Social Relationship Factors Influence on EWOM Behaviors in Social Networking Sites: Empirical Study: Taiwan and Vietnam

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Abstract

This study provides insight into how social relationship factors influence on electronic Word-of-Mouth (EWOM) behaviors in social networking sites. By using the sample from Taiwan and Vietnam college students - who spend more time on social networking sites, we investigate these determinants of EWOM behaviors such as social capital, trust and interpersonal influences, and compare the results between Taiwanese and Vietnamese samples. Simple regression analysis was utilized to examine the three hypotheses through a questionnaire designed on the Likert seven-point scale. The results indicated that bonding social capital and interpersonal influence have positively significant influence on EWOM behaviors, and there are different about some factors between Taiwan and Vietnam. Taiwan consumers are found to have more bonding social capital, trust and normative influence than Vietnam counterparts do.

Key words: Electronic Worth-of-Mouth, EWOM, Social Relationship Factors, Social Capital, Trust, Interpersonal Influences

1. Introduction

Understanding the difference of word-of-mouth (WOM) networks is importantly relevant of designing Web and making marketing communication strategy (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007). In the years of 21st century, the application of Web 2.0 brought the efficient facility to the marketing field that created the revolution from buzzword marketing to using the Internet (Riegner, 2007). In 2010, the consumers around the world increased 82% of the time spent on social networking sites (SNSs) in comparison with the last year. They spent more than five hours and thirteen minutes on the SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter. SNSs became a phenomenon on the world (Nielsen, 2010). According Chu & Kim (2011), SNSs are important part in everyday lives of Internet users; and more than ninety-nine percent of the participants have account on Facebook - the most popular SNS of college students in America. Due to the development of Internet and SNSs, the communication environment of customers have changed and enriched. For instance, besides traditional communication, electronic communication between consumers can take place by many ways like email, forum, and groups (Vilpponen, Winter, & Sundqvist, 2006). This is the first time in human history the individuals' thoughts and opinions can access to global community with almost costless (Dellarocas & Chrysanthos, 2003).

The flow of WOM information between consumers is a form of individual behavior that contributes to the total operation of markets (Frenzen & Nakamoto, 1993). In addition, the positive WOM is a powerful marketing medium from the marketers as well as companies to the consumers. Bernard et al.(1989) indicated that online communication or the social networking services could strongly influence on the consumers brand perception and purchasing decisions, because the consumers tend to find more information, insights and opinions from the trusted sources before they decide to choose the products or brands.

Hence, this trend brings a new opportunity to the marketers to build the relationship between the electronic WOM (EWOM) communication platforms and the potential consumers (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009); and electronic market has provide a complete business mode for marketers and companies(Lee & Li, 2006). While the marketers have realized the present situation of the consumers' behaviors as well as the development of the Internet and SNSs, there are little researches about the factors influence to EWOM behaviors in Taiwan and Vietnam particularly. Due to the engagement in EWOM on SNSs is different from country (Choi, Kim, Sung, & Sohn, 2011; Chu & Kim, 2011), the research about the EWOM behaviors to provide to the marketers and companies the reference for their business and enrich more empirical study for the researching.

This study examines about the social relationship factors influence on EWOM behaviors of consumers and compare the result with the response of the American consumers. The model is build base on three social relationship factors: social capital, trust and interpersonal influence; and how they affect on the EWOM behaviors.The sample will be taken from the college students, who spend more time and have more relationships on SNSs. The results of this study is expected not only contributes to the literature for research, but also infer the empirical insights for the marketers as well as the companies about the trend of current consumers to built the marketing model catching up market.

This study is continued by the next four sections with the beginning of the section two. Section II provides the general views of the literatures and infers hypotheses development, section III mentions about the methodology and the sample, next section discusses about the results of the empirical study. The section V includes the collusion and implication about EWOM. Finally, the references of this research are the end of this paper.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Which and how the social relationship factors influence on the EWOM behaviors is one of the intensive research fields that demands to be studied and proved. Although, there are many previous studies about EWOM, but few researches about the factors impact on EWOM behaviors, on the other hand these factors have not similar influences on EWOM behaviors(Choi, Kim, Sung, & Sohn, 2011) in different countries (Chu & Kim, 2011).The development of the Internet and web 2.0 applications today give the consumers the greater control and influence to the products and brands for purchasing decisions through the WOM behaviors(Riegner, 2007). Moreover, the advance of Internet offers an open wide space for the EWOM, and the consumers engage with EWOM behaviors because it is a highly credible form of marketing information. While virtual communications between Internet communities have become a social phenomenon, the influence of EWOM in many fields is the topic that many authors are interested. For instance, there are paper researched about the influence of EWOM on virtual consumer communities (Hung & Li, 2007), or the effectiveness of EWOM for the purchasing of new members by SNSs (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009), or the research of WOM on online book sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006), etc. Those researches indicated that EWOM behaviors is the trend of consumers today, consumers more believe in EWOM information than traditional marketing or advertisement and the online reviews have become a habit before making purchasing decision of many people, and WOM communication has become a main part of online consumers interactions (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007).Hence, EWOM is trend that marketers must catch up to build the suitable marketing model. There are many determinants effect on EWOM behaviors, among them social capital, trust and interpersonal influence - three factors belong to social relationship - are the determinants understood in this paper. These determinants and EWOM behaviors are discussed in the next part.

2.1 Electronic Word-of-Mouth on social networking sites

EWOM behaviors refers to the giving any positive or negative statement from the potential, actual, and former consumers about the products or brands via the Internet(Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004).

Given the consumers are motivated to share the experiences about the affective elements of satisfaction, un-satisfaction or pleasure and sadness with others (Neelamegham & Jain, 1999), WOM communications are shaped and taken place every day in our lives. Prior to the Internet era, WOM communications are private conversation between acquaintances, with the limited space and time (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004) - this is traditional WOM. At that time, traditional WOM has known as a major role in consumers' purchasing decision (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988). Kotler (2000) surveyed 7,000 consumers in Europe and showed the results of 60% people were influenced to buy new products by WOM.

Therefore, people believe that WOM relates to the success of new products. Nowadays, the Internet allows people giving the information overcoming the limitation of traditional WOM; EWOM can transfer any opinion or comment from people who have never met together to each other. Hence, EWOM allows consumers look for the information related to products and brands that they are interested not only from few people they know, but also from a vast scattered people who have the experiences about this products and brands on over the world(Jalilvand, Esfahani, & Samiei, 2011). Hung & Li (2007) said EWOM provides explicit information, interactivity, and empathic listening, but in comparison with the communication with marketers, the distance between the receiver and the source of information is lower. This is the reason that the consumers perceive EWOM is more credible, reliable and trustworthy than the firm-initiated communication (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009).

In sum, the previous studied appealed that EWOM is the new trend to impact on the consumers' buying decisions. Be supported by Internet or SNSs, EWOM has a fertility land to exist and develop; it has become a social phenomenon need to be follow and examine.

2.2 Social capital

Social capital is an intrinsic part of relations between people; it is presented by interactions in the network, resources - information, ideas, norms, cooperation, jointly, emotional support, and interpersonal trust (Coleman, 1988). Social capital has been defined as the connections between people and the factors that tie people together. There are many studies have identified main clusters of social capital differently. Onyx & Bullen (2000)showed five main themes comprise social capital such as networks, reciprocity, trust, shared norm and social agency. Other authors, Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998)have suggested that social capital includes structural, relational, and cognitive - three dimensions. The definition about the social capital of Nahapiet & Ghoshal provides valuable implications for studying the information management and knowledge integration in social network. Putnam (2000)has indicated social capital refers to the "connections among individuals' social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p.19). According to Putnam, there are the most important distinction in social capital is bonding and bridging social capital, in these, bonding social capital refers to the inward-looking and the tendency of reinforce exclusive identities and homogenous groups with similar background such as ethnic groups or country groups. On the contrary, bridging social capital is outward looking; include people across diverse social division or heterogeneous group, such as youth service groups or civil rights movement. In addition, both bonding and bridging social capital can exist in social capital simultaneously.

In two types of social capital, bridging social capital is associated with the loose or weak ties across communities and bonding social capital is associated with dense network or strong ties within a limited group(Leonard & Onyx, 2003). Moreover, bridging social capital refers with the thinner or different sort of trust, whereas bonding social capital relates to localized and thick trust, which emphasizes emotional charge (Pigg & Crank, 2004). People who have more bridging social capital - loose ties - are likely to access to a large amount of information because the loose ties bring in novel information, in the other hand, strong ties mainly provide emotional support or sense of belonging (Granovetter, 1973). Choi, Marina, Kim, Sung., & Sohn, 2008(2008)has indicated that strong connections might be further articulated and strengthened by SNSs that provide channels for interactions with strong ties, so bonding social capital is increased. Otherwise, bridging social capital may be enhanced as a number of loose social ties are found and combined into the networks (Choi, Marina, Kim, Sung., & Sohn, 2008). A recent study found that the use of Facebook was connected with both bonding social capital and bridging social capital among college students(Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), therefore when people usually use SNSs, they likely to perceived effect of interactions with other, both strong ties and loose ties in social capital , as positive. Applying the notion of social capital, the findings indicate that the potential of online networking sites as a powerful social venue that increase bridging among people, and the SNSs provide consumers opportunities to maintain existing personal networks and expand them that promote bonding and bridging social capital simultaneously(Chu & Kim, 2011). In other words, the consumers on SNSs interact not only with close relationships with strong tie, but also with loose ties or weak ties. Hence, this study hypothesizes that both boding and bridging social capital have influenced on EWOM behaviors of consumers on SNSs positively.

H1: (a) Bonding and (b) bridging social capital have influenced on EWOM behaviors of consumers on SNSs positively.

2.3 Trust

Onyx & Bullen (2000)and Putnam (1993)have described trust is a crucial part of social capital. Trust is one of social relationship variables that effect on the consumers who interact in SNSs. Previous studies have contributed to people to understand the role of trust in information exchange. Trust involves a willingness to take a risk in communication with others based on a sense of confidence that others will respond as expected and act in reciprocally supportive ways. In addition, the level of trust plays a role that determines the decision to bridge other networks to exchange information of an individual (Onyx & Bullen, 2000). Putnam (2000)has also showed that when consumers trust in their contacts, they no need to spend more time and money enforcing contracts, so trust makes people believe in information express from others easily. Moreover, Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998)have suggested that trust increase the perceived trustworthiness of information, and leads to higher use of that information, thus it facilitates the use of information. Furthermore, the perceived trustworthiness are the important factor that influence on knowledge-sharing decisions, without trust, regardless of any formal information - sharing requirements in place, people would not share knowledge, but with the higher degree of trust, the amount and type of information exchanges enhances(Andrews & Delahaye, 2000). Besides, in communication context, trust between source and receiver is significant to the transfer of knowledge and information, and contribute to the efficient interpersonal communication (Chu & Kim, 2011). Others study has indicated that because little information comes through the person's social networks about other group members, thus the more people identify with a group and perceives the similarity with the group members, the more similarly that may be to trust others in that group. In addition, highly active consumers of virtual communities might be more trusting of other group members than in face-to-face communities (Blanchard & Horan, 1998).

When people interact on the Internet or the SNSs, because the Internet allow people connect without boundary limitations, these interactions likely promote the weak ties but restrain strong ties and therefore increase generalized trust among online consumers from different groups communities. High level of trust not only is one of prerequisites for investing online and connecting to new people, but also increases and maintains social capital through the Internet (Pénard & Poussing, 2010). Therefore, the higher of level trust, the frequently consumers interacts with people on Internet or SNSs. Shah, Kwak & Holbert(2001)have found that when people use the Internet for information exchange purpose such as seeking or giving information has positive impact on trust. Indeed, the users of the Internet for social recreation and information exchange are inversely related to trust in others; however, the users use Internet for recreational activities purpose is less level of trust than for information exchange purpose (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001).

Those evidences about imply that trust has influence on the information exchange as well as EWOM positively, people who have more trust will engage with EWOM behaviors more.

(H2): The higher of level trust leads to a greater engaging in EWOM behaviors.

2.4 Interpersonal influence

Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel (1989)have indentified two determinants of susceptibility to interpersonal influences are normative interpersonal influences and informational influences. Informational influence refers to the condition of credible evidence of reality, it mean the tendency of people to make informed decisions by accepting information from others. Normative interpersonal influence relates to conformity with the pledges to achieve rewards and avoid punishment, it refers the tendency of consumers follow the expectation of others through purchasing decisions (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975).There are many previous studies found out the effect of susceptibility to interpersonal influence on consumers' decision-making processes. The individual consumption may be highly effected by normative and informational interpersonal influences, both normative and informational influence are assumed to the basic interpersonal influences on consumers 'behaviors (Lascu, Bearden, & Rose, 1995). Susceptibility to interpersonal influence is conceptualized to the influence of social relationships on consumer reliance on SNSs as a source of product information (Chu & Kim, 2011).

Susceptibility to informational interpersonal (SII) influence reflects tendency to accept the information from others as credible evidence about reality (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989).

Consumers are high in SII usually observe the behavior of their friends and family to obtain consumption relevant information as the tendency of SII - tend to ask friends and relatives for advice about the brands or products they observe(Martin, Wentzel, Tomczak, & Henkel, 2007).Individuals who have more susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) are always making decision when it is clear that the majority of relevant others. People who are SII focus on the information value of the message transmitted, whereas individual who have more SNI emphasize the process of transmission and relationship buildings (Laroche, Kalamas, & Cleveland, 2005).

Consumers have high susceptibility to interpersonal influence are individuals who are shown to be more influenced by other when making purchase decisions, in other words, consumers who have high susceptibility to interpersonal influence are more likely to be effected by WOM behaviors(Liao & Cheung, 2001). Indeed, the users of social networking site who have informational influence are predicted to display a higher need to acquire valuable information from informed contacts in order to guide their purchase decisions. On the other hands social networking site users who are more susceptible to normative influences are more likely to comply with the expectations of close contacts and look for social approval through the purchase and use of the same products and brands (Chu & Kim, 2011). From the evidences above, it could be concluded that the susceptibility to interpersonal influence include both informational interpersonal influence and normative interpersonal influence have positive effect on EWOM behaviors.

(H3): (a) Informational interpersonal influence and (b) normative interpersonal influenceeffect on EWOM behaviors positively.

The proposal research model is presented in figure 1.

3. Research Method

3.1 Questionnaire design

This study collected data from using a questionnaire with 7 points Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". EWOM behaviors in SNSs were tested in two countries: Taiwan and Vietnam. The popular social networking platform in these countries is Facebook (98.5% of samples use Facebook), which enable users to create personal file and allow brands to set up communities to connect with their consumers. Therefore, the sample were picked from these countries was appropriate.

EWOM behaviors were estimated by 18 questions that were built by using the opinion leadership, opinion seeking and pass-along behaviors scales (Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1996; Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006).

Social capital was measured by using the capital scale developed by Williams (2006)with 20 items were used to access bonding and bridging social capital.

Trust was assessed by adopting 7-items reflecting the perceived of trust in SNSs(Chu & Choi, 2011; Lin, 2006).

Interpersonal influence factors were measured by 12 questions that were built base on scales of Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel(1989)and Chu & Choi (2011).

3.2Data collection

The target respondent is college students in Taiwan and Vietnam who spend much time to interact with others in SNSs. One hundred twenty-five Taiwan and eighty-five Vietnam undergraduate and graduate students participated in this study with the percent of 59.5% and 40.4% respectively. The samples were composed approximately 29.5% males and 70.5% females and 93.8% ranged in age from 21 to 30. More than 61% of the participants were senior, 25% were graduate students and the rest of 12.5% were sophomores, juniors and others.
To enhance the effectiveness of the samples, this study used both online survey and paper survey to collect data, and Google.doc was used to deliver the online questionnaire.

4. Result

4.1 Samples' demographic profile

There was 205 respondents take part in this survey include both Taiwanese and Vietnamese, and all of the responses are valid for data analysis after checking selection criteria.

Amongst various SNSs platforms, Facebook is the most favorite one with 98.5% of users, Yahoo 360 ^{o} is the second one with 14.7%. The users of Zingme, Myspace, Windows Live Space, and Twitter are 6.6%, 1.9%, 5.7% and 5.2%, respectively. Most of the samples have a experience to use SNS more than two years with 77.6% of respondents, 17.6% have one to two years using SNS experience. 42.3% of them use the SNS 1-5 times/day, 36.1% samples use 6-10 times/day, 8.5% use 11-15 times/day, and 12.8% use 12 times over/day. Moreover, the time they spend on SNSs as follow: one hour and below 16.6%, one to three hours 36.19%, three to five hours 23.3%, five to seven hours 12.5%, seven hours and above 11.4%.Thus, most of the respondents spend more than one hour on SNSs every day. The activities that they most often do when they use SNSs are reading the status and comments of their friends with the percent of 90.0% responses, updating status with 57.9%, chatting with 64.2%, commenting with 40.9%, using the applications of SNSs with 27.14%. In addition, the contacts that they often talk with are close friends (78.9%), classmates (78%), acquaintances (58.5%), family (52.8%), and colleagues (31.9%), hence, the users of SNSs are not only contact with the close ties, but also contact with the loose ties.

4.2 Factors analysis

The factors model comprising of five variables was uses to analyze the EWOM behaviors via SNSs. In this model, EWOM was dependent variable, and bonding social capital, bridging social capital, informational interpersonal influence, normative interpersonal influence and trust were independent variables. Regression analysis was conducted to explore how social relationship factors influence on EWOM behaviors. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 showed that the model is statistically significant with $R^2 = 0.377$. The fitted model as follow: EWOM = 1.9493 + 0.0312 Trust + 0.1930 Bonding social capital + 0.0227 Bridging social capital + 0.1503 Informational interpersonal influence + 0.0991 Normative interpersonal influence

The table 2was the result about the effect of social capital, trust and interpersonal influence on the EWOM behaviors. That revealed that bonding social capital and both informational and normative interpersonal influence have a positive and significant effect on EWOM behaviors. Thus, the hypothesis (H1) (a), (H3) (a) (b) were supported, whereas (H1) (a) and (H2) were rejected.

4.3 Comparing the results between Taiwan and Vietnam

The separated results of the effect of social relationships on EWOM behaviors through three factors social capital, trust, and interpersonal influence was present in Table 3. As the results, there was significant different between Taiwan and Vietnam in the factors of bonding social capital, trust and normative interpersonal influence. Given the results, Taiwanese had more bonding social capital, trust and normative interpersonal influence with the contacts on the SNSs than Vietnamese counterparts. That if significant different between two countries in these factors.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study was conducted aiming to investigate how three factors - social capital, trust and interpersonal influence - influence EWOM behaviors in Taiwan and Vietnam. Moreover this paper also found out whether the difference between two countries on these factors. The findings from this empirical study indicate that bonding social capital, both informational interpersonal influence and normative interpersonal influence effect on EWOM behaviors. Whereas trust and bridging social capital have no significant effect on EWOM behaviors. Previous research has indicated that both bonding and bridging social capital have influence on EWOM behaviors, but in this study only bonding social capital have impact on EWOM behaviors. This result could be explained by bonding social capital emphasizes the norms obtained through dense networks and it related to group-orientated collectivistic cultures (Choi, Kim, Sung, & Sohn, 2011), moreover Taiwan and Vietnam are countries that tend to collectivistic cultures. Thus, these countries have more bonding social capital that leads to stronger engagement in EWOM.

Another factor - trust - also has no significant effect on EWOM behaviors. This result is contract with the previous examines (Chu & Choi, 2011). Several studies have found that the level of trust plays an important role in determining an individual's decision to bridge other networks to pass-along or find information. However, in this examine, bridging social capital that have function to bridge people who have never meet each other together have no significant influence on EWOM behaviors, thus, trust is not a significant predictor of EWOM behaviors.

Moreover, many users using SNSs to search for offline contacts as opposes to meeting strangers, the social and connective characteristics of SNSs enable consumers to interact with others and facilitate the development of new relationships throughout a large-scale network that may have a little of trust. Hence, the result of previous study was not supported. Given the prediction, both factors of interpersonal influence have significant influence on EWOM behaviors. While consumers have higher susceptible to normative influence are more engaging in giving, seeking and pas-along the information on SNSs than others are, consumers who are subject to information influence have higher tendency to exchange and forward product-related information to contacts, thus, these results were supported.

In the comparison between two countries - Taiwan and Vietnam, there is difference about the factors of bonding social capital, trust and normative interpersonal influence. According Hofstede (1991), the individualism of Vietnam higher than Taiwan, it means the spirit of collectivism of Taiwan people larger than Vietnam. In addition, the collectivism culture relates to the importance of emotional support and shared norms obtained through dense network that are emphasized in bonding social capital (Choi, Kim, Sung, & Sohn, 2011). Therefore, the previous study about the culture and social capital was supported. Bonding social capital focus on close tie in the social relationships, which have more trust than loose network in bridging social capital, and Taiwan has more bonding social capital than Vietnam, so that is the reason for the trust in their contacts more than Vietnam people. Moreover, those within collectivistic cultures tend to be subject to the normative influence (Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005), so Taiwan people has more normative influence than Vietnam counterparts do.

From the managerial perspective, it is importance to understand the factors in social relationships have influence on EWOM behaviors - a tendency of current consumers, which lead the managers or companies get success to touch their consumers. Our study showed how three factors - social capital, trust, interpersonal influence - affects the EWOM, and the different influence in different countries with the sample from Taiwan and Vietnam. Hence, the managers could understand the behaviors of the consumers in Taiwan and Vietnam, as well as understand in the different countries, the consumers have not similar behaviors. This examine would provide the general view about the consumers EWOM behaviors on SNSs in Taiwan and Vietnam, the managers and companies can research to apply a suitable marketing strategies in these countries. Moreover, they can build the channel for EWOM behaviors in SNSs to do the marketing. Examining social relationships factors in SNSs contribute to the understanding of the process of EWOM, which enables managers and companies to direct the marketing strategies.

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Figure 1: Proposal Research Model

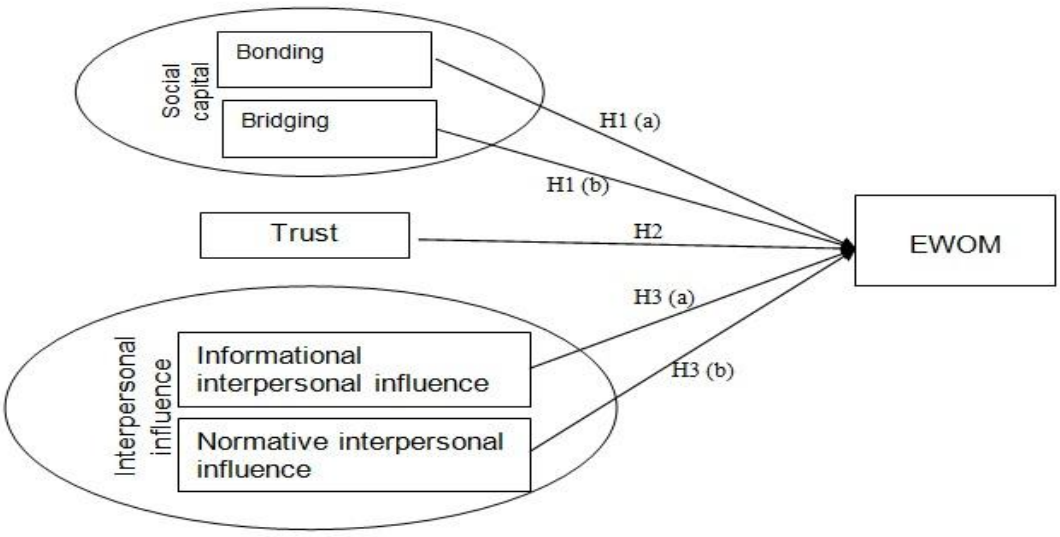

Table 1: Regression output

Model Summary						
Model		R	R square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of the Estimate	
1		0.614095	0.377113	0.361846	0.394548	
ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19.22607	5	3.845214	24.70140385	2E-19
	Residual	31.75624	204	0.155668		
	Total	50.9823	209			
Coefficients						
Model		Regression Summary for dependent Variable EWOM				
		B		Std. Error		
	(Constant)	1.9493		0.0000		
1	Trust	0.0312		0.032870		
	Bonding social capital	0.1930		0.055463		
	Bridging social capital	0.0227		0.040304		
	Informational interpersonal influence	0.1503		0.033856		
	Normative interpersonal influence	0.0991		0.034068		

Table 2: Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis		P value	Results
(H1): (a) Bonding and (b) bridging social capital have influenced on EWOM behaviors of consumers on SNSs positively.	Bonding social capital	0.000612465*	(H1) (a): Supported
	Bridging social capital	0.572939662	(H1) (b): Rejected
(H2): The higher of level trust leads to a greater engaging in EWOM behaviors.		0.342347003	(H2): Rejected
(H3): (a) Informational interpersonal influence and (b) normative interpersonal influence effect on EWOM behaviors positively.	Informational interpersonal influence	1.47149E-05*	(H3) (a): Supported
	Normative interpersonal influence	0.004012775*	(H3) (b): Supported

*P < 0.05

Table 3: Testing results in Taiwan and Vietnam

	Mean				
	Social capital		Trust	Interpersonal influence	
	Bonding social capital	Bridging social capital		Informational	Normative
Taiwan	4.213091	5.178667	4.490286	5.134000	4.147000
Vietnam	3.774332	4.996078	3.836975	5.152941	3.647059