CHAPTER 7

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS
Limitations and Future Research Directions

All researches have limitations which further provide scope for future research. Current research also has a few limitations.

Firstly this research attempts to focus on motivational and social relationship factors that lead to eWOM behaviour. There may be other antecedent variables that further explain occurrence of eWOM behaviour. Motivation and social relationship properties are not the exhaustive list of all antecedents to eWOM behaviour. Further research may be done to identify other antecedents to eWOM behaviour.

Secondly eWOM variable is measured keeping in mind the three core behaviours of WOM: product information collection, product opinion sharing/discussion and product recommendation (Eccleston & Griseri, 2008). Future research may slice these core behaviours and test them individually. Moreover eWOM behaviour is tested as an outcome variable or as an independent variable. What are not included in this study are factors that may or may not lead to other dimensions of eWOM behaviour like praise or valence.

Thirdly, credibility is a receiver-based judgement, therefore apart from characteristics of the source and the message it is also influenced by the characteristics of the receiver (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Susceptibility to informal influence varies from person to person and is dependent on certain individualistic traits and characteristics (Bearden, Netemeyer & Teel, 1989). For our study receiver characteristics were not considered however it may too have a moderating effect over the relationship between eWOM and brand attitude formation. Therefore it should be tested in future studies.

Fourthly, for our experiment a fictitious brand has been considered from the mobile phone product category. Researchers in the past have suggested that in a purchase situation, public scrutiny or display is possible only when the product under contemplation will be noticeable by others. Public scrutiny or display of the product is high for public-private and luxury-necessity product categories (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). In other words, product categories where public scrutiny or display is low, there will be less WOM behaviour. Therefore further research may be done to understand how category of product can play a role over eWOM behaviour and its consequences. Moreover respondent’s attitude about fictitious brand before exposure to all the stimuli of the experiment was not captured. If it was captured then the change in the brand attitude because of the stimuli could be captured.
Fifthly, all experiments are conducted with a set of assumptions and the environment is controlled, which further leads limited generalizability. One assumption that was stated before the experiment commenced for a respondent, was to assume that the fictitious source is a “friend” on their own Facebook network. Therefore the limitation of the experiment is that it was conducted in the context of “Weak Tie Strength”. In order to avoid the effect of source familiarity, fictitious source profiles have been used, thereby assuming weak tie strength between source and the respondent. “Strong Tie Strength” relations will affect brand attitude and purchase intention in a different way. Further research may be done, where the source and the respondent have strong ties, with the help Social Network Analysis. Moreover by using a fictitious brand we have control for alternate exposure of brand communication. In reality this may not hold true as consumers are exposed to brand communication from multiple sources simultaneously. This may further add to the limitation and generalizability.

Sixthly, our investigation is limited to eWOM behaviour on Facebook, SNS, further studies may be done for other forms of eWOM behaviours and other categories of social media that allow consumer to consumer brand related communications.

Previous studies have been criticised for using students as the respondents for research studies. But this limitation is cannot be considered as limiting as we needed sample that would fulfil the requirements of our two control variables: eWOM behaviour via social media; average social media consumption in a week. Using student population helped meet those requirements. Further studies may expand the scope of this study by using working professionals or any other age group or profession.

Lastly perception based self-reported measures have their own limitations and biases attached. Qualitative studies in form of content analysis may be done to further study the “why” and “how” aspect of eWOM behaviour via social media and validate the results of the current research.