et al., 2016). The use of symbols in computer-mediated communication has evolved primarily to clarify the meaning, particularly the affective meaning, of verbal messages. While non-standard spelling and punctuation have long been used in many kinds of written communication to clarify or emphasize meaning, the use of symbols in computer-mediated communication accelerated after the smiley emoticon was introduced by Scott Fahlman in a 1982 post on the Carnegie Mellon University message board. In 1987, the GIF, an image

encoded using the graphics interchange format, was introduced by Steve Wilhite. Then, in 1999, the first emoji, developed by Shigetaka Kurita, was used in computer-mediated communication (Walker, 2019). In addition to the pictorial symbols that are used in computer-mediated communication, other forms of symbolic communication including the "Like," the Favorite, the Upvote, and the +1 have gained widespread use on social media platforms. These symbols are all considered paralinguistic cues (Carr et al., 2016). In this paper, paralinguistic cues that are used in statements made by consumers about a product, service or company will be termed implicit or symbolic eWOM.

Implicit eWOM on Facebook

The impact of implicit eWOM on purchase intention was selected for study because there is little research on this topic. Facebook was selected as the platform to study for three reasons: 1) its high frequency of use, 2) the demographic prolife of its users, and 3) the changes that have been made in the platform to enhance the use of paralinguistic cues. These factors are examined below.

Size of user base. Of the wide variety of social media platforms in use in 2020, Facebook was the most accessed social networking site in the world with 1.79 billion daily active users and 2.7 billion monthly active users (Facebook Investor Relations, 2020). From its original incarnation in 2004, the number of Facebook users has risen every subsequent quarter through 2020, with the result that it is currently the social media platform that is accessed most frequently by the most users.

Demographics of user base. Although the most widely represented age group on Facebook is the 25-34-year-old demographic (26.3%), the age demographics have begun to shift in recent years with slightly fewer younger adults actively using Facebook and those aged 65 or

older representing the age group with the greatest increase in users beginning in 2014 (Duggan et al., 2015). This trend has continued through 2020. It should be noted that while Facebook use among older adults has increased, as of October 2020, only 11% of active Facebook users were 55 or older (Clement, 2020). Approximately 77% of American women are Facebook users compared to approximately 66% of American men. Marketers, then, can reach most age groups, except those over 65, and both genders through Facebook (Chen, 2020).

Platform changes. Facebook first began offering banner ad space to companies in 2006 and launched Facebook Ads in 2009, allowing companies to create and share Facebook pages to highlight a company or product (Lawrence, 2017). The goal of the pages created on Facebook Ads was to facilitate interaction between a company and potential consumers. In 2009, the "Like" button was introduced which – ostensibly – was a graphic representation of approval or familiarity. A running tally of "Likes" is presented on Facebook pages for companies, which can signal (or be interpreted to signal) a high-level of popularity or success to other Facebook users. Companies have sought to drive Facebook users to the company-specific Facebook page by asking them to "Like" their page to increase their visibility on Facebook.

In 2013, Facebook staff collaborated with sociologists and with Pixar illustrators to develop "Facebook Stickers," which are emojis, to capture a wider range of human emotions (Ferro, 2013). The emoji buttons were introduced on Facebook in September 2016.

In 2017, Facebook introduced a GIF button to Facebook and allowed posting of GIFs in Messenger. Facebook also enabled advertisers on the platform to add GIFs to their ads leading to predictions that GIFs would exponentially influence click rates to ad (Ventura, 2019).

Research Study

Significance of the Study

The current study is significant for both theoretical and practical reasons. There has been little research on implicit eWOM on Facebook. From a theoretical viewpoint, it is not known whether 1) there are differences in the factors that influence the impact of explicit and implicit eWOM on Facebook, 2) different types of eWOM have different effects on consumer behavior, including purchase intention, or 3) existing models/theories adequately explain the influence of paralinguistic cues on purchase intention.

From a marketing professional's viewpoint, there are also several reasons why the effect of implicit eWOM is important. The amount of money that United States companies spend creating a presence on Facebook is increasing. In 2019, Facebook earned over $16 billion in ad revenue during the second quarter of the year – a 28% increase year-over-year from 2018. Despite the pandemic, Facebook was still projected to earn over $31 billion in advertising revenue in 2020 in the United States alone – a nearly 5% increase over 2019 (eMarketer, 2020).

Implicit eWOM is becoming increasingly important to companies and marketers because consumers have lower trust in companies and marketers as sources of information. According to Nielson (2012), consumer confidence in advertisements dropped 25% between 2009 and 2012 while nearly 90% of those surveyed trusted recommendations from friends and family or other consumers, highlighting the importance of consumer-to-consumer communication. Additionally, eWOM can spread an advertising message nearly twice as quickly as traditional WOM (Keller & Fay, 2009). Each year since 2017, the amount that companies have spent on traditional advertising has decreased while the amount spent on digital media has increased (Gutmann, 2021). Considering the amount of money being spent on Facebook to facilitate eWOM, it is of

vital importance to understand how implicit eWOM impacts consumers and whether different forms of implicit eWOM have different levels of impact on consumers. While research has been extensive on explicit or text-based eWOM, little research has been devoted to symbolic or implicit eWOM, the focus of this paper.

Research Focus and Research Questions

Implicit or symbolic eWOM is intended to convey affective meaning that might not be clearly communicated by text only. On Facebook, emoticons, emojis and GIFs are frequently used types of implicit eWOM. This paper will investigate the impact of these types of implicit eWOM on purchase intention. Purchase intention is conceived as the consumer's willingness to buy a specific product (Lu et al., 2014). Purchase intention includes affective and cognitive attitudes that lead to conative attitude, the motivation to buy. Lavidge and Steiner (1961) suggested there were six steps in purchasing behavior: awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and purchase (See Table 1.2).

Table 1.2

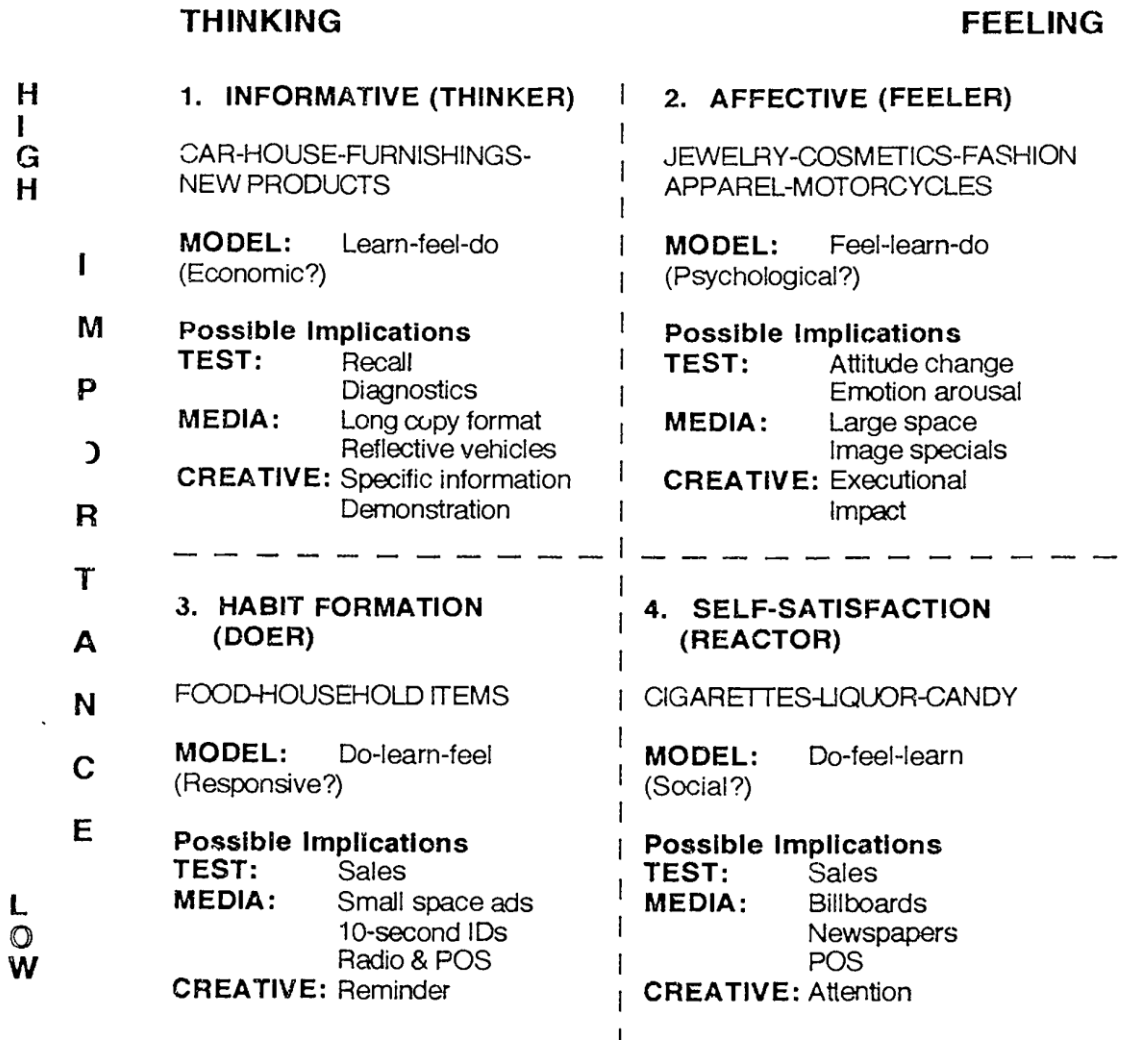
Stages in Purchasing Behavior

Stages in Purchasing Decision Lavidge and Steiner (1961)	**Attitude**	**Purchase Intention**
Awareness	Cognitive	Purchase Intention: All cognitive and affective attitudes related to willingness to make a purchase. (Lu et al., 2014)
Knowledge		
Liking	Affective	
Preference		
Conviction (Motivation to buy)	Conative	
Purchase	Action	

Other models of purchasing decisions suggest that processing of messages about products may vary with the type of product. For example, the Foote, Cone, and Belding Grid (FCB) model, developed by Vaughn (1980), suggests that the factors influencing purchasing decisions fall on two dimensions: thinking-feeling and high importance-low importance. The original model as presented by Vaughn at a conference in London in 1979 and published in 1980 (Yssel, 1994) is shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

Original Foote, Belding, and Cone Model



From the viewpoint of the FCB model, the order of the processes involved in making a purchasing decision and the type of media and information that may influence consumer behavior varies with the quadrant of the model in which the product falls. High importance products may trigger either a cognitive response or an affective response as an initial reaction. For low importance products, purchase decisions (doing) may be made quickly with either cognitive or affective responses. The FCB model has been updated and expanded to include new products and reflect changes in media (Erasmus et al., 2014; Prachi, 2020; Yssel, 1996). The

updated model is discussed in Chapter 2. Understanding the purchasing process is clearly important in understanding the impact of implicit eWOM on purchase intention.

Two studies are presented in the following chapters. The results of the two studies will be examined from the viewpoint of four theories: Social Presence Theory (SPT), Affect as Information Model (AIM), the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and the Foote, Cone, Belding Grid Model (FCB). The terminology that these models employ for key concepts used in the current studies vary. In the current studies, the term engagement will be used to refer to the concept that has also been labelled as importance or involvement in the theories under consideration. The terms affective and cognitive processing will be used to refer to processes that also have been labelled feeling and thinking.

The four theories being used to frame the current studies vary not only with regard terminology, but also in the emphasis they place on cognitive and affective processes in making purchasing decisions. ELM emphasizes the depth of cognitive processing of information about a product while AIM and SPT focus on consumers' affective responses without directly considering the role of level of engagement by the consumer. The FCB Grid Model suggests 1) that the sequence and importance of the cognitive and affective processes will vary with level of importance of the type of product and 2) that cognitive processing is more important for some products and affective processing is more important for others. ELM and FCB both place importance on the level of the consumer's engagement with a product while AIM and SPT do not.

Research Questions

The research questions are 1) whether there is an impact of implicit eWOM on purchase intention and 2) whether there is a difference in the impact of implicit eWOM on products,

which represent different levels of consumer engagement/involvement and which evoke differences in cognitive and affective processing. To examine the first research question, three different types of paralinguistic cues (emoticon, emoji, and GIF) were studied. To examine the second question, products that represented different levels of engagement, different prices, and different quadrants in the FCB Grid were studied. Specifically, the items chosen in Study 1 fall in the high importance/involvement-thinking quadrant (computer) and in the low importance/involvement-affective quadrant (candy). The products (computer, chair, and candy examined in Study 2 reflect quadrants 1, 2, and 4, respectively. Recent research has provided empirical evidence that there is more depth of processing for some specific types of products than others. Product factors such as price (Erasmus et al., 2014), perceived risk of the decision, technological complexity, and the need for physical touch and feel (Bhatnagar et al., 2000; Cheong, 2016) influence the depth of the cognitive processing. In the present studies, the computer reflects a product with technological complexity; the office chair represents a product that may involve a need for physical touch along with price considerations, and candy represents a product from the non-essential grocery category requiring low levels of processing (Erasumus et al., 2014). Using a scale intended to measure personal engagement in decision-making about products, on scale of 1(low)-7(high), Cheong (2016) found that the scores for computer, office furniture, and candy were 6.09 (computers), 5.85 (office furniture) and 3.92 (snacks).

It should be noted that AIM and SPT do not directly address the issue of level of engagement while FCB and ELM both predict an influence of engagement on purchase intention. ELM asserts that high engagement will increase cognitive processing while FCB suggests high engagement may first trigger either a cognitive or affective response. Based on ELM, FCB, and the subsequent research cited above, the products studied reflect different levels of engagement

by the consumer. The impact of level of engagement, then, is important in evaluating models of the influence of implicit eWOM on purchase intention. Other factors that are important for understanding the potential impact of implicit eWOM on purchase intention are described below.

Social presence should impact purchase intention by changing the receiver's affective attitude toward the product. AIM asserts that feelings serve as affective feedback and may guide judgment, decision-making, and information processing, depending on the context and the receiver's mood and personality (Storbeck & Clore, 2008). It follows that if implicit eWOM arouses an affective response, then there may be a change in judgment concerning a product. The more effective the symbol is in arousing affect, the greater the impact on judgment should be.

ELM predicts that peripheral factors may influence judgment (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984). Specifically, ELM posits that persuasion may occur due to central, direct cues or peripheral, indirect cues. In ELM, engagement is a motivational state – personal interest or relevance of the topic or product at hand. Petty and Cacioppo (1979) defined engagement as "the extent to which the attitudinal issue under consideration is of personal importance" (p. 1915). One approach to changing degree of engagement with a product is to manipulate cost (Hayes & King, 2014) with high-cost products considered high-engagement products and low-cost products considered as low-engagement products. High engagement by the consumer leads to use of central processing, the term used in ELM to refer to more in-depth consideration of an attitude or product (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). Low engagement favors the use of peripheral cues such as product popularity (social influence) or affect (Park & Lee, 2008). In situations in which less cognitive effort (less central processing) is exerted, affect should play a stronger role due to low engagement, low risk, or even distraction. Purchase intentions toward low-cost products, then, are more likely to be influenced by paralinguistic cues.

The specific research hypotheses to be investigated in Study 1 are:

H1: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for low-engagement products.

- H1a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.
- H1b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.
- H1c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.

H2: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for high-engagement products.

- H2a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.
- H2b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.
- H2c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

The specific research hypotheses for Study 2 are as follows:

H3: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for low-engagement products.

- H3a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product review low-engagement products.
- H3b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews low-engagement products.
- H3c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews low-engagement products.

H4: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for moderate-engagement products.

- H4a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.
- H4b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.
- H4c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.

H5: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for high-engagement products.

- H5a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.
- H5b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

- H5c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

Assumptions and Limitations

The proposed study is limited to the investigation of the effects of a small number of positive paralinguistic cues on purchase intention. Luangrath et al. (2017) have created a typology of the many types of paralinguistic cues used online and have noted that the number of cues, such as emojis and GIFs, is increasing rapidly on social networking sites. Further research will be required to investigate the impact of the expanding number of paralinguistic cues used on social media.

The study is also limited to positive implicit eWOM because the focus of the study is to determine if such cues can increase purchase intention. Study 1 is confined to two products, specifically, one low-cost, low-engagement product and one high-cost, high-engagement product. Study 2 includes one additional product selected to represent moderate price and a moderate level of engagement. In these studies, price and type of product are selected to manipulate the level of engagement (personal relevance) with the product that is the subject of the eWOM. Computers are presented as an example of a high cost, technical product that is likely to result in high engagement and more cognitive processing (Bhatnagar et al., 2000; Chair, 1992; Chang & Wildt, 1994; Vaughn, 1986). Candy is presented as an example of a low-cost product purchased for pleasure that evokes an affective response without evoking deep cognitive processing. Since research on implicit eWOM is in its infancy, it seemed prudent to use products that have been previously investigated. However, there is a clear need to explore the effect of implicit eWOM on a wide range of products, so a less studied product, office chairs, was also

included in the current research. Office furniture is classified in the FCB grid as in the affective, high-engagement quadrant, not in the thinking, high-engagement product.

This study further assumes that the results can be extrapolated to provide information relevant to the population from which the sample was derived and that future studies will be conducted to affirm or disaffirm its results. This study does not include a consideration of factors such as closeness and credibility of source of the implicit eWOM, a factor that has been found to influence eWOM adoption (Aghakhani et al., 2018) and which may, then, influence purchase intention.This study does not provide information about the motivations behind the choices or opinions of any specific respondent. All responses were anonymous. No questions were asked about attitudes toward the products or companies represented other than four questions used to measure purchase intention. There were no questions about the respondents' interpretation of the paralinguistic cues presented.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

The development and wide availability of the internet has allowed electronic communication to become a dominant force in everyday life. In particular, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become important in shaping the decisions consumers make about products and services and the decisions that companies make about marketing.

A frequently cited definition states that eWOM is "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). More recently, Litvin et al. (2008) defined eWOM as all informal communication via the internet addressed to consumers and related to the use or characteristics of goods or services or the sellers thereof. The platforms for eWOM are numerous and include social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, discussion forums, user groups, product reviews and blogs.

Companies quickly discovered that the internet had a key role to play in their advertising efforts and that eWOM was important to their marketing efforts, just as WOM had been for decades prior to the emergence of the internet. Marketing professionals as well as academic researchers turned their attention to eWOM as its importance began to increase in the early 2000s (King et al., 2014).

Research on Textual or Explicit eWOM

Numerous studies have shown that eWOM significantly impacts consumers' decision making, their satisfaction with goods and services, and the overall value of economic transactions (Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Pavlou & Dimoka, 2006). A marked increase in research began around 2001 with the number of published

articles doubling every year between 2001 and 2011 (King et al., 2014). The increase in research in this area has continued into 2020.

The number of publications on aspects of eWOM and the range of journals in which they have appeared have created a challenge for reviewers seeking to bring order to the burgeoning literature. Using Proquest, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar, four reviews of eWOM or social media marketing were identified in business-oriented journals between 2012 and 2017. The approach to creating a systemic review of the literature has been varied among these reviewers and individual researchers. This paper will use an expanded version of the basic framework suggested by Nyilasy (2005) and utilized by King et al. (2014). The framework classified research into four categories (quadrants in Table 2.1 shown below): antecedent/sender; consequences/sender; antecedent/receiver; consequence/receiver.

Table 2.1

Research Classification System Used for Review

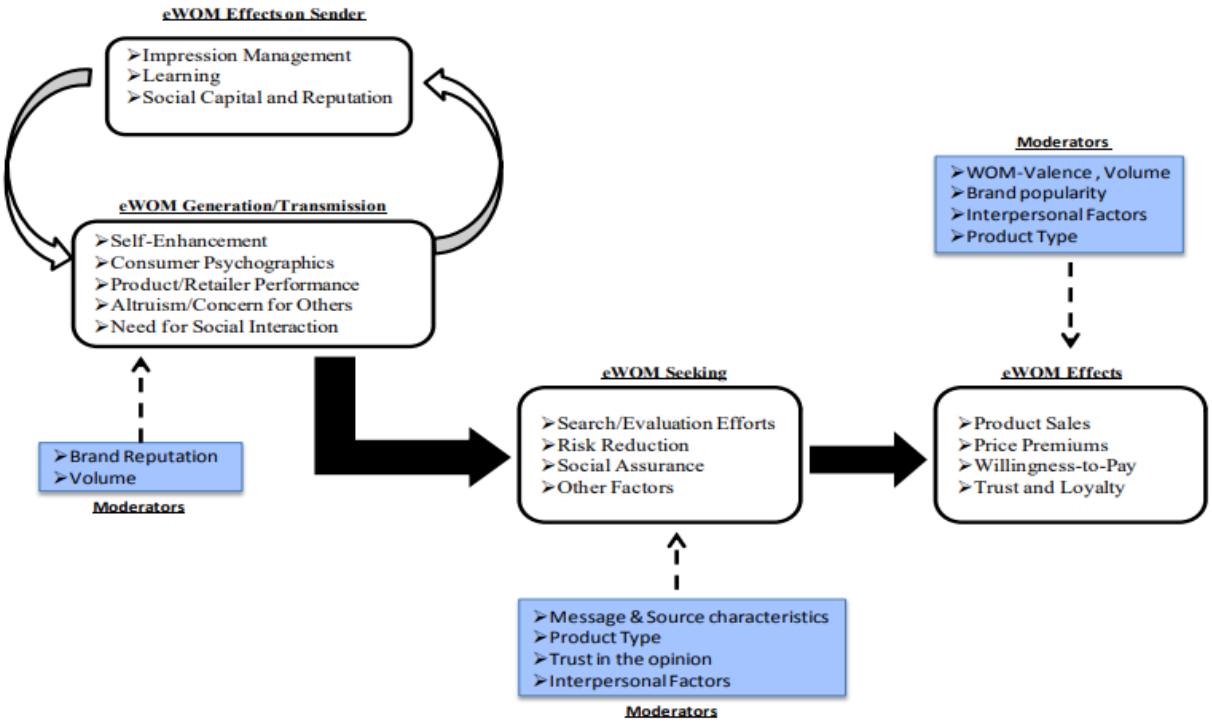
	Antecedents of eWOM Episodes	**Consequences of eWOM Episodes**
Receiver of eWOM	Why do people read eWOM? (Quadrant 1)	How, why do people respond or act on eWOM? (Quadrant 2)
Sender of eWOM	Why do people send eWOM? (Quadrant 3)	What happens to the sender of eWOM? (Quadrant 4)

King et al. (2014) conducted a review of 148 articles published between 2001 and 2011. The articles were identified by a search of 5 major databases using search terms including eWOM, online word-of-mouth, online buzz, online viral marketing, and online customer

reviews. Based on their analysis, research into eWOM at the time of their review fell into the areas shown in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1

Principal Areas of Research in eWOM



Antecedent and Consequence/Sender Research

As shown in Figure 2.1, King et al. (2014) conclude that for the sender of eWOM, research indicates that the major motivations for participation in eWOM are managing impression/persona online, building social capital within the social network, and learning about products, services, and experiences available to them (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Dellarocas & Narayan, 2007). The research on eWOM generation presented by Aghakhani et al. (2014), which includes some research of eWOM participation impact on the sender (Quadrant 4), has focused on how it enhances the self-image of the sender, including the sender's need to be unique, the

sender's need for social interaction, and the sender's concern for others. Another research thread in this area is the study of how the characteristics of the consumer (gender, age, country of origin, and ethnicities) influence participation in eWOM and the impact of eWOM.

Research has also focused on the sender's response to the way in which a company delivers quality products and services and responds to customers' concerns and questions. Customers with very positive or very negative experiences (product failure or procedural failures) with a company or brand are likely to participate in eWOM while those with experiences that are not at the extremes are underrepresented in eWOM episodes (Aghakhani et al., 2018). As eWOM has increased in frequency, companies have also started to send requests to consumers for reviews. Picazo-Vela et al. (2010) found that consumers report that one of the motivating factors behind their engagement in eWOM is that they have received invitations/requests from sellers to review their products and services.

Antecedent/receiver research

Research on the question of why people read eWOM (Quadrant 1) has been focused on why people seek information online. Studies have indicated that the primary motivations are 1) to evaluate products/services/experiences prior to purchase; 2) to reduce risk of wasting time and money; and 3) to receive social assurance that they have made or are preparing to make a good decision (Munar & Jacobson, 2013; Reichelt et al., 2014; Teng et al., 2016).

King et al. (2014) note several gaps in the literature on this topic due to an assumption that consumers are engaged in a linear, rational decision-making process, an assumption that seems to be in error. Consumers may consider or encounter eWOM before they have considered a product or service, may include new options in their decision-making process, or may have exposure to products or brands they were not seeking or considering while evaluating a specific

product or service. Consumers may go through this loop multiple times. Research has also suggested that gaining social capital is a strong factor in why consumers seek eWOM (Hung & Li, 2007). It is also worth noting that not all receivers of eWOM are seeking eWOM. Individuals who are participants in any of the major social media platforms are exposed to eWOM messages during their participation in the platform. Mere exposure (Zajonc, 1965) has been found to influence preference among and attitude toward a variety of objects and experiences. Mere exposure, then, may influence eWOM impact even when there is initially no intent to purchase a product or service.

Consequences/ Receiver Research

Research on the effects or consequences of eWOM (Quadrant 2) was the subject of 72 of the 148 studies reviewed by King et al. (2014). Since there is a feedback loop between sales and eWOM, it has proved challenging for researchers to estimate the size of the effect of eWOM on product sales, but well-controlled studies have indicated that eWOM is more effective than traditional marketing in customer acquisition in a social network (Trusov et al., 2009) and that eWOM has longer term carryover effects. Other studies have indicated that positive online reviews increase movie attendance (Duan et al., 2008) and video game sales (Zhu & Zhang, 2010), willingness to pay (Pavlou & Dismoka, 2006), and trust (Ba & Pavlou, 2002).

The impact of the valence, variability, and volume of online reviews has been extensively studied but the results from these studies are complex. While star ratings do not accurately predict sales (Clemons et al., 2006; Clemons & Gao, 2008), there seems to be a stronger impact of negative ratings, particularly if coupled with personal stories of negative experiences, than positive ones. King et al. (2014) suggest that, since most online review and ratings are positive and consumers are aware of the potential for deception online, positive reviews may be

discounted by consumers. Volume of eWOM has been found to influence sales positively. The quality and helpfulness of online reviews also increases the impact of an eWOM incident (Awad & Ragowsky, 2008; Forman et al., 2008).

The major gaps in the research on eWOM that were identified by King et al. (2014) include the following:

1. Study of the way in which consumers actively consume and process information during what has become a nonlinear decision-making process.
2. Identifying cultural differences in eWOM behavior
3. Disaggregating the effects of eWOM messages to determine why some messages are more effective than others, including the text and narrative of the messages.
4. Study of the impact of eWOM on the receiver of the message.

Also, King et al. (2014) note that the results concerning eWOM are dependent on many variables including the specific product, service, and message.

Research Reviews on eWOM after 2010

Schmäh et al. (2017) identified 206 articles based on searches of four major electronic databases for articles in English, published by a peer-reviewed journal, and including reference to eWOM. From that group, they selected 33 articles that had been most cited by other authors for their analysis. They placed studies into five categories based on 1) participation in eWOM, 2) typification of participants (demographics), 3) impact on user behavior (authors note few studies focused on the receiver of eWOM), 4) used media (e.g., social networks, and blogs), and 5) used content.

While Schmäh et al. (2017) use a different classification system than King et al. (2014), the research areas that they summarize and identify are included within the research areas

identified by King et al. (2014) apart from the used media, or channel of communication for eWOM. Specifically, Schmäh et al. (2017) discuss studies on:

1. Participation in eWOM (*antecedents of eWOM*): The motivation factors cited by the studies reviewed are consistent with those studied by earlier researcher. Desire for belonging, self-presentation, desire to help are all mentioned as important drivers of participation in eWOM research reviewed here, just as it was in earlier research.
2. Typification of participants (*antecedents of eWOM*): Gender, age, marital status, cultural differences, socioeconomic status, and degree of closeness to online communities have all been shown to influence the effect of eWOM on the participants. The number of demographic characteristics studied in the eWOM literature has increased since the review by King et al. (2014).
3. Impact on user behavior (*consequence of eWOM):* Studies demonstrate that eWOM influences decision-making, though does not necessarily lead to optimal decisions. Consumers are more influenced by negative than positive reviews, particularly for protective products (e.g., antivirus software). Results reported in this category are consistent with those reported by King et al. (2014).
4. Used media: Studies using video and music streaming services, online video games, virtual worlds, portals, online shops, online travel agencies, and whistle blower websites as well as social networking sites (SNS) have been conducted.
5. Used content (*eWOM generation and antecedents*): Studies examined the impact of the motivations of the sender (self-presentation, altruism) on the valence and quality of eWOM sent. Studies that examine the impact of perceived expertise of the sender and

helpfulness of the eWOM are included. Perceived expertise and helpfulness generally were positively associated with eWOM adoption.

The author reviewed nine research studies identified by King et al. (2014) and Schmäh et al. (2017) as having a focus on eWOM on social networking sites for information on any gaps in the literature. The results of the review are shown in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2

Exemplars of the Review Classification System

	Antecedent of eWOM episodes	Consequence of eWOM episodes	Conclusion	Gap in research/future research directions
Receiver of eWOM	Why do people read eWOM?	How, why do people respond or act on e-WOM?		
	Reichelt et al., 2014		Trustworthiness of source is the most important factor in credibility for social and utilitarian functions of eWOM. Expertise of source is also important.	Impact and processing of messages by receiver
	Vigilia et al., 2016		Review scores influence hotel bookings and occupancy.	eWOM and star ratings have been assumed to be similar measures of quality. This needs to be explored. The effect of variance of ratings needs to be explored. Results in the literature are inconsistent.
		Munar & Jacobson, 2013	Social electronic media are of low relevance for common travel decisions such as choice of accommodation and eating places for Danish and Norwegian tourists.	Cross-cultural studies Hedonic and socialization values provided by new media.

			Results not consistent with other studies.	
		Teng et al., 2016	Argument quality, source credibility, source attractiveness, source perception, and source style exerted varying influences on Chinese and Malaysian users' attitudes and intentions re study abroad.	Cross-cultural similarities and differences in the aspects of SNSs use and cultural values reflected via eWOM communication. Content analysis on online reviews and cultural norms
Sender of eWOM	Why do people send eWOM?	What happens to the sender of eWOM?		
	Chu & Choi, 2011 (identified as first cross-cultural study of eWOM)		Social capital, tie strength, trust, and interpersonal influence are predictors of eWOM communication. National culture plays a significant factor that affects consumers' engagement in eWOM.	Cross- cultural studies are needed.
	Hennig-Thureau et al., 2010		eWOM is heterogeneous for most products. Consumers are selective in their use of reviews.	Heterogeneity of eWOM about a product, consumers' selection of reviews and their subsequent evaluation
	Levy et al., 2014		The types of online complaints made by guests at 1-star hotels and response of managers to complaints are both influenced by customer characteristics.	Customer characteristics
	Sea-To & Ho, 2014		Theoretical integration of research on trust. value co-creation and eWOM interact.	Impact of value co-creation on consumer behavior, including eWOM.
	Tham et al., 2013.		Multiple factors influence eWOM adoption	Source-receiver relationships, channel variety, information

			concerning travel destination choice.	solicitation, message retention, and motivations for disclosing information. Credibility of eWOM

In summary, Schmäh et al. (2017) concluded that most existing papers on eWOM focused on the sender of eWOM communications and that there was a need for research into eWOM recipients. Of the most frequently cited articles, only one, Reichelt et al. (2014), focused on the receiver of eWOM. They also concluded that the most used measure of the impact of eWOM was its impact on purchase decisions, suggesting that other measures might be considered. Studies that used social networking sites as a channel for exploring eWOM identified other gaps, including the need for research into:

- the impact of personal characteristics of sender and receiver,
- the impact of cultural differences, and
- sender-receiver relationships.

Alalwan et al. (2017) conducted a review of social media marketing that included studies on eWOM, as well as studies on six other related topics: social media's role in predicting advertising activity; social media's impact on customer relations management; brand issues in social media; how social media can predict consumer behavior as a source of information; factors that influence customers' adoption of social media platforms; and social media from an organizational perspective. They identified 144 studies based on a search of four major databases that had been published between 2012 and 2017. The studies they identified that were specific to social media and eWOM were Teng et al. (2017), Vigilia et al. (2016), and Munar and Jacobsen (2017). These studies are summarized in Table 2.2. The major research topics are within the scope of the research areas identified by King et al. (2014).

In 2016, Mishra and Satish published an article entitled “eWOM: Extant Research Review and Future Research Avenues”. This study included a review of the literature from 2006 to 2016. Major journals and some non-peer reviewed journals were included in their study. The research studies reviewed by Mishra and Satish (2016) fall into two categories: the impact of eWOM and the measurement of eWOM. Of the 11 studies included in the review of measures of eWOM, seven focused on sales, sales diffusion, or sales rank as a dependent variable. Sales were measured by the number of units of products sold (e.g., books, movie tickets, cell phones), revenue from sales, growth in sales volume, and increase in rank of sales compared to the sales of other similar products. Other measures of eWOM cited include:

- number of posts,
- entropy of posts,
- number of ratings,
- average and standard deviation of ratings,
- review type and quality, and
- valence of review or post.

Isolation of the effects of eWOM on sales and other aspects of consumer behavior is challenging. For example, there are bidirectional influences between product quality and consumer reviews of products and between eWOM and sales. Sales can influence eWOM and eWOM can influence sales. Duan et al. (2008) have argued that studies need to use methodological and statistical techniques to account for this issue, but the use of these techniques is not common. Unlike Dellarocas et al. (2007), Duan et al., found that when endogeneity was accounted for online user review ratings had no significant impact on movies’ box office review

though the volume of reviews did. Additional studies that account for endogeneity are needed in the future.

Eight articles, not previously listed, were reviewed on the impact of eWOM (consequences of eWOM, Quadrant 2 in Table 2.1) and are summarized in Table 2.3. Mishra and Satish (2016) did not review studies that dealt with antecedents for either the sender or receiver or consequences for the sender (Quadrants 1, 3, and 4 in Figure 1.1).

Table 2.3

Exemplars of Consequence of eWOM on Receiver

	Antecedent of eWOM episodes	Consequence of eWOM episodes	Conclusion	Gap in research/future research directions
Receiver of eWOM	Why do people read eWOM?	How, why do people respond or act on e-WOM?		
		Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006	Number of reviews and average star ratings are positively related to book sales. Length of positive reviews was correlated with sales on Amazon but not Barnes and Noble	Review generating process. Usefulness of reviews may increase as important ways. For example, if reviewers respond to previously posted reviews (whether incorrect of positive)
		Dellarocas et al., 2007	Movie box office is impacted by online review volume, valence of critical reviews and gender entropy of reviewers	Diffusion model's applicability to entertainment sources other than movies – particularly those entertainment markets that characterized by heavy prerelease publicity and WOM whose intensity is correlated with the time of consumption
		Duan et al., 2007	Movie box office was not influenced by ratings of online reviews. It was	Process of decision-making about purchases and how consumer determine which reviews to accept as useful/correct.

			impacted by the volume of postings	
		Lee et al., 2008	Attitude toward mp3 players was affected by high quality negative online reviews.	Factors that influence the credibility of online reviews. Effect of the proportion and number (N) of positive and negative reviews
Sender of eWOM		Park & Lee, 2008	Number of reviews increases perceived popularity of a product. Informant role is more important to highly involved consumers, Recommender role is more important to low engagement consumers	Differential effect of quality and quantity of reviews according to review valence. (quality more important for negative review; quantity for positive reviews)
		Zhu & Zhang, 2010	Online reviews are more influential for less popular online games and for consumers with more internet experience	Impact of online reviews for purchase of goods online compared to off-line. Apply diffusion model and forecasting to other types of products
		Ho-Dac et al., 2013	Positive (negative) reviews increase (decrease) the sales of weak brands of Blu-ray and DVD play. No impact on strong brands.	Impact of variance of online reviews on brands of differing strength.
		Gopinath et al., 2014	Valence of recommendation influences sales of major cell phone brands. Volume had no impact on sales.	Explore effect of valence and volume on other types of products.

The gaps in research noted by Mishra and Satish (2016) include further examination of:

1. The interactions and influence of eWOM from different sources (e.g., company seeding online, expert reviews, consumer responses);
2. The effect of eWOM on different stages of a product life cycle;

3. Different sources and platforms for eWOM;
4. Cross-cultural studies of eWOM as well as studies of the influence of age and personality variables; and
5. The role of hoaxes and false product information on the nature and impact of eWOM.

eWOM Research: 2017-2018

A search of major electronic databases resulted in the identification of 87 articles published between January 2017 and October 2018. Proquest, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar were searched for articles, including but not limited to peer-reviewed articles, in English that made reference to eWOM. From these studies, 11 were selected for detailed examination and review based on their focus on eWOM on social networking sites and the scope of the study. The studies are listed in Table 2.4. The research reviewed falls into two quadrants of the classification system adopted for this review.

Table 2.4

eWOM on Social Networks Research, 2017-2018

	Antecedent of eWOM episodes	Consequence of eWOM episodes	Conclusion	Gap in research/future research directions
Receiver of eWOM	Why do people read eWOM?	How, why do people respond or act on e-WOM?		
		Shang et al., 2017	Receiver's resonance (number of comments, Likes, posts) with the posted information impacts purchase intent.	Impact of consumer resonance on purchase intention of a variety of products needs to be studied. Sample in the study was homogeneous. More diverse samples need to be examined.
		Yan et al., 2018	The stronger the "tie" between the eWOM	Future studies need to examine the impact on

			publisher and the consumer, the more positively consumers view the credibility. Tie strength and the volume of social cues are greater in social media than ecommerce sites	different products (headphones were studied here) and different populations (Subjects in this study were Chinese college students). Cross-regional and cross-cultural differences occur with eWOM.
		Erkan & Evans, 2018	Anonymous reviews are more influential on consumers' online purchase intentions than a friend's recommendation on social media	
		Gvili & Levy, 2018	The strength of social ties of user plays a key role in spreading eWOM effectively. Social capital and credibility, specifically, significantly affect customer attitude toward eWOM via *SNS*	Study was limited to two channel attributes (social capital and credibility) and two social media channels. Future research should look at other attributes such as interactivity, vividness, media richness, and social presence and other channels. Consumer engagement behavior may vary across product and service categories – needs to be investigated.
		Pihlaja et al., 2017	Exchanging product-related information serves a purpose other than facilitating social e-commerce. Social eWOM fuels social interactions in ways that anonymous eWOM cannot.	Future studies should consider anonymous eWOM and social eWOM as conceptually different. More research needs to be done to understand psychological and emotional reasons why consumers engage in social eWOM. Different eWOM platforms must be examined.
		Keshia & Kumar, 2017	User-generated positive eWOM on Facebook	Additional research is needed on the impact of

			significantly influences brand attitude and purchase intention of consumer electronics (cell phones).	SNS eWOM on consumer purchase decisions (i.e., Studies on the effect of eWOM on the receiver)
		Chu et al., 2018	A sense of belonging and need for self-enhancement influences consumer engagement and, ultimately, eWOM intention. (Social identity theory)	
		Kim et al., 2018	Tie strength between website and consumer drive source credibility and influences attitude toward website and reviews. Additionally, consumers tend to view websites as actors and develop relationships to websites themselves as opposed to other users/reviewers	
		Nieto-García et al., 2017	Increased valence and volume of eWOM increases willingness to pay. Consumers with higher internal price point more likely to be sensitive to increased valence	How does eWOM consensus influences consumer willingness to purchase? Different types of eWOM must be studied including user-generated content like photos, videos, comments on social networks, etc. Companies' responses to consumers' comments and the subsequent impact of that response
		Aghakhani et al., 2018	Explicit and implicit eWOM influence eWOM adoption	More research is needed on implicit or symbolic eWOM.

Sender of eWOM	Why do people send eWOM?	What happens to the sender of eWOM?	Findings	
	Wen et al., 2018		Certain cultural values are more likely to result in positive emotions which increase eWOM facilitation (intent to send)	There is little in the literature regarding emotions/eWOM especially compared to emotions and WOM – this adds to the sparse lit but more needs to be done. Negative eWOM could have equally important, detrimental effects on company performance – needs to be studied.
	Soboleva et al., 2017		Retweet (eWOM) frequency may be influenced by the industry. Specific interactive, textual and visual tweet features predict retweet requests eWOM Hashtags, photos, were associated with higher retweet rate across industry	

Summary of Research on Explicit eWOM

The studies summarized in Table 2.4 support the following conclusions:

1. There is a need for additional research on eWOM that is not textual but is instead symbolic or image based. The use of non-textual elements or paralinguistic cues in communication on social networks has grown exponentially in recent years (Carr et al., 2016) and the role of such paralinguistic cues or symbols in eWOM requires further study.
2. Factors such as consumer resonance, interactivity, emotion, media richness, media vividness, and type of media used in eWOM require additional research.

3. Need for belonging, self-presentation, and image-building, as well as the degree of connectedness to a social networking site, are variables that some researchers have found to have influence on eWOM impact, but the impact has been defined in many ways (e.g., willingness to pay more, intent to purchase, eWOM adoption, attitude toward brand, etc.). Additional study is required to clarify the role of these variables.

The studies of explicit eWOM are predominantly based on written (textual) reviews. Other forms of consumer-to-consumer communication including blogs, emails, and posts have seldom been studied. The studies have revealed a complex set of interconnections among the nature of the message and the characteristics and motivations of both the sender and the receiver on multiple aspects of consumer behavior including purchase intention. Most relevant to the present study is research that has examined the effect of positive eWOM on consumer behavior. While there are studies that contradict each of these conclusions, the following tentative conclusions may be drawn from the research summarized in Tables 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4:

1. Positive valence eWOM (i.e., positive reviews) enhances consumer response to products though the effect may depend on the strength of the brand and the type of product (Keshia & Kumar, 2017; Kim et al., 2018; Nieto-García et al., 2017).
2. The volume of eWOM influences consumer response (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Dellarocas et al., 2007). Some studies have found that volume rather than valence of eWOM is the most important factor in eWOM impact on consumers (Duan et al., 2007.)
3. Studies have generally agreed that the closeness of the tie between sender and receiver or sender and website (Yan, et al. 2018) and the perceived credibility of the source (Chu & Choi, 2011) increases the impact of eWOM on behavior. However, there are studies that do not find an effect of closeness of the source on eWOM impact (Erkan & Evans, 2018).

4. There is general agreement that the impact of eWOM on consumer behavior is influenced by demographic and cultural characteristics of the sender and receiver and the type of product but that none of these factors has been adequately studied (Shang et al., 2017; Yan et al., 2018).
5. There is increasing use of non-textual elements, that is, paralinguistic cues, in online communication and e-WOM. The effect of such cues requires future study (Aghakhani et al., 2018; Soboleva et al., 2017). Aghakhani et al. (2018) has suggested that paralinguistic such as emojis, emoticons, and GIFs may be a different kind of eWOM, implicit eWOM (IeWOM).

Research on Implicit eWOM

The use of paralinguistic cues has become increasingly common on Facebook and other social networking sites (Aghakhani et al., 2014). Emoticons, emojis, and GIFs are among the most frequently used paralinguistic cues on Facebook. Luangrath et al. (2017) have suggested that all types of paralinguistic cues influence a wide range of consumer behaviors including 1) message comprehension; 2) memory; 3) mood; 4) emotional support; 5) eWOM sharing; and 6) purchase intent. They provided, however, no empirical evidence for their assertion. Luangrath et al. (2017) note that consumer effects of paralinguistic cues "remain empirically unstudied" (p.98). Similarly, and more accurately, Aghakhani et al. (2018) noted that the study of eWOM has largely focused on text-based online reviews with only a few research studies on of the effect of paralinguistic cues on consumer behavior. Aghakhani et al. (2018) have suggested that when paralinguistic cues are used for consumer communication about products, they constitute a new kind of eWOM, symbolic or implicit eWOM (ieWOM).

If paralinguistic cues constitute a new kind of eWOM, then there may be differences in the variables that influence the impact of implicit eWOM as compared to explicit or textual eWOM. The nature of the impact of symbolic eWOM on consumer behavior deserves investigation. The current research will investigate the impact of three types of paralinguistic cues on the purchase intention of the Facebook receiver and explore theoretical frameworks for understanding implicit eWOM.

In the two studies presented, the paralinguistic cues studied are 1) the emoticon, 2) the emoji, and 3) the GIF (Graphic Interface Format). These types of paralinguistic cues were selected because they are frequently used on Facebook, enabling users to add emoticons and emojis to their communications with a single click and making it easier for users to add GIFs to posts. The impact of these cues on purchase intention will be compared to the purchase intention of a text only control group. The design of the studies reflects the concepts that level of engagement with a product and affective impact of a communication will influence purchase intention. These concepts are included in four prominent theories of attitude change and persuasion, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984), the Foote, Cone, and Beldon Grid Model (Vaughn,1980, 1986), the Affect as Information Model (Storbeck & Clore, 2008), and Social Presence Theory (Short et al., 1976).

Review of Research on Paralinguistic Cues in Computer-Mediated Communication

The limited research on paralinguistic cues in computer-mediated communication has come from a variety of disciplines, has limited intersection with the research on eWOM, and has modest overlap with the research on business communication. The research on the three types of paralinguistic cues that are the focus of this paper will be reviewed, followed by description of four theories that may help explain implicit eWOM effects.

Emoticons and Emojis

Emoticons (facial expressions represented by keyboard characters) entered the computer-mediated communication world in 1982. Scott Fahlman, a Carnegie-Mellon faculty member, is frequently credited as the creator of the first emoticon. He used the smiley face to clarify the affective content of a message that had been posted on a message board (Sefan, 2019). The earliest emoticons were the smiley face and the sad face. Emojis (pictorial representations of faces, animals, and objects) were introduced in 1999 by Shigetaka Kurita to help facilitate communication on an early mobile network that restricted the length of message (Walker, 2019).

Emoticons and emojis are widely believed to play a role similar to nonverbal behavior in face-to-face communication. However, as the use of emoticons and emojis has expanded, the meanings associated with them have become more complex (Hayes et al., 2016). In addition to communicating affect and author intent, emoticons and emojis may also: 1) show sociocultural differences, 2) be used to demonstrate the author's identity or persona, 3) serve as a conversational connection, 4) permit a playful interaction, and/or 5) be used to try to create a shared uniqueness in a relationship (Pavalanathan & Einstein, 2015). Pavalanathan and Eisenstein (2015) also found that, at least on Twitter, emoticons and emojis compete and that emoticon use decreases as emoji use increases. They posit that emoticons and emojis fill the same role as nonverbal behavior in face-to-face communication.

Research on emoticons by Derks et al. (2007, 2008a, 2008b) has shown that emoticons are more frequently used in three specific situations: socially oriented rather than in task-oriented communications, interactions between friends rather than between strangers, and in positive contexts more than in negative ones.

The limited research on the use of emoticons and emojis in business and marketing settings is described below. Even though few studies specifically looked at the role of emoticons and emojis in eWOM, the results of existing studies provide meaningful indicators that may be relevant to the use of such paralinguistic cues in eWOM.

Luor et al. (2010) examined the use of emoticons in instant messaging in a financial service company. They measured the self-reported emotional response to emojis included in instant messages. Results showed that (1) negative emoticons could cause negative affect in both simple (e.g., scheduling a meeting) and in complex (e.g., coordinating a work plan) task-oriented communications and (2) positive emoticons created positive affect in complex communications for both genders, but only for female employees in simple task-oriented communications.

In an examination of the use of emoticons, Skovholt et al. (2014) concluded that, in workplace e-mails, emoticons were not indicators of the senders' emotions but guides to how the receiver should interpret the message. Specifically, they found that emoticons had three major functions, depending upon the location of the emoticon in the communication: 1) after signatures, emoticons function as markers of a positive attitude; 2) following a statement intended to be funny, they are joke/irony markers; and 3) they are hedges or modifiers that strengthen positive expressive acts (e.g., thanks) and soften negative or directive expressive acts (e.g., corrections).

Studies in a variety of business and interpersonal situations on both emoticons and emojis have found that the primary motives for senders who use them are similar and include 1) expressing feelings; 2) strengthening the content of a message; 3) softening the content of a message; 4) making the content of a message more sarcastic/ironic; 5) making the content of a message more fun/comic; 6) making the content of a message more serious; 7) making the content of a message

more positive; and 8) expressing through an image something that cannot be expressed in words (Prada et al., 2018).

Hayes et al. (2019) studied the use of emojis and emoticons in the response of brands to product reviews by customers. In the case of computers, they found that the use of paralinguistic cues enhanced message relatability. Their study manipulated the strength of consumer brand response (weak/strong) and the presence of emoji, emoticons, or text only response. They found that the use of paralinguistic cues increased the social presence of brand messages, leading to more positive attitude toward the brand, greater purchase intention, and the strengthening of brand relationships.

In both an online study and a laboratory experiment, Das (2018) found that the use of emojis in banner advertising resulted in consumers experiencing higher positive affect and higher purchase intention. They found this outcome only for products that were considered hedonic and not for those considered utilitarian. They hypothesized a direct link between emoji use, positive affect, and purchase intention.

As of 2015, at least 16 companies had experimented with emojis in marketing. The brands noted as having successful emoji marketing campaigns include Bud Light, JC Penney, Taco Bell, and Dominos (Lacy, 2015). Bud Light created an American flag using cheering beer glasses as the white stripes. Consumers found that emoji to be appropriate to the holiday and the brand. Taco Bell developed a campaign to demand a taco emoji be created for taco lovers since there were already hamburger emojis. The campaign was well received. Uber, MasterCard, and Chevrolet, on the other hand, had unsuccessful attempts at emoji marketing. In its 2015 campaign to introduce the Cruze, Chevrolet issued a press release using only emojis. Many consumers did not understand the meaning of some of the emojis or found the emojis used

inappropriate (e.g., use of a chick emoji to represent women). The company released a text press release the next day to clear up the confusion around the use of emojis (Sorokina, 2015). The need to have knowledge of the intended audience for the emoji marketing is clearly paramount in emoji marketing campaigns. If the audience does not understand or cannot relate to the message, then the message will not have its intended effect.

Ayres (2019) found that posts on Facebook that included emojis resulted in more engagement and greater reach. Ayres compared posts with and without emojis on two business pages, Agorapulse and Social Media Hat. Ayres found positive results for the use of emojis in marketing campaigns on Instagram but found no impact for marketing campaigns using emojis on Twitter. Ayers noted that use of emojis, whether at the beginning or end of an e-mail subject line, did not influence open rate or click through rate. The emojis used varied with the post and were chosen to be relevant to the post. Ayres found that the number of impressions (displays), engagement ("Likes," comments, shares, check ins, or tagging) and clicks were higher for posts with emojis than those without emojis.

Hill (2017) examined the impact of companies using emojis and emoticons in their responses to online consumer reviews of their products. Hill asked participants in her online survey to answer questions about the brand, their relationship to the brand, the quality of the response of the brand to an online review, and their purchase intention after seeing either a review for a low engagement product (candy) or a high engagement product (a computer). Positive valence messages with emoticons from companies in response to consumer reviews produced a significant positive influence on purchase intention. Negative valence messages with pure text produced a significant negative influence on purchase intention. Hill (2017) found that

emojis used in a company's response to a consumer review did not result in a significant change in purchase intention in any of the conditions she studied.

Summary

In 2016, Lacy questioned whether the increased use of emoji in marketing had increased relatability and purchase intention. Mixed results have been obtained in marketing initiatives using both emoticons and emojis and the factors that impact the outcomes are largely unexamined. Similarly, the impact of emoticons and emojis as elements in eWOM remains unexamined.

GIF, Graphic Image Format

The GIF was developed by Compuserv engineer Steve Wilhite in 1987 and was important in the early days of the web (Konrad, 2016). The GIF allowed for moving, endlessly looping images without using the bandwidth required for videos. As the "ugly" Web 1.0 gave way to more sophisticated Web 2.0 programming, GIFs fell out of favor. However, beginning around 2007, GIFs began to appear with some frequency on Tumblr and spread quickly to other platforms. Reddit, a social news and discussion website, was also important in the rise of the GIF. Reddit's use of a corner of its homepage (the Radar section) to highlight an array of GIFs every day also helped fuel the use of the format. By 2016, Giphy, a GIF search engine platform which now provides a GIF keyboard, had 100 million users sending one billion GIFs per day (Konrad, 2016).

GIFs are heavily used in interpersonal communication as are emoticons and emojis. They are also increasingly used for commercial purposes. Academic research has investigated some of the physical properties that influence the effect of GIFs on consumer behavior but little else. While academic research and writing on the effects of GIFs are rare, marketing professionals are encouraging companies to use GIFs in e-mail, newsletters, and on webpages

and companies are following their advice (Geyser, 2021; Kakkar, 2018). Specifically, GIFs are being used to give a sneak peek of new products, to show the functionality of products with which consumers may be unfamiliar, to illustrate new products, to increase customer engagement, or simply to do what GIFs do in interpersonal communication: amuse and surprise the viewer (Bullas, 2019). The types of GIFs that have been recommended by marketing professionals include 1) reaction GIFs (that show an affective response), 2) illustration and cartoon GIFs, 3) illusion GIFS, 4) cinemographs (still photos with one animated element), and 5) branded GIFs. From the perspective of eWOM research, the use of reaction GIFs is of most interest.

Companies that have reported using GIFs in successful e-mail marketing campaigns include Chanel, Vans, Michael Kors, Bodon, Asos, and Bonobos. Other companies, including Dogfish Head and MailChimp, have used GIFs on their websites to attract clicks (Kakkar, 2016; Stacey, 2018).

The power of GIFs is hypothesized to spring from three major factors (Miltner & Highfield, 2017). First, GIFs convey affect in a concise way that words cannot for many people. They share this characteristic with emoticons and emojis. Second, GIFs can demonstrate cultural competence and knowledge of the sender. Individual internet users can mix and remix images to create a new image or choose from a large set of GIFs available on GIF search engines such as Giphy and Tenor or other internet platforms. GIFs have different meanings in different contexts and to different cultural subgroups. They provide an opportunity to convey inside jokes to one's peers. In other words, GIFs can be used in peer-image building by illustrating that the sender is a member of a group and shares its norms. Third, the humor and surprise of the GIF, enhanced by its looping nature and malleability, is a major source of its impact (Miltner & Highfield, 2017). GIFs, then, are hypothesized to have

an impact on receivers due to affective response based on humor, group relevance (group norms, value expressive normative influence), and relatability to the receiver.

Humor

While affect in general and humor in particular are believed to be important in marketing, the academic research on the role of humor in eWOM is sparse, though research on the role of humor in advertising in media other than social media has a long history. Based on a review of the role of humor in advertising in traditional media, Weinberger and Gulas (1992) drew the following conclusions about humor in advertising and marketing:

1. Humor attracts the attention of the viewer/receiver.
2. Humor does not harm comprehension of a message. It may have no effect or possibly aid comprehension.
3. Humor does not have an advantage over non-humor in persuasion.
4. Humor does not improve source credibility and may harm it.
5. Humor strongly enhances liking. Given the emphasis on affect in marketing, this is an important finding.
6. Humor related to the object that is being promoted is more effective than unrelated humor.
7. Humor depends on the nature of the audience including age, gender, and ethnicity.
8. Humor is more effective with established products than with new products and with low-engagement and feeling-oriented products.
9. Humor use does not guarantee a successful/effective communication.

The extent to which these conclusions apply to eWOM has not been established but provides some direction for further study.

Paralinguistic cues and humor

The findings on the impact of humor on consumer behavior suggest that the nature of the audience, the relatedness or relevance of implicit eWOM to the product, and the affect created by the implicit eWOM will influence the impact of implicit eWOM, including GIFs, on purchase intention. Researchers have also suggested that the informality in communication and the joking attitude that may be created or signaled by GIFs, emoticons, and emojis are factors that have an impact on receivers. Humor, then, may influence the impact of paralinguistic cues on the receiver by enhancing the perceived social presence of the sender by the receiver and the perceived closeness between the sender and the receiver of the message as well as by increasing positive affect (Luangrath et al., 2017).

Summary of Research on Paralinguistic Cues

Table 2.5 summarizes the academic research on emoticons, emojis and GIFs that has in business contexts. The sparse academic research on GIFs primarily involves exploration of the physical characteristics of GIFs that influence their impact on the receiver and the reasons for their use by the sender rather than its use in implicit eWOM.

Table 2.5

Research Studies on Paralinguistic Cue

Author	Type of Para-linguistic Cue	Comm. Type/ Platform	Latent Variables/ Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Outcome
Huang et al., 2008	Emoticons	Instant messaging		Enjoyment, personal interaction, perceived information richness, perceived usefulness, understanding of message	Emoticons had a positive effect on all dependent variables
Luor et al., 2010	Emoticons	Workplace instant messaging		Affective response	Negative emoticons cause negative affect in both simple and in complex communications Positive emoticons only created positive affect in complex communications for all genders and for female employee in simple task-oriented communications

Author	Type of Para-linguistic Cue	Comm. Type/ Platform	Latent Variables/ Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Outcome
Kaye et al., 2016	Emoticons	Email Text messages Social networking site (Facebook)	Type of platform	Reasons for emoticon use	Aiding personal expression, establishing emotional tone. lightning mood, reducing ambiguity. Emoticons considered less appropriate for use in emails than other platforms.
Manganari & Dimara, 2017	Emoticons	Online hotel reviews	Review valence Emoticon present or absent	Booking intention (analogous to purchase intent) Brand attitude	Emoticons enhanced booking intent and brand attitude in positive review. Emoticons in negative reviews increased credibility but decreased booking intent.

Author	Type of Para-linguistic Cue	Comm. Type/ Platform	Latent Variables/ Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Outcome
Hill, 2017	Emoticons Emojis	Facebook Company response to online consumer comment	Valence of company response High or low engagement product	Purchase intention Brand attitude	Positive emoticons produced a significant positive influence on purchase intent. Negative valence messages with pure text produced a significant negative influence on purchase intent. Emojis did not result in a significant change in purchase intent
Luangrath et al., 2017	Paralinguistic cues, including emojis and emoticons (GIFs not studied)	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	Type of platform	Frequency of use of paralanguage of all types: 20.6% of brand tweets, 19.1% of Facebook posts, and 31.3% of Instagram posts contained paralanguage	Effects of brand use (through corporate account or spokes character account) remain unstudied. Potential areas of impact include: 1) Message Comprehension;2) Mood; 3) Memory;4) Purchase Decisions; 4) Emotional Support; and 5) Sharing/eWOM

Author	Type of Para-linguistic Cue	Comm. Type/ Platform	Latent Variables/ Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Outcome
Das et al., 2018	Emojis	Banner ads	Use of emoji Type of product	Purchase intent	Emojis enhance positive affect which increases purchase intent for hedonic products only
Hayes et al., 2019	Emojis, emoticons	Facebook	Brand use of paralinguistic cues	Attitude toward brands Purchase Intent Social presence	Use of emojis and emoticons increase social presence, social attractiveness, and purchase intent
Bakhshi et al., 2016	GIFs (physical properties)	Tumblr	GIFs that were single user created photos, suitable for work .	Liking Reblogging	Animation, lack of sound, immediacy of consumption, low bandwidth, minimal time demands, storytelling capabilities and utility for expressing emotions were significant factor for liking and reblogging. Engaging GIFs included faces and higher motion energy, uniformity, resolution and frame rate

Author	Type of Para-linguistic Cue	Comm. Type/ Platform	Latent Variables/ Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Outcome
Hautsch, 2018	GIFs	Tumblr	Case study of Supernatural fandom	Rhetorical affordances of GIFs (linguistic uses of GIFs)	Emotional expression, transformative storytelling, inside jokes, and argumentation. "Because of their decontextualization, recontextualization, and intertextuality, GIFs offer a complex and rhetorically layered mode of communication ."

Table 2.5 demonstrates the limited nature of studies on the use of paralinguistic cues in product-related communication. Three of the studies cited focused on the frequency, appropriateness, and reasons for using paralinguistic cues in email or text messaging. The other seven studies listed are more directly related to the study of the impact of paralinguistic cues on consumer behavior, the focus of the present research, but have yielded mixed results.

Manganari and Dimara (2017) found that emoticons used in hotel reviews increased booking intent and brand attitude in positive review of the hotel. Emoticons in negative reviews increased credibility but decreased booking intent. Two studies measured the impact of brand-to-consumer communication on purchase intention. Das et al. (2018) and Hill (2017) found an impact of such cues on purchase intention in implicit eWOM communication in brand-to-

customer communication in some situations. Four studies (Bakhshi et al., 2016; Hayes et al., 2019; Kaye et al., 2016; Luangrath et al., 2017) focused on consumer-to-consumer communication on social networking sites. Kaye et al. (2016) investigated the reasons given by participants for use of paralinguistic cues on Facebook but did not investigate the impact of such use. Luamgrath et al. (2017) studied the frequency of use of paralinguistic cues on three social networking sites but did not measure the impact of the use of such cues on consumer behavior. Of those studies only Hayes et al. (2019) found a positive impact from the use of paralinguistic cues on purchase intention on a social networking site. Bakhshi et al. (2016) found an increase in liking and reblogging as a result of the use of paralinguistic cues but did not measure purchase intention. Only Hayes et al. (2019) found a positive impact from the use of paralinguistic cues on purchase intention in consumer-to-consumer communication on a social networking site.

Given the small number of studies conducted on the effect of implicit eWOM on consumer behavior, additional research is needed to determine the effect of implicit eWOM, specifically consumer-to-consumer communication, on purchase intention.

Overview of Theories of eWOM Effects

One of the challenges of eWOM research is determining a framework or theory that provides a cohesive explanation of the divergent results from eWOM research. The theories that have been referenced in eWOM literature come from a variety of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, economics, communication/media studies, and information technology. The major theories that have been referenced in the literature are briefly summarized below:

1. Information Adoption Model (proposed by Sussman & Sigel, 2003): Argument quality and source credibility influence information usefulness and information/advice adoption (Sussman & Siegel, 2003). The model has been used to explain how intentions towards a

message (eWOM) are formed and suggest that the usefulness of eWOM to a person depends on the quality of content and credibility of source.

2. Cognitive Fit Theory (proposed by Vessey & Galleta, 1991): Performance improves when the cognitive representation of a problem fits the task (Vessey & Galleta, 1991). Processing may occur through central or peripheral routes. Consumers with high motivation and ability process information through the central route (Misrah & Satish, 2016). Park and Kim (2008) have used Cognitive Fit Theory along with Elaboration Likelihood Model, to explain why a message with many arguments can be accepted if a consumer thinks that "more is better," without deep processing of the message.
3. Social Exchange Theory (proposed by Homans, 1958): Relationships are formed using a subjective cost-benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives (Emerson, 1976). It has been used to understand the motives for generating eWOM in online consumer platforms (Cheung & Lee, 2012; Munzel & Kunz, 2014).
4. Social Contagion Theory: The origin of social contagion theory can be traced at least as far back to James Baldwin (1894). More modern conceptualizations have been made by Levy and Nail (1993). At its core, it is a sociological and psychological theory that groups or crowds have a larger effect on individuals than single individuals have. The social contagion theory helps explain the spread and diffusion of eWOM among consumers. Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels (2009) explained the growth of online communities on Facebook. As the size of the group grows its influence increases (Christakis & Fowler, 2013).
5. Multi Flow Model (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1970): Information flows from media in many directions with people passing on their own interpretation of the information. People are

influenced in opinion formation by opinion leaders who have or are perceived to have more knowledge or expertise. In the eWom literature, opinion leadership in the eWOM literature has been used to explain the spread of messages and to identify the individuals who should be targeted first to expand the messages (Myers & Robertson, 1972, p. 41; Phelps et al., 2004). Opinion leaders are also influenced by the opinions of other opinion leaders. (Koufaris, 2002)

6. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984): Persuasion may occur due to central, direct cues or peripheral, indirect cues. High engagement of the consumer leads to use of the central route. Low engagement favors the use of peripheral cues such as product popularity (Park & Lee, 2008). This model has become frequently referenced in current eWOM research.
7. Foote, Cone, and Belding Grid Model (FCB) (Vaughn, 1980, 1986): FCB was developed specifically as a model of consumer purchasing behavior that could provide a guide to how advertising might impact purchasing. The two dimensions on which products are classified are engagement (high-low) and cognitive-affective processing. The model suggests that the sequence of processes involved in a purchase decision varies with the type of product.
8. Affect as Information Model (AIM) (proposed by Storbeck & Clore, 2008): The affect as information hypothesis focuses on the information that affect provides, rather than the feelings themselves. Affective reactions provide information about value or valence. Both positive and negative affects dimensions impact cognitive functioning by influencing attention, which in turn may influence judgments, decision making, and memory. In some situations, judgments are made based on how we feel about a given object, person, or

event rather than the specific attributes of the object, person, or event. There is, then, global processing rather than local processing, and mental heuristics or stereotypes may guide judgement (Storbeck & Clore, 2008). The AIM theory has also been frequently referenced in eWOM research and will be explored in detail in Chapter 3.

9. Social Presence Theory (SPT) (proposed by Short et al., 1976): The theory posits that mediated communication is more effective when the sender of the communication is perceived as psychological present or real in the communication. Cues that increase immediacy and reduce the psychological distance between the sender and the receiver (e.g., cues that increase perceiver similarity or attractiveness) will impact affective attitude and lead to greater acceptance of the message that is being sent. Social Presence Theory has recently been used to explain the results of a study of implicit eWOM (Hayes et al., 2019).

Theories Selected for Use

ELM, FCB, AIM, and SPT are the four theories that will be used to evaluate the results of the studies presented here because of their relevance in explaining the role of paralinguistic in influencing purchase intention and, particularly in the case of ELM and SPT, the frequency of citations that they have in the professional literature on marketing. The four theories reflect differences in 1) emphasis on cognitive and affective processes in attitude change on purchase intention and 2) on the role of consumer engagement in making a purchase decision.

ELM is a well-developed theory that has been very influential in eWOM research (2,170 Google Scholar references since 2015). As Petty and Wegener (1999) note, the results of research on attitude change and persuasion have been complex and sometimes contradictory. ELM incorporates several principles that attempt to provide a framework to organize and explain

the complexity of research on attitude change and has been applied extensively to the explanation of the complex pattern of results that has emerged from research on eWOM (Albarracin & Shavitt, 2018; Petty et al., 2003; Wood, 2000). Its primary focus is on the level of cognitive processing of the persuasive message. ELM suggests that level of cognitive processing is the key factor in attitude change. When there is a low level of engagement, there will be peripheral processing of information. Peripheral processing may result in increased use of heuristics and an increased impact of affect on attitude change. When there is a high level of engagement there will be more specific processing. Cognitive processing and attitude will be more important than affective changes.

FCB was developed as a model for advertising planning and has been referenced in eWOM research available on Google Scholar 30 times since 2012. FCB attempts to provide guidance on the type of messages and media that would influence consumer purchasing behavior and is a specific model for consumer behavior while ELM is a general model of attitude change. As in the case of ELM, FCB posits that the degree of engagement with a product will impact the way in which consumers respond to messages about the product but suggests that high engagement may lead to initial deep cognitive processing (thinking) for some products but may first trigger an affective response for other products. Products that trigger low engagement may lead to consumers making a purchase before they engage in either deep cognitive processing or experiencing a strong affective response, depending on the nature of the product.

AIM has been less referenced (31 Google Scholar references since 2015) in the eWOM literature than ELM but seems likely to have relevance for understanding the impact of paralinguistic cues on consumer behavior since paralinguistic cues are hypothesized to influence affect. AIM includes a set of principles that focus on the role of affect as information. It has

provided a partial framework for early research on implicit eWOM (Aghakhani et al., 2014; Aghakhani et al., 2018). Affect may serve as a source of information which influences a consumer's response to a persuasive message.

SPT is frequently referenced in the marketing literature (1,120 references in Google Scholar since 2016). Its focus is on the affective component of attitude change. It has been used to explore the impact of implicit eWOM on purchase intention (Hayes et al., 2019). The theory suggests that text or symbols that increase immediacy between the sender and the receiver (e.g., cues that increase perceiver similarity or attractiveness) will impact affective attitude and lead to greater acceptance of the message that is being sent.

Exploration of the Four Theories

Social Presence Theory

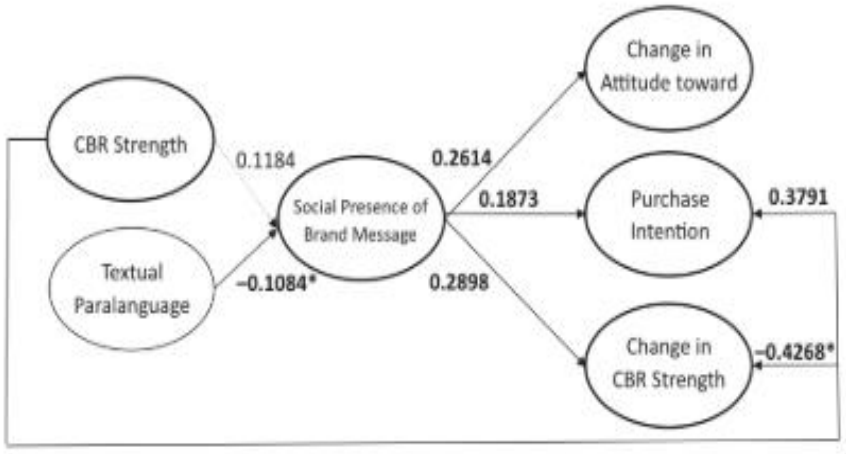
Social Presence Theory (SPT) is influential in thinking about mediated communication in the online environment, particularly in online learning Since 2016, there have been 1,120 Google Scholar references for social presence theory and marketing. Social presence was originally defined by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976) as "the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships" (p. 65). More recently, Gunawardena and Zittle (1995) have defined social presence as "the degree to which a person is perceived as a 'real person' in mediated communication" (p. 151).

According to Short et al. (1976), social presence as a construct is primarily composed of two main components: intimacy (Argyle & Dean, 1965) and immediacy (Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968). Intimacy in a communication medium is influenced by factors, such as: physical distance, eye contact, smiling, and personal topics of conversation (Argyle & Dean, 1965).

In the model proposed by Hayes et al. (2019, p.19), it is hypothesized that paratextual cues impact the social presence of a message. As the social presence of a message increases, the impact on purchase intent also increases. This model also suggests that the consumer brand relationship (closeness of relationship) impacts purchase intent. The model is shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2

Research Model



Note. Hayes et al. (2019, p.19).

From the viewpoint of Social Presence Theory (SPT), paralinguistic cues make communication more real and more relatable. Paralinguistic cues can provide some aspects of intimacy that are not present in text-only mediated communication. Immediacy has been defined as the psychological distance that a communicator puts between himself and the receiver of the communication (Cobb, 2009; Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968). Paralinguistic cues are perceived as creating more informal communication, thus reducing the distance between the sender and the receiver to the extent that paralinguistic cues reduce the psychological distance between the communicator and the receiver and increase the perceived intimacy between the two, the communication will have more impact on the receiver. If a receiver perceives that he or she has

shared values or perspectives, the psychological distance between the sender and receiver will also be reduced and the social attractiveness of the sender will be increased (Fang, 2014; Hsu & Tran, 2013).

Research has also shown that paralinguistic cues are more frequently used in intimate conversations than in professional ones, so it seems reasonable to suggest that they reduce the psychological distance between the sender and the receiver. Pavalanathan and Einstein (2015) assert that users often use emojis and emoticons to attempt to create a uniqueness or special quality in a relationship and to introduce humor into a conversation. In the case of eWOM, if the communication is more effective, an impact on purchase intention should be observed. Social Presence Theory predicts that paralinguistic cues impact social presence which in turn impacts affective attitude toward the product and, finally, purchase intention. It also follows that susceptibility to normative influence, particularly value expressive normative intent, would moderate the effect of paralinguistic cues on increasing social presence and their effectiveness in influencing purchase intention (Das et al., 2018).

Affect as Information Model

AIM has been less frequently referenced (31 Google Scholar references since 2015) than ELM or Social Presence Theory but seems likely to have relevance for understanding symbolic eWOM. AIM provides a set of principles that do focus on the role of affect in information processing and attitude change. Clore et al. (2001) have summarized the major principles of AIM as follows.

1. The Information Principle: Feelings serve as affective feedback that guides judgment, decision-making, and information processing. The affect is experienced as a feeling of

goodness or badness. It is experiential (not conceptual) information value depends on the object to which this experience of goodness or badness is attributed.

2. The Attribution Principle: The information value of affect and its cognitive consequences depends on the attribution of the experienced affect. If the affect is attributed to a specific object, then judgment of the object is influenced. Attribution to a source gives affective feeling information value.
3. The Affective Judgment Principle: When an individual is object-focused, affective reactions may be experienced as liking or disliking, leading to higher or lower evaluation of that object of judgment.
4. The Immediacy Principle: To guide immediate action, feelings must reflect current perceptual and cognitive content. There must be a salient object to which the affect can be attributed but the feelings depend on an individual's general mood, personality, and cognition as well as the stimulus.
5. The Episodic Constraint Principle: Lack of awareness of the sources of affect leaves their potential meanings unconstrained. The resulting feelings and concepts are experienced as spontaneous personal reactions to whatever is in focus at the time. When the meaning of feelings is constrained by the salience of a specific source, then it is unlikely that there will be an attribution to another source.
6. Level of Focus Principle: Affect experienced as feedback about the likelihood of success or failure should also influence the global versus local focus of processing. Positive affect should lead to global processing. Negative affect should result in more local processing (scrutiny of specific aspects of an object).

According to AIM, when there is an object focus (e.g., a product or a service), no explicit content other than the meaning attributed by the receiver and a generally positive valence (e.g., a Like from a Friend) attached to the object, global processing is likely to be used rather than more analytic processing (Principles 1, 2, 3, and 4). When peripheral processing occurs, then heuristics such as “How do I feel about that?”, “So many people like it, so it must be good.”, or “People I like like it so it must be good” come into play. AIM predicts that a high level of engagement (interest) should increase the effect of paralinguistic cues that arouse affect and that susceptibility to value expressive normative influence should moderate the effect.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model is generally described as a dual process theory of persuasion that indicates there are two routes to attitude change, a central route, and a peripheral route. ELM theorists argue that there is a continuum of elaboration in decision-making and persuasion. According to Petty and Wegener (1999), the theoretical assumptions of ELM are as follows.

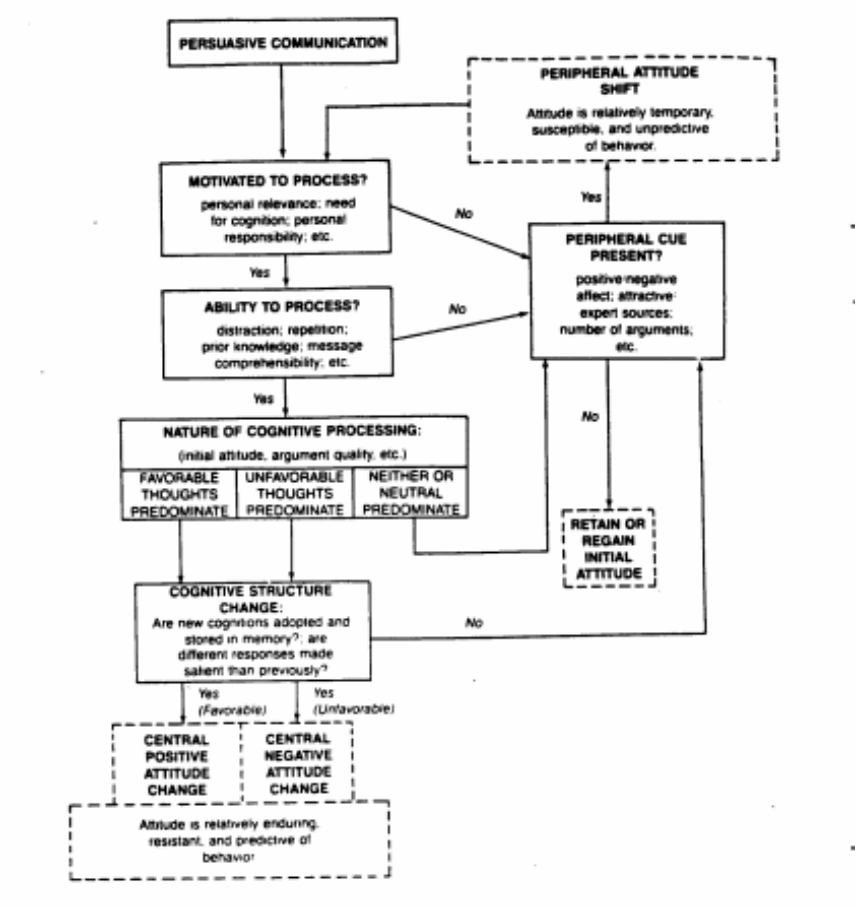
1. Postulate 1: The Correctness Hypothesis: People are motivated to come to a subjectively correct decision. They may be biased in their assessment of evidence, but people are rarely motivated to be biased.
2. Postulate 2: The Elaboration Continuum Postulate. At one end of the continuum is central processing (critical thinking) which involves the use of information by consumers to make a reasoned judgment. At the other end of the continuum is peripheral processing, which involves less scrutiny of information and more reliance on the use of heuristics of self-perception. The type of processing depends on motivation (personal relevance, need for cognition) and ability.

3. Postulate 3: The Multiple Roles Postulate: Variables can affect attitude change in three ways and a single variable may influence attitude change in more than one of these ways. The three roles are 1) serving as persuasive arguments, 2) serving as peripheral cues, and 3) influencing the degree of argument elaboration.
4. Postulate 4: The Objective Processing Postulate: Variables influencing motivation (e.g., increased personal relevance) or ability to process (e.g., distraction) may either increase or decrease argument elaboration/information processing.
5. Postulate 5: The Biased Processing Postulate: Motivation and ability may affect message processing in a biased way to produce either a positive or negative impact. In the case of motivational factors, biased processing occurs when one position is already preferred over another. The nature of the impact will depend on the motivation (e.g., impression management, reactance, self-affirmation, balance) that is operating. Petty and Wegener (1999) assert that an individual's perceived knowledge, rather than his/her actual knowledge may influence judgment about how much a message needs to be processed.
6. Postulate 6: The Tradeoff Postulate: As an individual moves along the elaboration continuum (from low to high) the impact of peripheral processing on judgment decreases and the impact of central processing increases, though both occur at most points along the continuum. The impact of variables serving peripheral cues (e.g., source credibility, source expertise) is reduced as elaboration is increased.
7. Postulate 7: The Attitude Strength: Attitudes changed by central processing are stronger than attitudes changed by peripheral processing due to greater cognitive processing (quantitative effect). The effect of a heuristic or an inference (e.g., self-perception, i.e., inferring one's attitudes from one's behavior) will be lower (qualitative effect).

A summary of the Elaboration Likelihood Model is shown in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3

Central and peripheral routes of persuasion



Note. Petty & Cacioppo, 1984

From the viewpoint of ELM, exposure to paralinguistic cues provides no explicit information but since it is the perceived knowledge rather than actual knowledge (Postulate 5), inferences made based on exposure to paralinguistic cues may influence judgment about how much processing is required. If only a peripheral level of elaboration is triggered (Postulates 2 and 6), then peripheral cues such as paralinguistic cues may have an influence. Paralinguistic cues may impact perceived message relevance and affect which then may influence purchase intention. On the other hand, if there is a high level of engagement, then central processing will be triggered and peripheral cues

such as paralinguistic cues will have less impact (Barden & Petty, 2008; Bitner & Obermiller, 1985; Cacioppo et al., 1986; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). ELM predicts that there will be little effect of paralinguistic cues on purchase intention for high engagement products.

FCB Grid Model

The FCB Grid Model hypothesizes that consumers respond to products along two main dimensions: a thinking/cognitive-feeling/affective dimension and a low engagement-high engagement dimension. Products, then, fall into one of four quadrants: a high engagement, thinking quadrant (Quadrant 1); a high engagement, affective processing quadrant (Quadrant 2); a low engagement, thinking quadrant (Quadrant 3); or a low engagement, affective processing quadrant (Quadrant 4). Cognitive, affective, and action decisions occur in different sequences in the four quadrants. For products in Quadrant 1, cognitive processing occurs first, followed by an affective response and a decision to act. For Quadrant 2, an affective response occurs, followed by information processing about the product and a decision to act. For products in Quadrant 3, consumers may buy a product, process information about the product and then have an affective response. For products in Quadrant 4, a decision to purchase comes first, followed by an affective response and cognitive processing about the product. Paralinguistic cues should, then, have the most influence on Quadrant 4 products. While paralinguistic cues may influence the affective response to Quadrant 2 products, consumers will still engage in cognitive information processing before acting on the product. An updated version of the FCB model with product examples are presented in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6

Updated Foote, Cone and Belding Grid Model

	Thinking	Feeling
High Engagement	**Quadrant 1** **Type of product:** expensive products with a high importance or high risk to the consumer **Examples:** life insurance, camera, household appliances, computers, new products **Process:** Learn, feel, do	**Quadrant 2** **Type of product:** expensive products with emotional importance to the consumer **Examples:** sports car, perfume, designer dresses, antiques, furniture **Process:** Feel, learn, do
Low Engagement	**Quadrant 3** **Type of product:** everyday essentials. Not expensive but needed. Habitual purchases. **Example:** household cleaners, insecticides, razors **Process**: Do, learn, feel	**Quadrant 4** **Type of product**: non-essential products with affective importance to the consumer. Purchases for self-satisfaction. **Examples:** Fast food, casual wear, confectionery items (e.g., candy) **Process:** Do, feel, learn

Note. Adapted from Vaughn, 1986; Yssel, 1996; Erasmus, Donoghue, & Dobbelstein, 2014; and Prachi, 2020.

Summary and Conclusion: Approaches to Understanding the Impact of Implicit eWOM

ELM, FCB, AIM, and SPT provide frameworks for conceptualizing factors that may impact the influence of implicit eWOM on purchase intention. The models differ in the roles that are assigned to cognitive and affective factors in facilitating changes in purchase intention. ELM places primacy on cognitive processes, while AIM and SPT place primary emphasis on affective processes. FCB suggests that the importance of cognitive processing and affective response depends upon the type of product being considered. ELM and FCB predict that level of

engagement with a product will influence whether peripheral cues will impact purchase intention. From the perspective of ELM, high-engagement products will cause consumers to engage in central, deep processing, Peripheral cues such as emoticons, emojis and GIFs should have little influence on high-engagement products. FCB specifies that certain types of products will cause consumers to think more about the product and engage more with it. Expensive, novel products such as computers are classified in the thinking, high-engagement quadrant. Other types of products will result in cognitive processing before affective response but will not evoke high engagement. Such products include products that are essential and have to be purchased regularly (e.g., household cleaners). Still other products will cause consumers to have an initial affective response, with some of those products invoking high engagement (e.g., expensive furniture or clothing) and others low engagement (e.g., candy). From the perspective of FCB, paralinguistic cues would be most likely to influence purchase intention toward products that fall in the affective processing/low-engagement category of products and least likely to influence products that fall in the thinking, high-engagement category. FCB also appears to suggest that paralinguistic cues may influence purchase intention toward products in the high engagement, high affect quadrant.

The two studies presented seek to investigate whether predictions that follow from these frameworks are supported.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research consists of two studies. The two studies address 1) the basic lack of research on the impact of implicit eWOM on consumer behavior, specifically purchase intention, and 2) the lack of research on the different types of paralinguistic cues used as implicit eWOM. Study 1 investigates the impact of positive implicit eWOM on the purchase intention toward two products: a low-cost, low-engagement product (a chocolate candy bar) and a high-cost, high-engagement product (a computer) using a between-subjects design. Study 2 investigates the impact of positive implicit eWOM on purchase intention toward three products, a low-engagement product (a chocolate candy bar), a moderate-engagement product (an office chair) and a high-engagement product (a computer). All subjects were exposed to reviews of all three products. The studies differ in whether subjects saw reviews for one or three products, the level of engagement of the products studied, and the strength of the positive valence of the review to which the paralinguistic cues were added. The current research focuses on the impact of three types of implicit eWOM (emoticon, emoji, and GIF) on purchase intention and the adequacy of four models: Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM); Foote, Cone, and Belding Grid Model (FCB); Affect as Information Model (AIM); and Social Presence Theory (SPT) in explaining the impact of implicit eWOM on purchase intention.

Study 1

The research hypotheses that were tested in Study 1 are described below:

H1: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for low-engagement products.

H2: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for high-engagement products.

Research hypothesis 1 was derived from all four theories that have been discussed. ELM asserts that consumers will be less engaged in processing product information for low-cost products that carry little financial risk. FCB makes a similar prediction based on the concept that low engagement products may result in consumers making buying decisions ("doing") before there is much cognitive processing or affective response. Such a response will lead consumers to rely more on peripheral cues, including implicit eWOM, as they act.

From the AIM perspective, emoticons, emojis, and GIFs should increase the affective response of the receiver, providing additional information and increasing purchase intention. From the viewpoint of SPT, paralinguistic cues should reduce the distance between the sender and receiver, increasing social presence and enhancing purchase intention. H1, H2, and related individual hypotheses for each type of implicit eWOM studied follow.

H1: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for low-engagement products.

- H1a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.
- H1b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.
- H1c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.

Research hypothesis 2 was derived largely from AIM. Paralinguistic cues used as eWOM arouse affect. From the viewpoint of AIM, affect provides additional information to the consumer and so should influence purchase intention. SPT seems to make a similar prediction. From the viewpoint of ELM, paralinguistic cues should have less influence on a high-cost product. Research hypothesis 2 and the individual hypotheses for each type of implicit eWOM studied follow.

H2: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for high-engagement products.

- H2a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.
- H2b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

  H2c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

Method

The specific products chosen for study as low-engagement and high-engagement products, respectively, were chosen following Hayes and King (2014) and Hill (2017) and were consistent with empirical research (Erasumus et al., 2014). The products, computers and candy, fall in the high-engagement, high-thinking quadrant of the FCB grid and in the low-engagement, low-affect quadrant of the FCB grid, respectively. Well-known products from each quadrant were chosen, specifically Hersey's candy and Apple Computers. These products were also used

by Hill (2017) in her study of the influence of the use of emojis and emoticons in the responses of companies to online reviews by consumers.

The text reviews of the products are modifications of Amazon reviews used by Hill (2017). The reviews were modified to eliminate information about gender and age. Hill's study measured the effect of positive and negative emoji or emoticon use in the response that a company made to online consumer products on brand relationship, perceived company quality and purchase intention. This study focused on the use of three types of paralinguistic cues in consumer-to-consumer communication, specifically in a consumer product review on the purchase intention of the reader. The three paralinguistic cues and the reasons for their selection are:

1. The original smiley face emoticon was chosen as the emoticon for study.
2. The smiling face with smiling eyes was selected as the emoji for study. It is one of the top two positive emojis used on Facebook (Moreau, 2020).
3. The GIF selected for this study is a "thumbs up" graphic moving up and down.

Study 1 is intended to determine if paralinguistic cues used as implicit eWOM impact purchase intention on high- and low-engagement products and, if so, if there is a difference among types of paralinguistic cues in their impact on purchase intention. The design is summarized in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1

Summary of Design for Study 1

Engagement Conditions	Implicit eWOM Condition Between Subjects Comparisons			
Low engagement	Text only (control)	Text plus positive emoticon	Text plus positive emoji	Text plus positive GIF
High engagement	Text only (control)	Text plus positive emoticon	Text plus positive emoji	Text plus positive GIF

To clarify, the between subject comparisons are between 1) Text only (the control group for all other groups) and 2) Text plus Emoticon (smiley face); 3) Text plus Emoji (smiley emoji) and 4) Text plus GIF (positive GIF, moving thumbs up).

The participants in each of the four conditions were shown one of the following two product reviews:

1. Candy: Absolutely delicious! I love Hershey's chocolate candy and it is a good value for the price! Every time the chocolate is smooth and creamy. Highly recommend.
2. Computer: This is a fantastic laptop. I have been using a different brand but when the screen shattered after a fall, I decided to try an Apple. With the Apple, you get more power and better battery life with the same performance as last year. I regularly have Word, Excel, Acrobat Pro and Edge/Chrome open- with 10 tabs active and doesn't overload the performance. The construction of laptop is great. The aluminum build feels great and sturdy. I have used it for 2 working days straight on a battery charge.

After each review, the participants were asked to respond on a 5-point scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) to the 4 questions listed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Questions Used to Assess Purchase Intention

Question	Source
1. Given the chance, I would consider purchasing this product in the future.	Shang, Wu, & Sie, 2017
2. Given the opportunity, I intend to purchase this product.	Lu, Zhao, &Wang, 2009
3. It is likely that I will purchase this product in the near future.	
4. I am interested in this product.	Adapted from Fang, 2014; Watson & Clark, 1988

Note. Question numbering, but not wording, differed in the Study 1 and Study 2 surveys.

The studies from which the questions were selected identified the questions as measures of purchase intention and used a question format that did not refer to the source of the information. The format of the question was important for the present research since the reviews in Study 1 and 2 were from unknown sources and not social networking friends. Studies, such as Aghakhani et al., that were relevant to the issue of the impact of paralinguistic cues on consumer behavior 1) used formats that referred to the source of the information, 2) used question stems that were not compatible with the present study, or 3) were intended to assess related variables (e.g., eWOM adoption) but not specifically purchase intention. The questions selected were found by the authors of the studies listed in Table 3.2 to be reliable and valid and focused on measuring purchase intention of a product Data presented in Chapter 4 (Table 4.1) affirm that the questions assess one factor and are reliable and valid. The survey is included in Appendix A (Attachment A.1).

Subjects

The study involved a total of 240 participants, 60 in each of the four independent groups (text only control, text plus emoticon, text plus emoji, and text plus GIF). Within each of the groups, half the subjects were exposed to a review of a high-cost, high-engagement product (computer) and the other half was exposed to a review of a low-cost, low-engagement product (candy). The design was then a 4 X 2 independent groups design. The number of subjects in each group met the minimum number of subjects (30) recommended to detect differences between groups (Cohen, 1988). Surveys were distributed from November 14-17, 2020, through SurveyMonkey Audience with the goal of having a sample representative of Facebook users. Subjects volunteered for the study through SurveyMonkey's marketing panel (SurveyAudience) which includes over 50 million people worldwide (SurveyMonkey, 2021). Only subjects over 18 years old from the United States were included in the study. The subjects were selected by SurveyMonkey to reflect the US Census percentage for age and gender. Subjects were required to read and agree to an informed consent document to participate in the study. Subjects who did not consent were disqualified. Of the 258 subjects who opened the survey, three subjects did not agree to the informed consent, so data were collected from 255 participants. Of the participants consenting, 14 did not answer the purchase intention questions and so their data were unavailable. Detailed information about the subjects is shown in Tables 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6. In Study 1, 35% of the participants were male and 65% were female. Fifty-one percent of the participants were under 34 and only 6.8% were 55 or older.

Table 3.3

Gender of Respondents in Study 1 for Each Implicit eWOM (IeWOM) Condition

	Gender		
IeWOM Type	Males	Female	Total
Text	19	41	
Emoticon	23	36	
Emoji	22	38	
Gif	20	38	
Total	84	153	237
Proportion	0.35	0.65	

Not all respondents answered all questions. The totals in each table reflect the number of subjects who answered the specific question or questions represented in the table. Totals may vary among tables.

Table 3.4

Age of Respondents in Study 1 for Each Implicit eWOM Condition

IeWOM Type	Age						
	18-24	**25-34**	**35-44**	**45-54**	**55-64**	**64+**	Total
Text	13	22	11	8	3	3	
Emoticon	17	21	11	6	1	0	
Emoji	16	16	13	8	1	4	
Gif	12	23	12	4	4	0	
Total	**60**	**82**	**47**	**26**	**9**	**7**	**231**
Proportion	0.25	0.35	0.20	0.11	0.04	0.03	

Not all participating subjects answered all the demographic questions. Six fewer subjects answered the question about age than about gender.

Study 2

Method

Surveys for Study 2 were distributed using SurveyMonkey Audience during November 24-27, 2020. The same Purchase Intention Scale and the same types of implicit eWOM were used in Study 2 as in Study 1. Study 2 involved changes in the design, the review wording, order of the response alternatives in the Purchase Intention Scale, the number of products studied, and the number of products shown to each subject and from Study 1. The specific changes are listed below.

1. Between 41 and 45% of the respondents to the four questions on the Purchase Intention Scale responded *Strongly Agree* to all question in all the implicit eWOM conditions. Because there was such a strong skew to the high end of the scale for all groups, including the Text Only control group, changes were made in the language of the review to try to reduce the skew. The specific language is presented below:
    - Tasty. I love Hershey's chocolate candy and it is a good value for the price! Every time the chocolate is smooth and creamy. Recommended.
    - This is a good laptop. I have been using a different brand but when the screen shattered after a fall, I decided to try an Apple. With the Apple, you get more power and better battery life with the same performance. The construction of the laptop is good. The aluminum build feels sturdy. I have used it for 2 working days straight on a battery charge.
2. A third product was added that was intermediate in cost between candy and computers, specifically an office chair. Using the operational definition that level of engagement is determined by cost of a product, the chair is classified as moderate in terms of level of

engagement. The chair is also not associated with a brand as well-known as the candy and computer brands used in the survey. The description is listed below:

- It was pretty easy to assemble. The arms were a little tricky, probably because I did it alone. It was what I expected. It's not a bad chair, but I can tell over time, it may become uncomfortable on the seat cushion. Great for a short-term solution. Maybe 2 yrs. to 4.

3. The order of presentation of the response alternatives (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) was altered so that positive end of the scale would not always appear first. This change was made to avoid any possible response bias in the respondents (e.g., always checking the first or last response on the scale).
4. In Study 2, subjects saw review of all three products: candy, chair, and computer. In Study 1, each subject saw a review of only one product, candy, or a chair.

The research hypotheses to be tested in Study 2 are described below:

H3: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for low-engagement products.

H4: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for moderate-engagement products.

H5: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for high-engagement products.

The rationale for the hypotheses used in study 2 is identical to the rationale described regarding the hypotheses formulated for study 1. Individual hypotheses for each type of implicit eWOM studied were included in H3, H4, and H5 and are as follows:

H3: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for low-engagement products.

- H3a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product review for low-engagement products.
- H3b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.
- H3c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.

H4: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for moderate-engagement products.

- H4a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.
- H4b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.
- H4c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.

H5: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for high-engagement products.

- H5a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

- H5b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.
- H5c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

The survey for Study 2 is provided in the Appendix (Attachment A.2). A summary of the design for Study 2 is shown in Table 3.7

Table 3.5

Summary of Design for Study 2

Engagement Conditions	Between Subjects Comparisons			
Low engagement (candy)	Text only (control)	Text plus positive emoticon	Text plus, positive emoji	Text plus positive GIF
Moderate engagement (chair)	Text only (control)	Text plus positive emoticon	Text plus positive emoji	Text plus positive GIF
High engagement (computer)	Text only (control)	Text plus positive emoticon	Text plus positive emoji	Text plus positive GIF

Subjects

Surveys were distributed through SurveyMonkey to 426 participants. Respondents volunteered for the study through SurveyMonkey's marketing panel (SurveyAudience). Only subjects over 18 years old from the United States were included in the study. The subjects were selected to reflect the US Census percentage for age and gender. Of those opening the survey, forty-six individuals either refused to sign the consent form or failed to answer the questions about purchase intent. The data included in the study are from the remaining respondents. Not all

respondents included in the analysis answered all the demographic questions. The number of respondents included in the analysis for each implicit eWOM condition is shown in Table 3.6

Table 3.6

Number of Respondents Completing Survey in Each Condition

Implicit eWOM Condition	**N for each survey**
Text Only	96
Emoticon	98
Emoji	90
GIF	96
Total	**380**

The distribution of gender across conditions is similar with females making up a slightly higher number overall (51.8 %**)**. More women (54.1%) than men use Facebook, so the sample seems reflective of Facebook users (*Statista*, 2020). This information is shown in Table 3.7 below.

Table 3.7

Gender of Respondents in Study 2 for Each Implicit eWOM Condition

Implicit eWOM Type	Gender		
	Males	Females	Total
Text	46	48	
Emoticon	46	51	
Emoji	44	47	
Gif	44	48	
Total	**180**	**194**	**374**
Proportion	0.48	0.52	

Approximately 42% of the respondents were in the 55 and older age category. Approximately 40% of Facebook users in 2020 were in this age category. The percent of users of

Facebook in the 18-34 age category was also roughly 41% (Statista, 2020) but was only 23.7% in the sample for this study as presented in Table 3.8. The sample, then, does underrepresent younger Facebook users. The sample in Study 1 had an age distribution that was much closer to the distribution found in the general population of Facebook users.

Table 3.8

Age of Respondents in Study 2 for Each Implicit eWOM Condition

IeWOM Type	Age						
	18-24	**25-34**	**35-44**	**45-54**	**55-64**	**64+**	Total
Text	4	16	21	14	19	20	
Emoticon	7	18	19	10	26	17	
Emoji	6	18	18	13	20	17	
Gif	9	12	21	16	27	10	
Total	**23**	**64**	**79**	**53**	**92**	**64**	**375**
Proportion	0.061	0.17	0.21	0.14	0.25	0.17	

Chapter 4: Results

The two studies presented explore 1) the impact of three types of paralinguistic cues used as implicit eWOM on purchase intention and 2) the role of the level of engagement with a product in moderating the impact of implicit eWOM on purchase intention. Specifically, Study 1 investigates the impact of positive implicit eWOM on the purchase intention toward two products, a low-cost, low-engagement product (candy) and a high-cost, high-engagement product (a computer) using a between-subjects design. Study 2 investigates the impact of positive implicit eWOM on purchase intention toward three products, a low-engagement product, low-priced product (candy), a moderate-engagement, moderate-price product (a chair), and a high-engagement, high-cost product (computer); all three of which were presented to all participants. The studies differ in number of products presented to each subject, the level of engagement of the products studied, and the strength of the positive valence of the review to which the paralinguistic cues were added.

Study 1

Study 1 employed two variables. One variable was level of engagement with two levels (low or high) and one variable was type of implicit eWOM with four levels (text only control, emoticon, emoji, or GIF). Each participant saw *either* the review of the computer (high-engagement) *or* the review of the candy (low-engagement) with either text only or text with one of three types of implicit eWOM (emoji, emoticon, or GIF) at the end of the review.

The Purchase Intention Scale shown in Table 3.2 was analyzed to determine the reliability and validity of the scale. A factor analysis was conducted that showed that the four questions used in the Purchase Intent Scale constituted one factor. The loadings on the factor are

shown in Table 4.1. Cronbach's Alpha Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1

Component Matrix for Study 1

Questions in Purchase Intention Scale	Factor Loadings
Consider the Product	.95
Will Purchase	.97
Intend to Purchase	.95
Interested in Product	.97
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis: 1 component extracted	

Table 4.2

Cronbach's Alpha, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR)

Statistic	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	CR
Value	.97	0.96	0.98

Following Shang (2017), Hair et al. (2009), and Fornell and Larcker (1981), convergent validity of the scale measured by these criteria 1) factor loadings should exceed 0.7, and 2) the average variance extracted (AVE) should exceed .5. The Fornell and Larcker criteria were established as part of a study using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). However, the values specified were used to establish factor structure, which is the validity of each factor, as well as the relationship between latent variables. In the present study, the values are used as evidence of the existence of one factor, purchase intention, which is consistent with usual uses of the Fornell and Larcker criteria.

Table 4.1 indicates all items exhibited loading higher than 0.7 on the purchase intent construct. Table 4.2 indicates that AVE value exceeded .5, thus satisfying the criteria of convergent validity. Cronbach's Alpha and CR both indicate reliability of the scale.

The specific research hypotheses to be investigated in Study 1 were:

H1: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for low-engagement products.

- H1a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.
- H1b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.
- H1c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.

H2: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for high-engagement products.

- H2a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.
- H2b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.
- H2c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

Low-engagement Product (Candy)

The Mean Purchase Intention for the low-engagement (candy) condition for each type of implicit eWOM is shown in Table 4.3. The Mean Purchase Intention is the sum of the scores from each of the four questions used in the Purchase Intention Scale. The response to each question ranged between 1 and 5. The Mean Purchase Intention score for product could range between 4 and 20.

Table 4.3

Mean Purchase intention for Each eWOM Type: Low-Engagement Product (candy)

IeWOM Condition	Mean	N	Standard Deviation
Text	17.68	22	1.99
Emoticon	17.04	19	1.95
Emoji	14.86	29	2.48
GIF	18.42	20	1.87

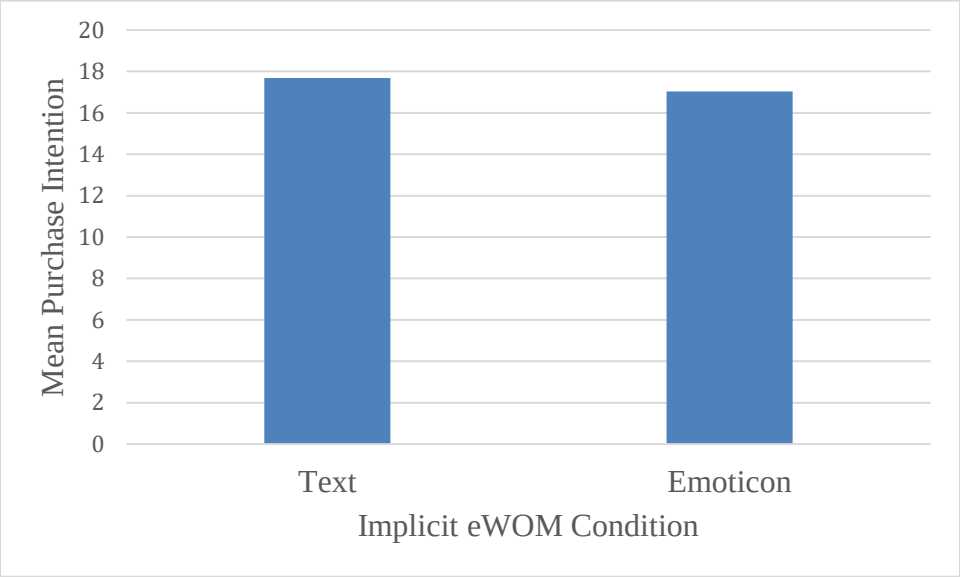
The means the four implicit eWOM conditions for the high-engagement product ranged from 14.86 to 18.42. The standard deviations for all conditions ranged from 1.87 to 2.48. Comparisons of each of the groups exposed to a review containing a paralinguistic cue and to the Text Only control are presented below. This approach was adapted from Das (2019) from his work comparing the impact of emojis on positive affect.

The comparison in Figure 4.1 is between the Text Only condition and the Emoticon condition with the low-engagement product. The hypothesis tested was:

- H1a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.

Figure 4.1

Effect of Emoticon on Purchase Intention for Low-Engagement Product (Candy)



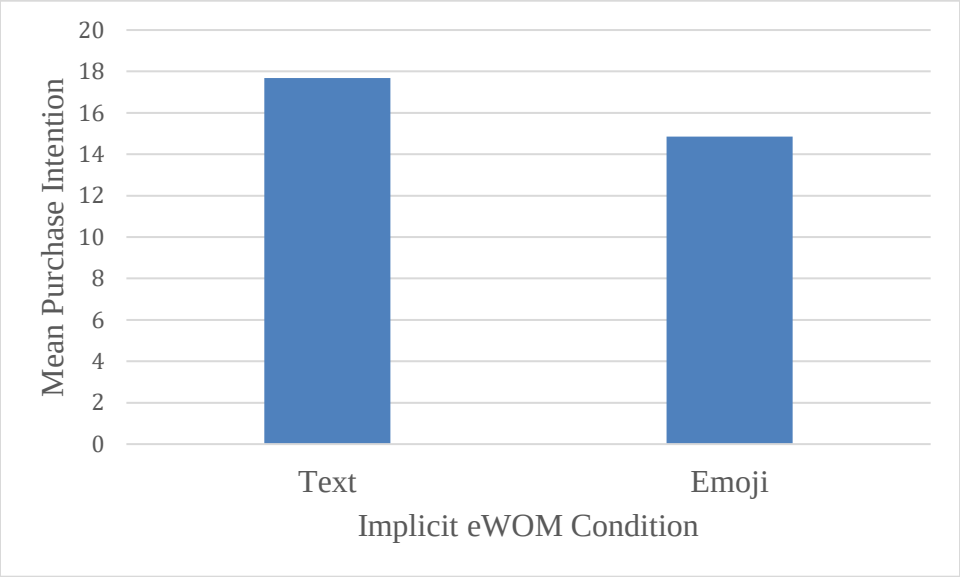
The mean purchase intention of the Text Only (Control) condition (M = 17.68, SD = 1.99) was higher than the Emoticon Condition (M = 17.04, SD = 1.95). The two conditions did not differ significantly from each other (t (39) = 1.04, p = .15). H1a is not supported.

The comparison in Figure 4.2 is between the Text Only condition and the Emoji condition with a low-engagement product. The hypothesis tested was:

- H1b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.

Figure 4.2

Effect of Emoji on Purchase Intention for Low-Engagement Product (Candy)



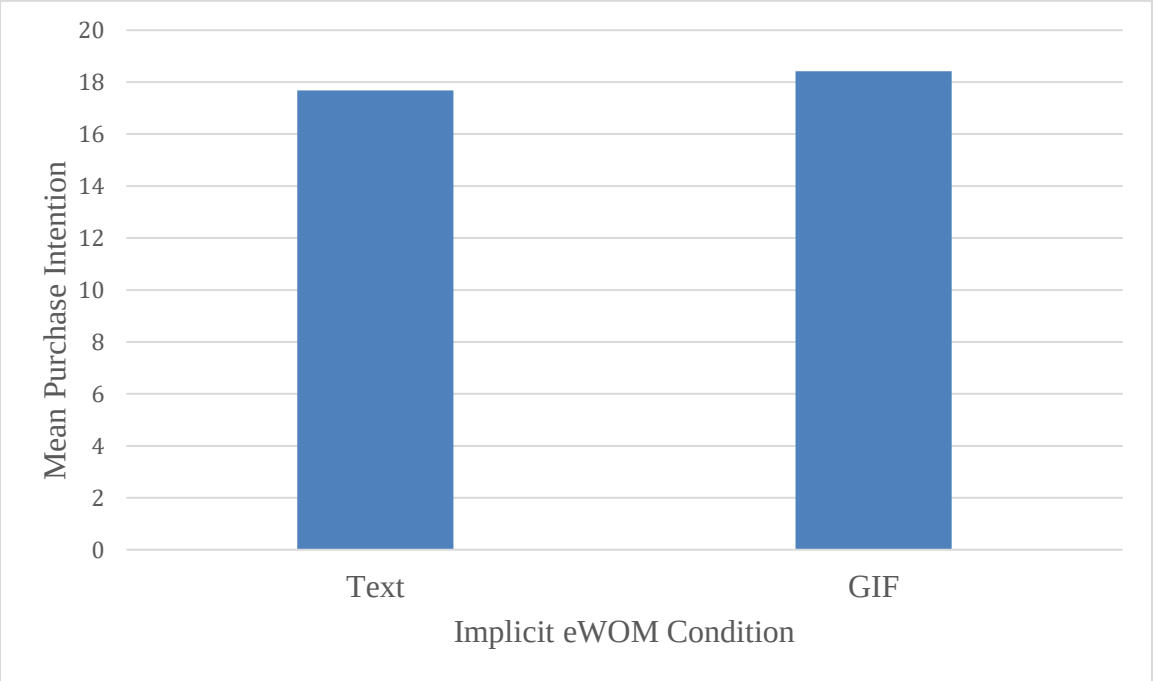
The mean purchase intention of the Text Only (control) Condition (M = 17.68, SD = 1.99) was higher than the Emoji Condition (M = 14.86, SD = 2.48). The two conditions differed significantly from each other ($t(49) = 4.37$; $p < .01$) but purchase intention for the Text Only Condition was higher than purchase intention for the Emoji Condition, a difference in the opposite direction from the difference predicted in H1b. H1b is not supported.

The comparison in Figure 4.3 is between the purchase intention of the Text Only condition and the GIF Condition. The hypothesis tested was:

- H1c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.

Figure 4.3

Effect of GIF on Purchase Intention for Low-Engagement Product (Candy)



The mean purchase intention of the Text Only (control) Condition (M = 17.68, SD = 1.99) was lower than the GIF Condition (M = 18.42, SD = 1.87) but the two conditions did not differ significantly from each other (t (40) = -1.24, p = .11). H1c is not supported.

High-engagement Product (Computer)

Table 4.4 shows the means and standard deviations for the implicit eWOM conditions in the high-engagement(computer) condition. The means ranged from 14.11 (text) to 16.45 (emoticon).

Table 4.4

Mean Purchase intention for Each eWOM Type: High-Engagement Product (computer)

IeWOM Condition	Mean	N	Standard Deviation
Text	16.36	22	3.49
Emoticon	14.11	19	3.50
Emoji	15.82	29	3.50
GIF	16.45	20	3.50

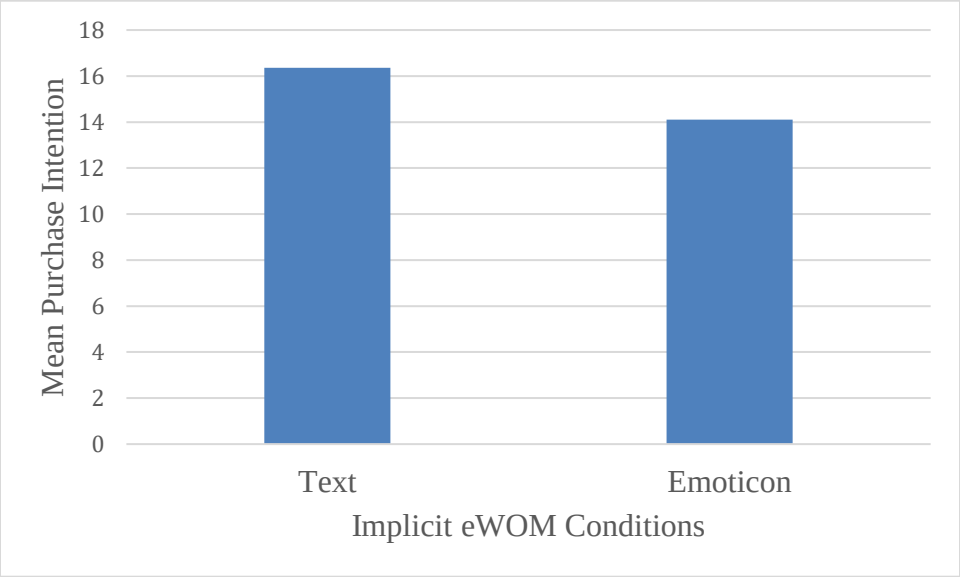
The results in Figures 4.4-4.6 provide comparisons of the effect of implicit eWOM on purchase intention for high-engagement products. The main hypothesis to be tested is H2: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for high-engagement products.

The comparison in Figure 4.4 is between the effect on purchase intention of the Text Only Condition and the Emoticon Condition. The specific hypothesis tested was

- H2a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

Figure 4.4

Effect of Emoticon on Purchase Intention for High-Engagement Product (computer)



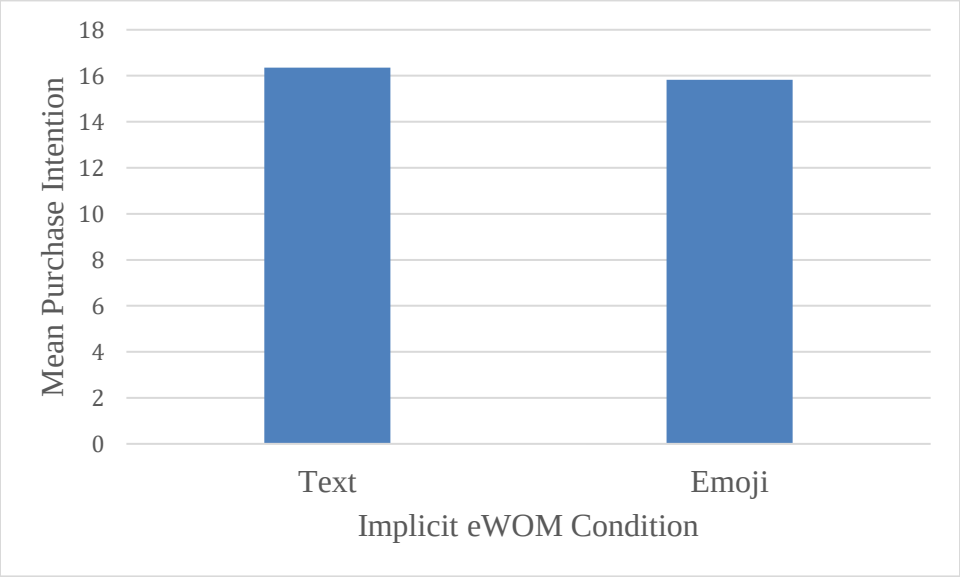
The mean purchase intention of the Text Only (control) Condition (M = 16.36, SD = 3.49) was higher than the Emoticon Condition (M = 14.11, SD = 3.50). The two conditions differed significantly from each other (t (39) = 2.06, p = .02) but in the opposite direction predicted by the hypothesis. H2a is not supported.

The data shown in Figure 4.5 compare the effect on purchase intention of the text only review with the effect of the test review with an emoticon added to the text. The specific hypothesis tested was:

- H2b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

Figure 4.5

Effect of Emoji on Purchase Intention for High-Engagement Product (computer)



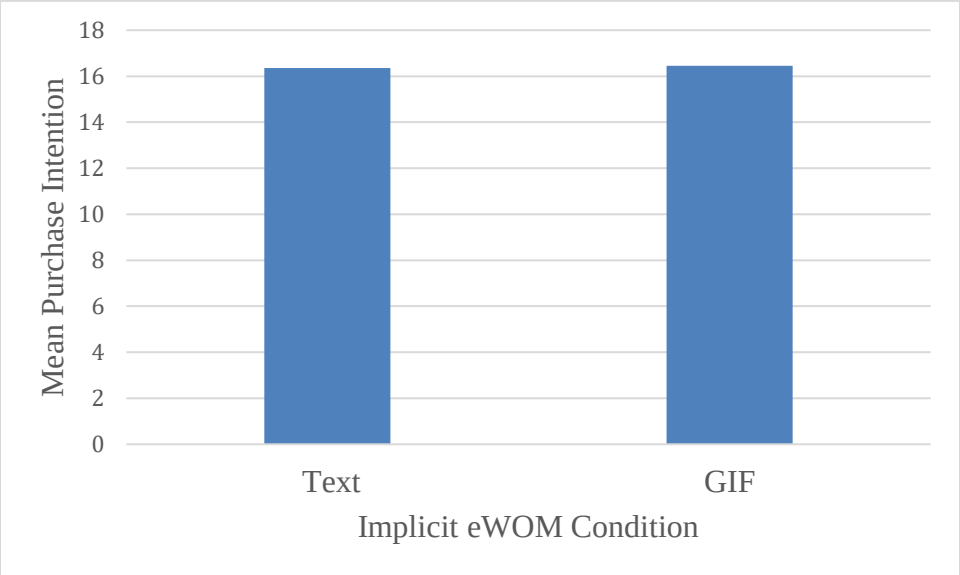
The mean purchase intention of the Text Only (control) Condition (M = 16.36, SD = 3.49) was higher than the Emoji Condition (M = 15.83, SD = 3.50). The two conditions did not differ significantly from each other (t (49) = .55, p = .29). H2b is not supported.

The comparison of the effect of the text only review and the text review with GIF added is shown in Figure 4.6. The specific hypothesis tested was

- H2c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

Figure 4.6

Effect of GIF on Purchase Intention for High-Engagement Product (computer)



The mean purchase intention of the Text Only (control) Condition (M = 16.36, SD = 3.49) was lower than the GIF Condition (M = 16.45, SD = 3.30) but the two conditions did not differ significantly from each other (t (40) = -.08, p = .47). H2c is not supported.

Study 2

Study 2 employed two variables. One variable has three levels (low, moderate, or high-engagement) and one variable (type of implicit eWOM) with 4 levels (text only control, emoticon, emoji, GIF). Each participant saw *all three* products with their assigned condition. The design is summarized in Table 3.7.

The specific research hypotheses for Study 2 are as follows:

H3: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for low-engagement products.

- H3a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product review for low-engagement products.
- H3b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.
- H3c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.

H4: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for moderate-engagement products.

- H4a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.
- H4b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.
- H4c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.

H5: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for high-engagement products.

- H5a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

- H5b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.
- H5c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

A factor analysis was conducted that showed that the 4 questions used in the Purchase Intent Scale constituted one factor. Table 4.5 shows the factor loadings obtained in the factor analysis. As in Study 1, the guidelines provided by Shang (2017) and Fornell and Larcker (1981) were followed.

Table 4.5

Extracted Loading of Questions on Factor from Factor Analysis

Questions on Purchase Intention Scale	Factor Loadings
Questions in Purchase Intention Scale	.94
Consider the Product	.96
Will Purchase	.96
Intend to Purchase	.93
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis: 1 component extracted	

For the Purchase Intention Scale, the AVE was .891 and CR (composite reliability) was .970. Table 4.5 indicates all items exhibited loading higher than 0.7 on the purchase intention construct. Table 4.6 shows the values of AVE, CR and Cronbach's alpha.

Table 4.6

Cronbach's Alpha, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR)

Statistic	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	CR
Value	.96	0.89	0.97

AVE values exceeded .5, thus satisfying the criteria of convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha for the Purchase Intention scale across all conditions was .96. The measure of Purchase Intention is internally consistent, has convergent validity and is reliable, affirming the reliability results found in Study 1.

The study included comparisons across four independent groups: text-only was compared with a review followed by an emoticon, a review followed by an emoji and a review followed by a GIF. Each group was shown reviews of three products: candy, an office chair, and a computer. The products were chosen to represent different price points and engagement levels (low, moderate, and high).

Low-Engagement Product (Candy)

The Mean Purchase Intention for the low-engagement product, candy, are shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Mean Purchase Intention for Low-Engagement Product (Candy)

IeWOM Condition	Mean	N	Standard Deviation
Text	13.24	96	4.46
Emoticon	13.50	97	4.37
Emoji	14.30	94	4.48
GIF	14.00	93	4.39

Note. Not all respondents answered all questions. The number responding varied across conditions.

The research hypothesis tested was:

H3: Implicit eWOM will result in a higher level of purchase intention than explicit eWOM alone for low-engagement products (candy)

The means of the conditions ranged from 13.24 for the Text Only Condition to 14.30 for the Emoji Condition.

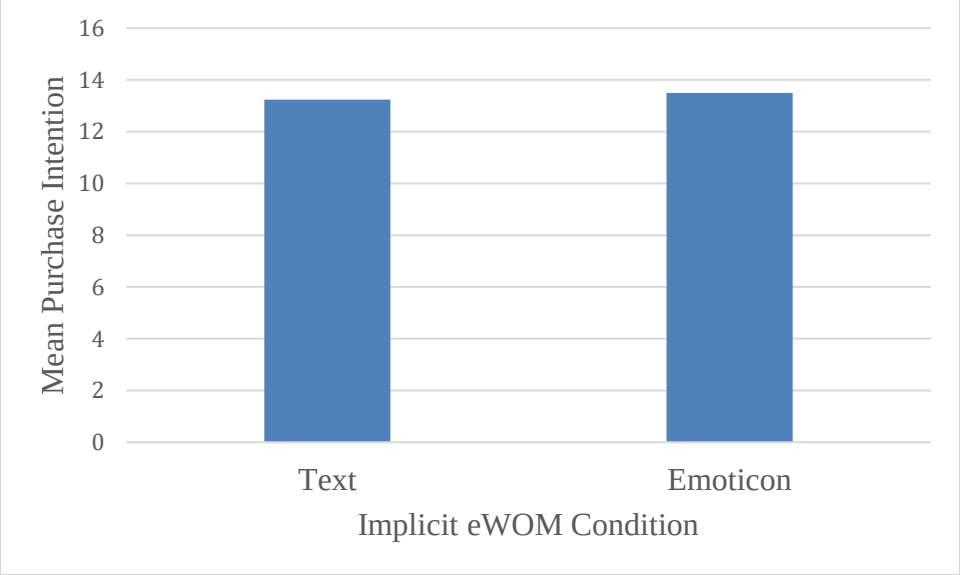
Figure 4.7 compares the effect of the text only review on purchase intention with the effect of a text review combined with an emoticon on purchase intention of a low-engagement product. The specific hypothesis tested was:

- H3a: Product reviews including an emoticon ill result in a higher purchase intention than text only product review for a low-engagement product.

The data shown in Figure 4.7 compare the effect of text only and text plus emoticon on purchase intention for a moderate-engagement product.

Figure 4.7

Effect of Emoticon on Purchase Intention for Low-Engagement Product (candy)



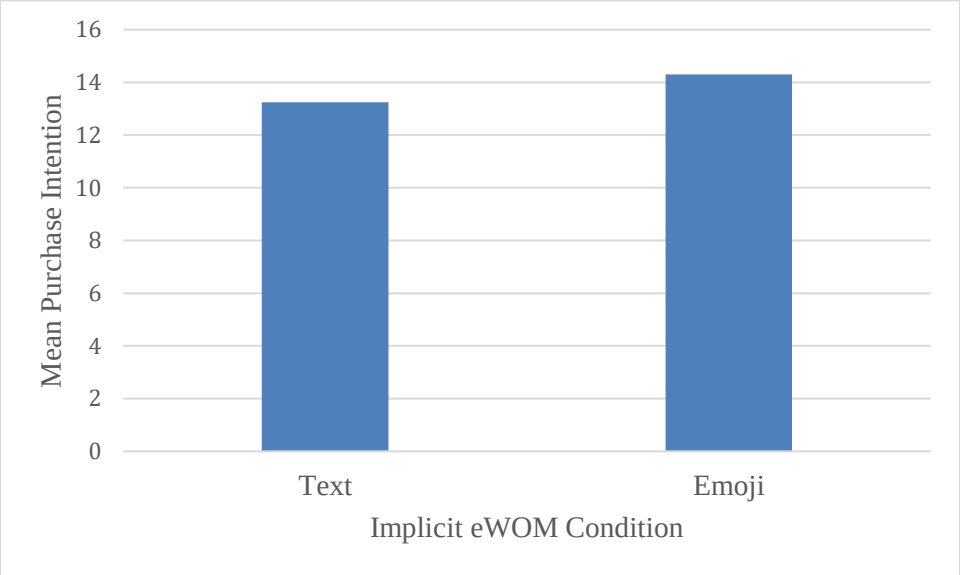
The mean purchase intention of the Text Only (control) Condition (M = 13.24, SD = 4.46) was slightly lower than the Emoticon Condition (M = 13.50, SD = 4.37). The two conditions did not differ significantly from each other (t (191) = -.41, p = .34). H3a is not supported.

Figure 4.8 compares the effect of the text only review on purchase intention with the effect of a text review combined with an emoji on purchase intention of a low-engagement product (candy). The specific research hypothesis tested was

- H3b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.

Figure 4.8

Effect of Emoji on Purchase Intention for Low-Engagement Product (candy)



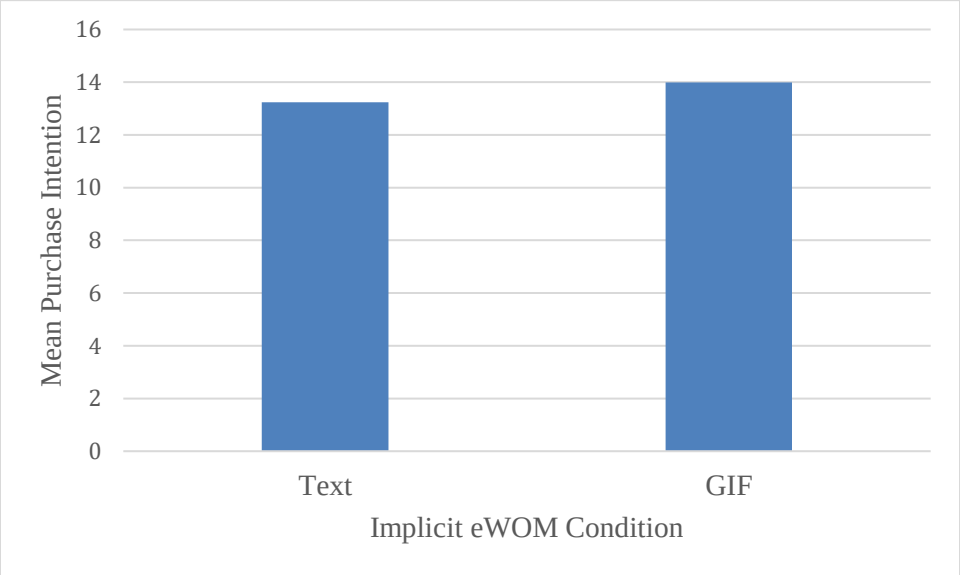
The mean purchase intention of the Text Only (control) Condition (M = 13.24, SD = 4.46) was slightly lower than the Emoji Condition (M = 14.30, SD = 4.48) but there was no significant difference (t (188) = -1.63; p = .055) had greater than a .05 probability. H3b is not supported.

Figure 4.9 compares the effect of the text only review on purchase intention with the effect of a text review combined with a GIF on purchase intention of a low-engagement product (candy). The specific research hypothesis tested was

H3c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for low-engagement products.

Figure 4.9

Effect of a GIF on Purchase Intention for Low-Engagement Product (candy)



The mean purchase intention of the Text Only (control) Condition (M = 13.24, SD = 4.46) was lower than the GIF Condition (M = 14.00, SD = 4.39). The t value obtained (t (187) = -1.18) had a probability of .12. H3c is not supported.

Moderate-Engagement Product (Chair)

Table 4.8 shows the mean purchase intention for a moderate-engagement product, a chair. The means ranged from 9.59 for the GIF and emoji conditions to 9.97 for the emoji condition. The standard deviations ranged from 1.05 to 1.12.

Table 4.8

Mean Purchase Intention for Moderate-Engagement Product (Chair)

Implicit eWOM Condition	Mean	N	Standard Deviation
Text	9.68	98	4.20
Emoticon	9.69	97	4.20
Emoji	9.97	93	4.48
GIF	9.59	95	4.39

The specific hypothesis tested was

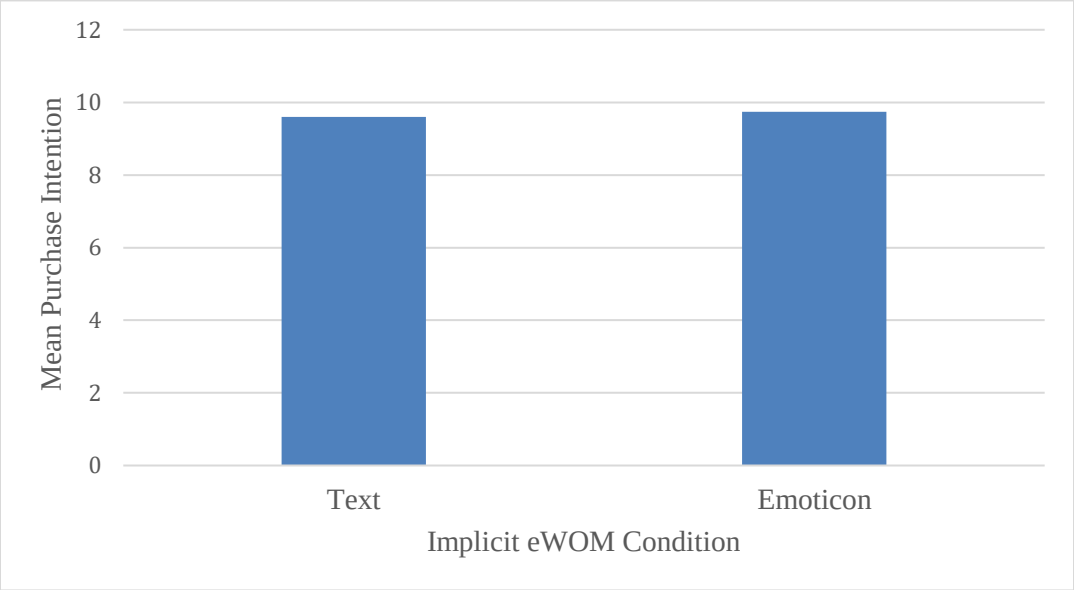
- H4: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.

Figure 4.10 compares the effect of the text only review on purchase intention with the effect of a text review combined with an emoticon purchase intention of a low-engagement product (candy). The specific research hypothesis tested was:

- H4a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.

Figure 4.10

Effect of Emoticon on Purchase Intention for Moderate-Engagement Product (chair)



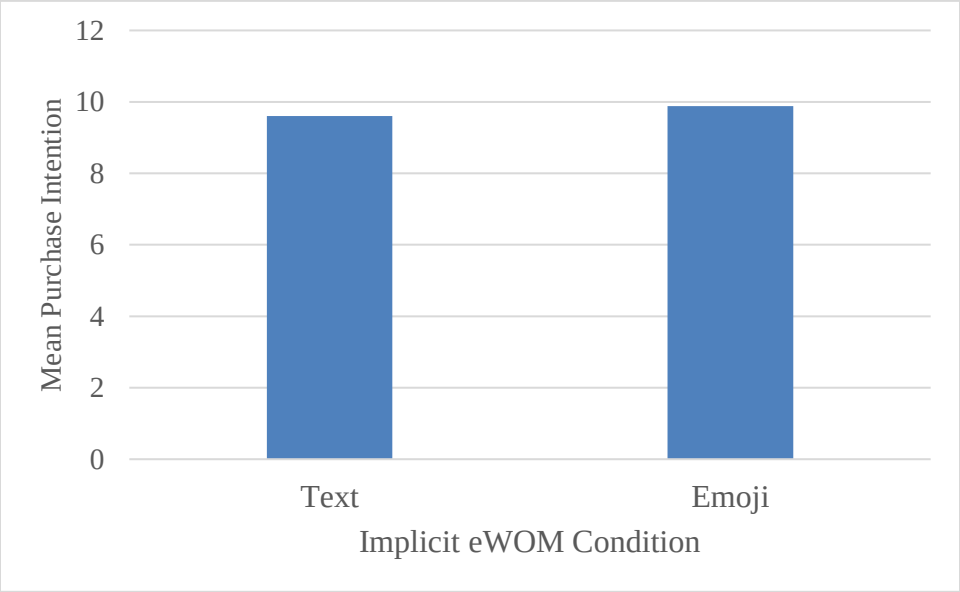
There was no significant difference (t (193) = -.02, p = .49) between the mean of the Text Only Condition (M = 9.68, SD = 4.20) and the Emoticon Condition (M = 9.69. SD = 4.20). H4a is not supported.

The data shown in Figure 4.11 compare the effect of text only and text plus emoji on purchase intention for a moderate-engagement product. The specific hypothesis tested was:

- H4b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.

Figure 4.11

Effect of Emoji on Purchase Intention for Moderate-Engagement Product (chair)



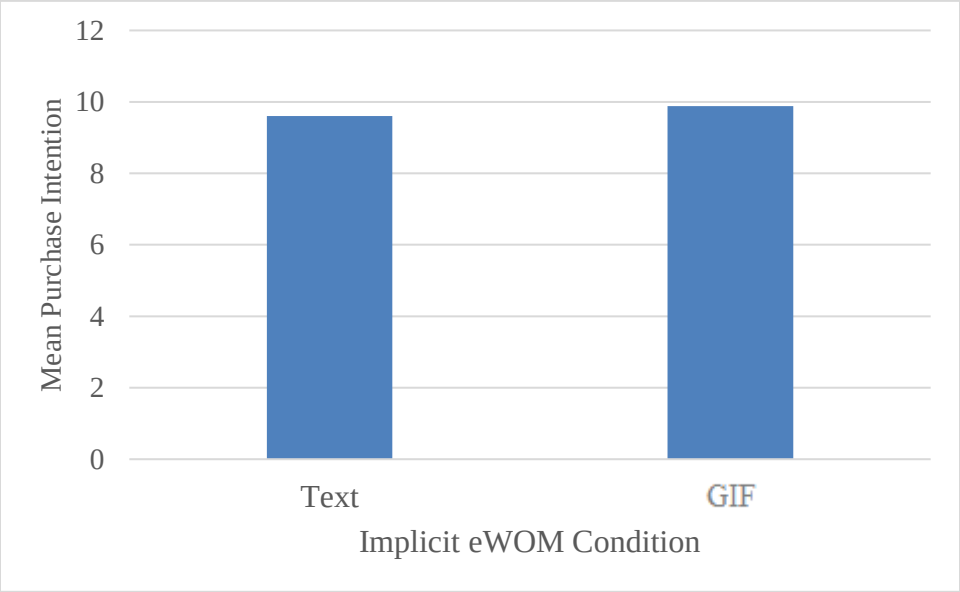
The means of the Text Only Condition (M = 9.68, SD = 4.20) and the Emoji Condition (M = 9.59, SD = 4.48) were not significantly different (t (187) = -.46, p = .32). H4b is not supported.

The data shown in Figure 4.12 compare the effect of text only and text plus GIF on purchase intention for a moderate-engagement product. The specific hypothesis tested was:

- H4c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for moderate-engagement products.

Figure 4.12

Effect of GIF on Purchase Intention for Moderate-Engagement Product (chair)



The mean of the Text Only Condition (M = 9.68, SD = 4.20) and the mean of the GIF Condition (M = 9.59, SD = 4.39) were not significantly different (t (191) = -.15; p = .44). H4c is not supported.

High-Engagement Product (Computer)

The estimated Mean Purchase Intention estimates for the high-engagement product, the computer, are shown in Table 4.9.

H5: Implicit eWOM will increase the purchase intention that consumers have toward a high-cost product, a computer.

Table 4.9

Mean Purchase Intent for High-Engagement Product (computer)

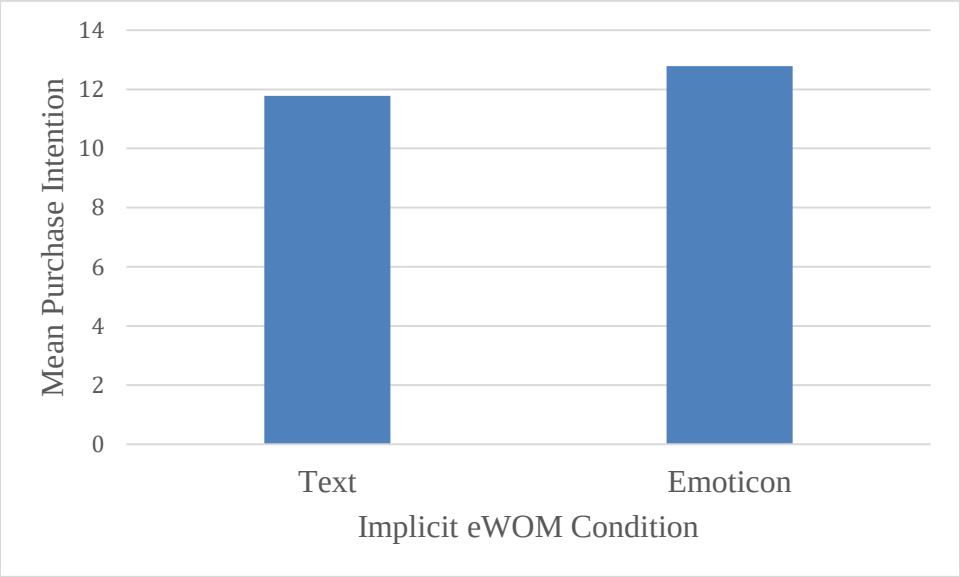
Implicit eWom Condition	Mean	N	Standard Deviation
Text	11.68	98	4.25
Emoticon	12.68	95	4.25
Emoji	12.06	89	4.29
GIF	12.33	93	4.31

Figure 4.13 provides a comparison of the effect of the text only review and the review plus emoticon on purchase intention. The research hypothesis tested was

- H5a: Product reviews including an emoticon will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.'

Figure 4.13

Effect of Emoticon on Purchase Intention for High-Engagement Product (computer)



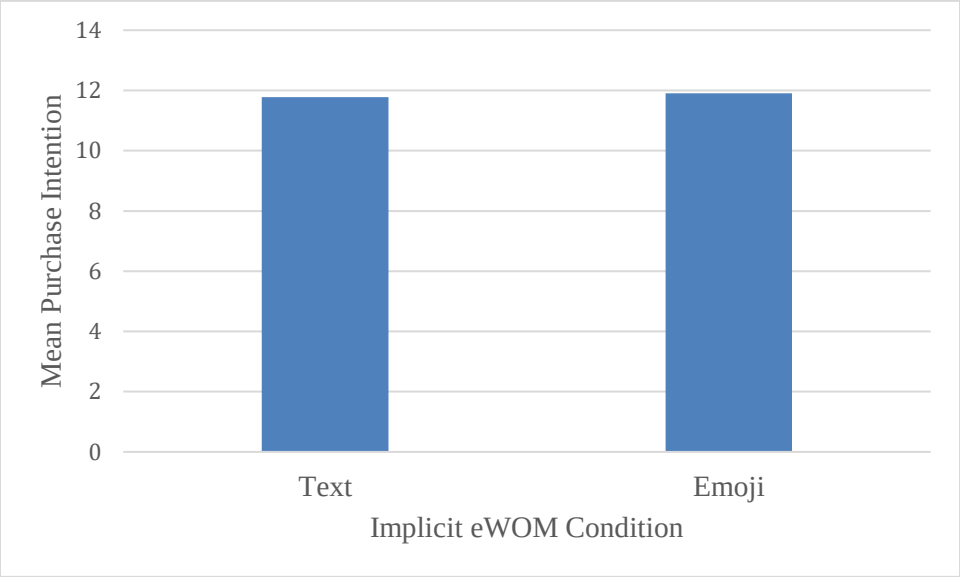
The mean of the Emoticon Condition (M = 12.68, SD = 4.25) was higher than the mean for the Text Only Condition (M = 11.68, SD = 4.25) but the difference is not significant (t (191) = -1.63; p = .053). H5a is not supported.

Figure 4.14 shows a comparison of purchase intention for a high-engagement product in the Text Only (Control) condition and the Emoji Condition. The specific hypothesis tested was:

- H5b: Product reviews including an emoji will result in a higher purchase intention than text only product reviews for high-engagement products.

Figure 4.14

Effect of Emoji on Purchase Intention for High-Engagement Product (computer)



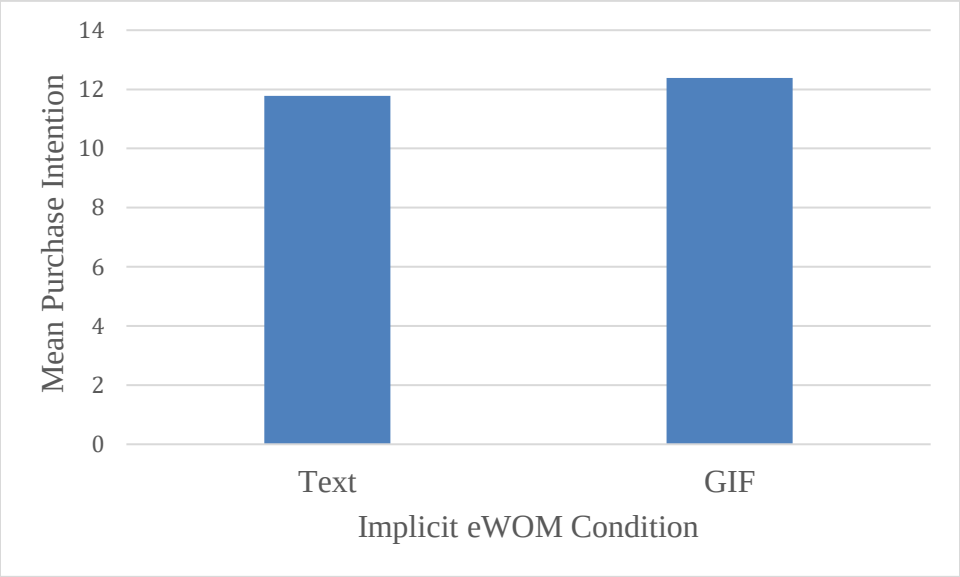
There was no significant difference between the mean of the Text Only Condition (M = 11.68, SD = 4.25) and the Emoji Condition (M = 12.06. SD = 4.29; (t (185) = -.61, p = .27). H5b is not supported.

Figure 4.15 shows a comparison of purchase intention for a high-engagement product in the Text Only (control) Condition and the GIF Condition. The specific hypothesis tested was:

- H5c: Product reviews including a GIF will result in a higher purchase intention than text only.

Figure 4.15

Effect of GIF on Purchase Intention for High-Engagement Product (computer)



There was no significant difference (t (189) = . -1.05; p = .15). between the mean of the Text Only Condition (M = 11.68, SD = 4.25) and the GIF Condition (M = 12.33, SD = 4.31). H5c is not supported

Summary

Study 1 and Study 2 investigated the impact of adding paralinguistic cues to positive text reviews on purchase intention toward three types of products: low-engagement (candy), moderate-engagement (chair) and high-engagement(computer). In all cases, there was no evidence to support the hypotheses that implicit eWOM increased purchase intention for products representing the three different levels of engagement.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The use of paralinguistic cues in communication among consumers and between consumers and companies is widespread. Academic research on the impact of paralinguistic cues on purchase intention is limited. The two studies reported here sought to clarify the impact on purchase intention of paralinguistic cues in consumer-to-consumer communication (implicit eWOM). The specific type of consumer-to-consumer communication studied was online product reviews that presented as a Facebook post.

Study 1 examined the impact of three types of implicit eWOM, (emoticon, emoji, and GIF) compared to a text only control group, on purchase intention of two products: candy, a low-cost product falling in the affect/low-engagement quadrant of the FCB grid and a computer, a high-cost product falling in the thinking/high-engagement quadrant of the FCB. The text reviews presented in all conditions had a strong positive valence. The two products studied differed in cost, engagement, and technical complexity, all factors known to influence purchase intention (Bhatnagar et al., 2000; Chang & Wildt, 1994; Vaughn, 1980, 1992). From the viewpoints of ELM, FCB, and AIM, positive peripheral cues such as implicit eWOM would be more likely to impact purchase intention positively for the low-engagement/low-cost product than for the high-engagement/high-cost product. SPT does not make this prediction. Study 1 did not find a significant increase in purchase intention as a result of including implicit eWOM in a product review for either the low-engagement or high-engagement product. Rather, in one of the three comparisons between the effect of a text-only review and a text review plus a paralinguistic cue, the mean purchase intention of the Text Only (control) Condition ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.99$) was significantly higher than the Emoji Condition ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.95$) for the low-engagement product, an outcome not predicted by any of the models examined. Positive peripheral cues are predicted by ELM to have more positive effect on attitudes toward low-engagement products

than high-engagement products. AIM would predict that a positive peripheral cue should increase positive affect toward products, particularly low-engagement products and increased purchase intention. SPT would predict that positive peripheral cues should decrease the social distance between the sender and receiver of a communication and increase the likelihood of being influenced by the message.

Study 2 examined the effect of three types of implicit eWOM (emoticon, emoji, and GIF) on purchase intention of three products. The three products that were examined varied in engagement level, price, and in their placement in the FCB grid: candy, a chair, and a computer. In Study 2, all subjects were presented product reviews of all three products. The subjects were randomly assigned to groups exposed either to text only review of the three products, text plus emoticon reviews of all three products, text plus emoji reviews of all three products, or text plus GIF reviews of all three products. Study 2 found no significant increase in purchase intention due to inclusion of implicit eWOM in a product review for any of the three products. However, as in Study 1, one of the comparisons showed a significantly higher purchase intention for the Text Only Condition than for the condition that included a paralinguistic cue with the text review. The mean purchase intention of the Text Only (control) Condition ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 2.15$) was significantly higher than the Emoticon Condition ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 4.17$) for the high-engagement product, an unexpected result. ELM, FCB, and AIM would have predicted little or no influence of the paralinguistic cue on purchase intention for the high engagement product. SPT would suggest that the paralinguistic cues reduce social distance between the sender and the receiver and so would serve to increase purchase intention, but it should not decrease purchase intention. As in Study 1, the results obtained were not predicted by any of the models examined.

As noted above, the findings that purchase intention was higher for the Text Only Condition than for the Emoji Condition for the low-engagement product (Study 1) and higher for the Text Only Condition than the Emoticon Condition with the high-engagement product (Study 2) are unexpected. One hypothesis is that for products firmly in the high-engagement, deep cognitive processing category of ELM and the high-engagement, cognitive quadrant of the FCB model, a paralinguistic cue might distract from processing the information and recommendation in the review or even undermine the perceived seriousness of the review. For the low-engagement product, there are two possibilities. As in the case of the high-engagement product, given the extremely positive review given for the product, the paralinguistic cue may have undermined the positive content of the review and may have been interpreted as being sarcastic. Alternatively, from the viewpoint of FCB, a decision on the product may have been made quickly before complete processing of the information, cognitive or affective, presented by the review. If the latter were the case, then it might be expected that the results would be mixed across comparison conditions of text and text plus paralinguistic cues. Study of subjects' interpretation of the paralinguistic cues is required to evaluate these possibilities. Data in the current studies do not allow evaluation of these hypotheses.

Differences with Other Studies

The results of Study 1 and Study 2 differ from the results found by some other researchers and practitioners. Three academic studies (Aghakhani et al., 2017; Das et al., 2018; Hill, 2017) that found a positive effect of implicit eWOM on purchase intention differed from the present studies in terms of either 1) the nature of the sender of the communication, 2) the type of communication, or 3) the measure of consumer behavior used. Two of the studies focused on implicit eWOM included in a company's communication with a customer. Hill (2017) compared

consumer responses, including attitude toward brand and purchase intention to a company's reply to a consumer post about a product when the company's reply was text only and when it included a positive emoji or emoticon. She found that the inclusion of a positive emoticon, but not a positive emoji, in a company's positive reply to a consumer enhanced purchase intention but not brand reputation. Das et al. (2018) found that inclusion of emojis in banner ads enhanced positive affect which increased purchase intent for hedonic products only. Both studies, then, focused on company-to-consumer reputation rather than consumer-to-consumer communication as in the present studies. The fact that the communication came from a company may have been a factor in the difference between the findings of those studies and the present study since brand association and awareness influence purchase intention (Keller, 2001; Taute, 2010).

The third study by Aghakhani et al. (2017) found a positive impact of implicit eWOM on purchase intention focused on asking participants to recall product information provided by a friend's product review. The subjects recalled reviews on a range of products. In the case of respondents who recalled that a paralinguistic cue was used in the review, eWOM adoption increased more than for respondents who did not recall having seen such a cue. One of the important factors in the difference between the Aghakhani studies and the present studies may have been the closeness and credibility of the source providing the review. Closeness and credibility have been found to influence the persuasiveness of a message (Chu & Choi, 2011; Yan et al., 2018). A second factor may have been the difference in the measure of behavior. The eWOM adoption scale used by Aghakhani included questions that referenced increased knowledge about the product as well as purchase intention toward the object. All the questions referenced "My friend's review" in each question focusing the respondent's attention on the source of the information. As Trusov (2015) and other researchers (Dellarocas & Narayan, 2007;

Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) have stated, communication within a social network of friends is an important component of effective eWOM. The studies presented here used reviews that came from sources unknown to the participants in the study. The lack of a relationship with the source may have limited the impact of the reviews and implicit eWOM compared to reviews from a close friend.

Studies by practitioners (Ayres, 2019; Lacy, 2015) have found a positive impact of emoticons, emojis, and GIFs in some, though not all, marketing campaigns and on some platforms (Instagram and Facebook) but not others (Twitter). The studies by Lacy (2015) chose paralinguistic cues that were relevant to the specific product being marketed while the same cues were used here for all products. Finally, neither the studies by Ayres (2019) nor Lacy (2015) directly studied purchase intention. They used metrics such as click through rates and comments. The findings from Lacy (2015) and Ayres (2019), did not show a positive effect of paralinguistic cues on consumer behavior in all cases and they did not directly measure purchase intention in their studies. The use of click through rates and comments might indicate that paralinguistic cues impacted the earlier affective and cognitive stages of the purchase cycle (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961) but did not move the participant to the later stages of the purchase cycle.

Positive effects on purchase intention have been found with some paralinguistic cues in company-to-consumer communication and in communication between friends. It is hypothesized that the differences between the outcomes of the present studies and the limited published studies on the use of paralinguistic cues in communications about products may be due to the source of the communication and the consumer behavior that has been measured. In the current studies, a single positive review that included a paralinguistic cue from an unknown source did not increase purchase intention when compared to a text review. In two comparisons with text only

reviews, the presence of the paralinguistic cue resulted in lower purchase intention. Further research is needed to evaluate the reasons for the outcomes observed. Possible avenues of research are suggested below.

Further Research

Future studies should include both refinements in the methodology used in the studies presented here and investigation of variables not included in the studies. First, the effect of changing the framing of the reviews should be studied. Framing of the reviews to suggest that they were written by a close friend and changing the stem of the statements used in the Purchase Intention Scale to focus on the friend as the source of the information about the product may influence participants' responses. Such changes would allow the impact of closeness of the source to the receiver to be investigated. Closeness of the source to the receiver has been found to influence the impact of eWOM in several studies (Yan et al., 2018).

Second, taking a more granular approach to purchase intention may be useful in understanding the pattern of results that have been found. Lavidge and Steiner (1961) conceptualized consumer buying behavior as a process that moves from awareness, knowledge, liking and preference to conviction and purchase. The first two stages are considered to involve cognitive processes, the second two, affective processes and the last two, conative or action-oriented processes. The purchase intention measure used included two questions that would indicate that consumers had moved to the conative stages of the purchase cycle ("It is likely that I will actually purchase this product in the near future." and "Given the opportunity, I intend to purchase this product."). Two other questions ("I am interested in the product" and "Given the chance, I would consider purchasing this product in the future.") were reflective of the earlier cognitive and affective stages. The two questions reflective of the earlier stages of purchase

intention showed a higher frequency of agree responses for products that the questions that reflected the later stages of the purchase decision. Exploration of the impact of implicit eWOM on moving consumers through the stages of making a purchase decision may be useful.

Third, the influence of interest in the type of product and message relevance (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984) are factors that require further investigation. While price of products has been used to define engagement in several studies of purchase intention (Hayes & King, 2014), level of interest has been used as an indicator of engagement other studies of attitude change (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). Interest in the product and relevance of the message can be assessed during data collection.

Finally, the interpretation of the paralinguistic cues by participants needs to be examined. The current studies did not provide any information about how the participants interpreted the paralinguistic cues presented. While all the cues presented are categorized as positive, the cues are subject to interpretation (Sorokina, 2015) and positive paralinguistic cues (e.g., emoticons, emojis) can be interpreted as sarcastic, ironic, or inappropriate (Filik et al., 2016). Hayes et al. (2016) even suggests that sarcastic or ironic use of paralinguistic cues may be more widespread and salient to social media users than the faithful appropriations or use of such cues. A qualitative study focused on the interpretation of the paralinguistic cues associated with product reviews would be instructive. The fact that paralinguistic cues resulted in a decrease in purchase intention in some comparisons may have been due to participants interpreting the paralinguistic cues as a sarcastic in nature rather than positive in nature.

Implications for Business

There are several practical implications of the current research for businesses and marketing practitioners. An important caveat is that, though paralinguistic cues are increasingly

prominent and frequently used on social media, their impact on consumer behavior is still unclear. Studies to this point have found positive effects, no effects, and negative effects on consumer behavior. It seems likely that several factors, including product type and source of the communication will influence the impact of paralinguistic cues. First, the type of implicit eWOM that is most likely to have impact on purchase intention may differ with the type of product (Das et al., 2019). Second, different types of paralinguistic cues may influence different aspects of consumer behavior. For example, Hill (2017) found a positive effect of positive emojis on brand reputation but not purchase intention while positive emoticons influenced purchase intention but not brand reputation. Third, the extent to which a product has brand recognition is also likely to influence the impact of implicit eWOM on purchase intention (Keller, 2001; Taute, 2010). Finally, if companies are seeking to use consumer-generated reviews that include implicit eWOM, they should consider using the reviews in combination with advertisements. The use of paralinguistic cues in advertisements has been found to have a positive influence on consumer behavior in several studies (John et al., 2017)

Conclusion

The impact of implicit eWOM on purchase intention is a topic relevant to businesses. Marketing budgets are limited so understanding factors that increase purchase intention is important. The current studies looked at consumer-to-consumer communication because research has suggested that 1) consumers have become more skeptical of advertising messages from companies and 2) consumer-to-consumer communication within a social network (Trusov et al., 2009) influences purchase intention. The present studies did not support the hypothesis that adding positive paralinguistic cues to a positive review would increase purchase intention toward the products studied (candy, office chair, computer). In comparisons of text-only reviews with

text reviews including positive paralinguistic cues, the studies found no difference or a difference that favored text only reviews over text reviews plus paralinguistic cues. The possible reasons for this include: 1) the anonymous source (not a friend) of the review, 2) the fact that there was a single review with a single paralinguistic cue presented when online users are accustomed to seeing many reviews, and 3) the interpretation of the paralinguistic cue by the receiver. There is limited research to support the hypothesis that paralinguistic cues impact some aspects of consumer behavior. Clarification of the impact of such cues on consumer behavior will be needed to evaluate the adequacy of ELM, AIM, SPT, and FCB in explaining the impact of eWOM and implicit eWOM on that behavior.

Appendix A

Attachment A.1

Survey Used in Study 1

The attachment shows the survey used in the Emoticon condition. The surveys used in all implicit eWOM conditions had the same reviews and questions. The difference was in the type of paralinguistic cue that followed each review. The Text Only control included no paralinguistic cue. The Emoticon condition used the smiley face. The Emoji Condition used the smiley face. The GIF condition used the wagging thumbs up. The control text-only condition contained no paralinguistic cues.

Consumer Reviews on Facebook Study 1

* 1. You are being asked to participate in a research study about how consumers share and react to information about purchase decisions on Facebook. Facebook's stated mission (2017) is "To give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together." As the largest social media platform in the world, Facebook is also an important place for individuals to share information about the things they do and the things they buy. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to read a product review and answer questions about your reaction. You will also be asked a few questions about your use of Facebook. In total, this questionnaire should take fewer than 3 minutes to answer.

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study will increase our understanding of how social media networks influence consumer behavior. As such, the information may benefit you in the future.

There are no known risks associated with this research study. No identifying information will be collected, and your answers are confidential. Risks will be minimized by storing data on a password protected computer system.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any question that you choose.

If you have questions about this questionnaire or the overarching study, you may contact the researcher at socialmediasurvey18@gmail.com. If you have any questions concerning your

rights as a research participant, you may contact Chris Koch- the Chair of the George Fox University Institutional Review Board - at ckoch@georgefox.edu.

By clicking “I agree” below you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, have read and understood this consent form and agree to participate in this research study. Please print a copy of this page for your records.

- [ ] I Agree
- [ ] I Do not agree.

Consumer Reviews on Facebook

A 50.0% **Please read the following review and respond to the questions that follow**:

Absolutely delicious! I love Hershey’s chocolate candy and it is a good value for the price! Every time the chocolate is smooth and creamy. Highly recommend. :-)

:

Based on the review above, indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Given the chance, I would consider purchasing this product in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
It is likely that I will actually purchase this product in the near future.	○	○	○	○	○
Given the opportunity, I intend to purchase this product.	○	○	○	○	○
I am interested in this product.	○	○	○	○	○

Please read the following review and respond to the questions that follow

This is a fantastic laptop. I have been using a different brand but when the screen shattered after a fall, I decided to try an Apple. With the Apple, you get more power and better battery life with the same performance as last year. I regularly have Word, Excel, Acrobat Pro and Edge/Chrome open- with 10 tabs active and doesn't overload the performance. The construction of laptop is great. The aluminum build feels great and sturdy. I have used it for 2 working days straight on a battery charge. :-)

Based on the review above, indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Given the chance, I would consider purchasing this product in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
It is likely that I will actually purchase this product in the near future.	○	○	○	○	○
Given the opportunity, I intend to purchase this product.	○	○	○	○	○
I am interested in this product.	○	○	○	○	○

2. What is your age?

3. What is your race/ethnicity?

4. How often do you access Facebook?

5. How many Facebook friends do you have?

Attachment A.2

Survey Used in Study 2

The attachment shows the survey used in the Emoji condition. The surveys used in all implicit eWOM conditions had the same reviews and questions. The difference was in the type of paralinguistic cue that followed each review. The Text Only control included no paralinguistic cue. The Emoticon condition used the smiley face. The Emoji Condition used the smiley face. The GIF condition used the wagging thumbs up.

Consumer Reviews on Facebook Study 2

* 1. You are being asked to participate in a research study about how consumers share and react to information about purchase decisions on Facebook. Facebook's stated mission (2017) is "To give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together." As the largest social media platform in the world, Facebook is also an important place for individuals to share information about the things they do and the things they buy. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to read product reviews and answer questions about your reaction. You will also be asked a few questions about your use of Facebook. In total, this questionnaire should take fewer than 3 minutes to answer.

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study will increase our understanding of how social media networks influence consumer behavior. As such, the information may benefit you in the future.

There are no known risks associated with this research study. No identifying information will be collected, and your answers are confidential. Risks will be minimized by storing data on a password protected computer system.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any question that you choose.

If you have questions about this questionnaire or the overarching study, you may contact the researcher at socialmediasurvey18@gmail.com. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact Chris Koch - the Chair of the George Fox University Institutional Review Board -at ckoch@georgefox.edu.

By clicking “I agree” below you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, have read and understood this consent form and agree to participate in this research study. Please print a copy of this page for your records.

- [ ] I Agree
- [ ] I Do not agree

Consumer Reviews on Facebook

2.

Tasty. I love Hershey’s chocolate candy and it is a good value for the price! Every time the chocolate is smooth and creamy. Recommended. 😊

Based on the review above, indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Given the chance, I would consider purchasing this product in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
It is likely that I will actually purchase this product in the near future.	○	○	○	○	○
Given the opportunity, I intend to purchase this product.	○	○	○	○	○
I am interested in this product.	○	○	○	○	○

Consumer Reviews on Facebook

3.

This is a good laptop. I have been using a different brand but when the screen shattered after a fall, I decided to try an Apple. With the Apple, you get more power and better battery life with the same performance. The construction of the laptop is good. The aluminum build feels sturdy. I have used it for 2 working days straight on a battery charge. 😊

Based on the review above, indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Given the chance, I would consider purchasing this product in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
It is likely that I will actually purchase this product in the near future.	○	○	○	○	○
Given the opportunity, I intend to purchase this product.	○	○	○	○	○
I am interested in this product.	○	○	○	○	○

Consumer Reviews on Facebook

4.

It was pretty easy to assemble. The arms we're a little tricky, probably because I did it alone. It was what I expected. It's not a bad chair, but I can tell over time, it may become uncomfortable on the seat cushion. Great for a short-term solution. Maybe 2 yrs to 4. 😊

Based on the review above, indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the statements below.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Given the chance, I would consider purchasing this product in the future.	○	○	○	○	○
It is likely that I will actually purchase this product in the near future.	○	○	○	○	○
Given the opportunity, I intend to purchase this product.	○	○	○	○	○
I am interested in this product.	○	○	○	○	○

Consumer Reviews on Facebook

What is your age?

5. What us your gender?

6. What is your race/ethnicity?

7. How often do you access Facebook?

8. How many Facebook friends do you have?

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