

The Impact of Social Media Relationships on e-WOM in Syria and Hungary

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Abstract: *Cultural values play a crucial role in the formation of individuals' behaviour. With the emergence of social networking sites, which have formed a parallel world to the real world, the behaviour of individuals and their motives to engage in electronic word of mouth (eWOM) on social media platforms has become extremely important for brands. Due to a relative lack in studies focusing on the cultural difference-based impact of social relationships on eWOM in social media, the present study seeks to address this gap as its broad objective is to investigate the effect of social relationship variables on eWOM in social media by comparing two different cultures, namely Syria and Hungary in order to explore whether social relationships exert a more significant impact on eWOM in a collectivistic society than in an individualistic one. An explanatory research design was adopted and the data was collected by means of a questionnaire survey. The final sample included 113 Syrian and 90 Hungarian respondents, all of them aged 35 or below. It was found that tie strength among young adults has a more positive impact on eWOM in Syria than in Hungary, while no homophily impact was found on eWOM in either. Regarding the other social relationship variables examined in the study (trust, normative and informational influences), the results showed that they do not have a more positive impact on eWOM in Syria than in Hungary. The research is believed to have contributed to previous investigations on the impact of social relationships on eWOM via social media by providing insights into the role of a cultural value dimension in determining the extent to which individuals are affected by their cultural background, whether collectivistic or individualistic, when they interact in social media platforms. At the same time, it is acknowledged that the study has limitations thus future examinations are necessary.*

Keywords: cultural values, eWOM, social media, social relationship variables

JEL Codes: C12, C83, D12, D91, M31

1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

In the field of marketing there is increasing interest in digital interactions, especially those that occur in the social media between the customers (Heinonen, 2011). Customers are no longer passive recipients of marketing messages; they also contribute to content creation and sharing (Stewart & Pavlou, 2002) since social media allows users to ask questions and seek advice from others, and further, it allows experts to take a leadership role and present themselves as influencers.

Electronic word of mouth (henceforth: eWOM) occurs in social media when customers search for advice or informal information using an application which allows communication between its users. eWOM in social media comprises three main aspects: the first is opinion giving, the second is opinion seeking, and the third aspect is pass-along behaviour. Information giving behaviour is related to opinion leaders who are defined as individuals who have knowledge and expertise; therefore, they are considered as information

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sources by opinion seekers (Feick, Price, & Higie, 1986). Information seeking behaviour is related to opinion seekers who search for leaders' recommendation and advice when they want to purchase a product (Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1996). Pass-along behaviour can be defined as behaviour that allows information to flow between users in a way that may not include seeking or giving advice through social media interactions (such as like, comment and share); it appears in the cyberspace because of its interactive nature, which allows users to undertake multiple roles in terms of giving and seeking for advice as customers' preferences for a particular brand and their opinion on a particular product or idea can be seen by their social community regardless of their personality as opinion leader or seeker (Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006). The most important characteristic of this behaviour is its great dependence on social relationships between users, whether family relationships or community relationships such as brand community.

Given that the essence of social media is social communication between individuals, the variables of social relationships are important for the understanding of how eWOM occurs. There are a number of studies on the effect of social relationship variables on eWOM in social media (e.g. Chou & Kim, 2011; Sharma & Rehman, 2017). The present study aims to contribute to this trend by comparing the above effects on young customers from two distant cultures: Hungary and Syria. Accordingly, the broad research question is formulated as follows: Is there a difference in the impact of social relationships on the electronic word of mouth in social media between young Hungarian and Syrian consumers?

1.1. Social relationships and eWOM in social media

Social media users, either opinion leaders or opinion seekers, engage in eWOM because of the users' desire to build new social relationships and keep in touch with their current personal network. Users of social networking sites help each other make decisions (e.g. purchasing decisions) by exchanging information and experiences with their social networks. Studying the variables of social relations greatly helps in understanding the mechanism of eWOM and the factors that contribute to generate it (Chu & Kim, 2011). According to Chu & Kim (2011) there are four main variables that determine the nature of social relationships and their impact on word of mouth: (1) tie strength (2) homophily (3) trust (4) interpersonal influence.

Tie strength refers to the power of the relationships between members of a network, for example "the potency of the bond between the customer and service provider" (Mittal, Huppertz, & Khare, 2008 p. 195). It can be measured through several variables, such as the importance of the social relationship between the sender and the receiver, the extent to which users are close to each other, and the frequency of communication between them (Brown & Reingen, 1987). According to Granovetter (1973 p. 1361) there are two types of social ties: strong and weak ties based on the "combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services that characterize the tie". The first one is the type in which the relationship is strong, close to the person and has significant influence and emotional support, such as friends and family. On the other hand, the second type, in which the relationship is weaker and does not have a significant impact on the person, does not have emotional support unlike the first, and consists of a wide range of acquaintances and colleagues (Pigg & Crank, 2004). Several researchers have confirmed that tie strength is one of the most significant factors that affect the traditional and electronic word of mouth (e.g. De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Wallace, Buil, & De Chernatony, 2012). Strong ties have been found more reliable sources than weak ties, especially for word-of-mouth receivers who prefer to obtain information from close sources such as family and friends (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008).

Homophily is the degree of similarity between the individuals who interact in terms of age, education, interests, values and beliefs, while heterophily is the degree to which individuals who interact are not alike in many aspects (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). Homophily has been studied mainly in the communication

literature, but recently it has been given attention in marketing studies with the advent of social media, as the presence of brands within these sites requires them to interact with their customers. It is important that the customer feels that the brand and its employees are similar to him, have the same values and beliefs, and its website provides content that matches the characteristics and interests of the customer, as the more similar customers are to the brand, the more they interact with its contents (Kim, Kandampully, & Bilgihan, 2018). Moreover, customers feel more satisfied when they feel that other customers are similar to them and have the same characteristics, which motivates them to interact with them and thus engage in eWOM in its various forms (giving, seeking and passing-along) (Hanks, Line, & Yang, 2017). In social networking sites Thelwall's (2009) study showed that similar demographic characteristics such as education, attitude and age are reasons for joining social networking sites and engage in eWOM. On the other hand, Kim and Chu's (2011) study found that the similarity with friends has negative effect on sending information as consumers hesitated to give opinion that may not match network members' values and interests.

Trust is defined as relying on a particular trustor in making decisions and believing in his/her credibility (Moorman, Deshpande, & Zaltman, 1993). Since customers exchange information among themselves if they trust each other, trust plays a major role in customers' desire to engage in eWOM, which in turn will affect their purchasing decision (Wang, Yeh, Chen, & Tsydypov, 2016). In the context of viral marketing, users receive endless messages, emails and information every day and they ignore many of them for several reasons, for example due to lack of confidence in the source of the content so trust between contacts plays a significant role in the arrival of information to a large number of customers through one of the most important dimensions of eWOM, namely pass-along behaviour (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Although customer reviews and comments are considered more credible than the traditional promotional mix, they are still viewed as unreliable due to their anonymous source. Social media, by adding the element of pass-along behaviour to the two basic elements of giving opinion and seeking opinion, has brought about a significant change in the traditional and electronic word of mouth mechanism. Now consumers are involved in eWOM since, after trying out a product, they can pass this experience to their friends by sending a message, commenting on the brand website of the product or by sharing a specific post and thus they influence their friends who trust them (Wang, Yeh, Chen, & Tsydypov, 2016).

Interpersonal influence relates to social conformity, which can be defined as thinking and possessing behaviours that are consistent with the beliefs and values of the group to which a person belongs, as people judge a certain behaviour correct if they see others doing it, and when more people do the same act, additional people will do it and the acceptance of people within the group will increase as well (Coleman, 2004). Society or group pressures the individual to accept certain opinions and behaviours, and the individual's compliance with the beliefs and norms of the community results from the desire to belong to that particular community (Hansen & Lee, 2013). Several studies have shown that interpersonal influence is one of the most important social factors that affect the decision-making of the consumer, and the more susceptible the customer is to interpersonal influence, the more likely (s)he is to engage in eWOM (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989; Chu & Kim, 2011; Castellano & Vincent, 2017).

Interpersonal impact has been classified in the literature in two dimensions: *normative and informational influences* (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989). The customer's tendency to adopt behaviours and actions that are consistent with the expectations and beliefs of others in order to achieve reward or avoid consequences is known as normative influences. Informational influences, on the other hand, refer to the tendency to accept information provided by knowledgeable others as evidence of reality serving as a guide in the search for the right brand and product (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989; Castellano & Vincent, 2017). In social media, users are subject to interpersonal influences, whether normative or informational, which in turn influence how they engage in eWOM. In terms of normative influence, users are expected to acquire

products and adopt ideas in line with the culture and beliefs of the community and thus they are expected to engage in eWOM to obtain the conformity of the community to which they belong, and regarding informational influence, users are expected to participate in the eWOM in order to obtain expert information before decision-making (Chu & Kim, 2011).

1.2. The cultural value of individualism and eWOM

Professor Geert Hofstede was perhaps the best-known theorist and researcher to provide a model of culture initially based on four cultural value dimensions: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity and uncertainty avoidance; long-/short-term orientation and indulgence/restraint were later added to the model (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). The sample of Hofstede's study was large and international and the data analysis techniques which were used at that time were advanced. His study offered a sophisticated model of cultural differences which made it easy to include culture as a variable in various models (Taras & Steel, 2009). Although there are more recent dimension-based models, e.g., the project GLOBE and the Trompenaars model, our study relies on Geert Hofstede's model since Syria is not mentioned either in the Globe, or in Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (2020). In our study we concentrate only on the individualism/collectivism dimension, which relates to whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "We", as our study investigates the impact of social relationships dimensions which are related to the degree of dependence of individuals on each other in the decision of engaging in eWOM.

Individualism vs. Collectivism indicates the degree to which members of a society are integrated into groups. Individualism is a characteristic of cultures in which the relations between members of the society are not very strong, as the individual takes care of himself and his immediate family; collectivism, on the other hand, relates to the culture of a society in which individuals are integrated with each other at a higher level than the immediate family, as relations are coherent with uncles, grandparents, etc. (Hofstede, 2011). In individualistic societies, individual goals are more important than collective goals, in contrast to collectivistic societies, in which members pay more attention to group goals than to their personal goals as collectivism manifests itself in loyalty and commitment to the family and the in-group. The individual in individualistic societies has several social interactions, but the interactions are short and not very intimate, unlike the individual in collectivistic societies who does not have many social interactions, but interactions last for a long time and are more intimate (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; House et. al., 2004). According to Hofstede, Syria is a collectivistic society with a low score of 35, whereas Hungary is an individualistic society with a high score of 80 (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

Regarding the first dimension, *tie strength*, societies of a collectivistic nature maintain strong social relations, both online and offline (Farias, 2017) and the influence of tie strength on eWOM could be higher and more direct in collectivistic societies than in individualistic societies. Thus, the first set of hypotheses is formulated to examine the difference in the impact of tie strength on eWOM in social media between Syria and Hungary:

H1: Tie strength with social media contacts has more positive effect on young adults in Syria than in Hungary on (a) giving opinion (b) seeking opinion (c) pass-along behaviour in social media.

While the second and third dimensions, *homophily* and *trust*, do not have a direct effect on collectivistic societies more than on individualistic ones, they exert a positive impact on the strength of the relationship, which is stronger in collectivistic societies. Thus, the indirect homophily influence on eWOM could be higher in collectivistic societies than in individualistic societies (Farias, 2017). Hence, the following hypotheses are formulated to explore the difference in the impact of homophily and trust on eWOM in social media between Syria and Hungary:

H2: Homophily with social media contacts has more positive effect on young adults in Syria than in Hungary on (a) giving opinion (b) seeking opinion (c) pass-along behaviour in social media.

H3: Trust in social media contacts has more positive effect on young adults in Syria than in Hungary on (a) giving opinion (b) seeking opinion (c) pass-along behaviour in social media.

As for the last dimension, *interpersonal influence*, previous studies showed that interpersonal influence affects members of collectivistic cultures more than members of individualistic cultures as societal norms and traditions determine how individuals behave (Lee & Kacen, 2008). Thus, the direct influence of interpersonal influence on eWOM could be higher in collectivistic societies than in individualistic societies and the following hypotheses are put forward to explore the difference in the impact of normative influences and informational influences on eWOM in social media between Syria and Hungary:

H4: Susceptibility to normative influences has more positive effect on young adults in Syria than in Hungary on (a) giving opinion (b) seeking opinion (c) pass-along behaviour in social media.

H5: Susceptibility to informational influences has more positive effect on young adults in Syria than in Hungary on (a) giving opinion (b) seeking opinion (c) pass-along behaviour in social media.

2. Research Elaboration

The present study reviewed previous research on social relationships in social media and their effects on the interaction of customers through giving, seeking or passing along the information, which in turn leads to eWOM between customers and their friends. Hypotheses from existing theories were developed in order to test them empirically by collecting data using the survey strategy through distributing a questionnaire to a sample of Syrian and Hungarian respondents in an attempt to gain results that support or oppose the existing theories. Therefore, the research reported in this paper fits the positivist philosophy (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). Positivism is linked to deductive research and quantitative designs (Deshpande, 1983).

In line with the quantitative design and survey strategy which were adopted, the data were collected by means of an anonymous self-administered questionnaire, which was created by using Google forms. The self-administered questionnaire was adopted since it allows for remote data collection, its cost is low and it is economical also in terms of researcher time and effort.

2.1. Questionnaire items

The questionnaire contained validated items from previous studies that relate to the dimensions chosen; these studies (to be presented below) employed a five-point Likert scale to measure the data.

To measure tie strength, three statements were adopted from Chu & Kim's (2011) measure. The first item related to the frequency of respondents' communication with their social media friends, whether it occurs "never", "rarely", "occasionally", "frequently" or "very frequently"; the second statement was about the importance of respondents' relationship with their friends, if it is "not important", "slightly important", "neutral", "important" or "very important", while the third item concerned the degree of respondents' closeness to their friends in social media, whether it is "not close", "slightly close", "neutral", "close" or "very close".

The measures of homophily were adopted from McCroskey et al.'s (1975) measure by using three statements. The first one was about the similarity of respondents' thinking to that of their social media friends, whether they "never think like me", "rarely think like me", "sometimes think like me", "very often think like me" or "always think like me". The second item concerned the similarity of respondents' character to that of their social media friends, if it is "completely different from me", "different from me", "neutral", "similar to me", "completely similar to me", while the third item related to the similarity of respondents'

behaviour to that of their social media friends, whether they “never behave like me”, “rarely behave like me”, “sometimes behave like me”, “very often behave like me” or “always behave like me”. The rest of the items were measured by a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” with a neutral anchor in the middle.

To examine trust, we adopted two items from Lin’s (2006) measure which were about the degree of respondents’ trust in their social media friends and the degree of respondents’ reliance on them as information source.

Normative influence and informational influence were assessed by adopting items of Bearden et al.’s (1989) measure, seven items for normative influence and four items for informational influence. Regarding normative influence, the items concerned the importance of others’ liking and approval of the brands to be purchased by the respondent, purchasing products and brands that are expected from others, achieving a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands as others purchase, looking for brands and products that make good impressions on others, buying the same brands that others buy if the respondent wants to be like them and identifying with other people by purchasing the same products and brands as they purchase. As for informational influence, the items related to whether respondents ask their friends about the product in which they do not have enough experience, if they ask their friends about the best alternative available from a product class, whether respondents ask their friends about a product before they buy it and if they observe what others buy and use to make sure that they buy the right product.

To measure eWOM behaviours we used three items for opinion giving behaviour and four items for opinion seeking which were adopted from Flynn et al. (1996) and four items for opinion passing which were adopted from Sun et al.’s (2006) measure. With regard to opinion giving, the items were about the degree to which respondents persuade and influence their friends on social media to buy the products which they buy and the response degree of their friends on social media to their advice. As for opinion seeking, the items related to the degree of respondents’ dependence on their friends’ opinion and advice, the degree of their friends’ influence on their choice of products and the degree of their comfort with buying a product after getting the opinions of their friends. Finally, opinion passing items concerned the desire of respondents to share social media friends’ opinions about product with others, either positive or negative opinions or both, and the desire of respondents to share interesting opinions about products from one group to another on social media.

2.2. Sample and procedure

The questionnaire was developed in English and then translated into Arabic and Hungarian by the authors, who are native speakers, in an effort to eliminate the sampling bias to some extent, i.e., not to exclude systematically respondents who do not speak English. The link of the questionnaire was posted on some Facebook groups and also shared among acquaintances of the authors, so the convenience sampling method was selected, which is the easiest way to obtain the data, in order to form a suitable sample size. With the convenience sampling technique, it is supposed that the target population will be represented by the subset of population and the researcher selects a subset of participants who are accessible due to time and cost constrictions (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009, p. 241).

Data collection took place from 4th to 17th April, 2022. A total of 243 individuals filled in the questionnaire, 56% of whom was Syrians (135) and 44% was Hungarians (108). Of the 243 participants, the final sample of 203 respondents was used for data analysis after eliminating respondents older than 35 years since we were planning to study those who were under 18 years old in 2004, when Facebook was released. Facebook is the most important social media based on the number of users and the largest segment group of Facebook users is between the ages of 25 and 35 based on Statista database company; therefore the final

sample was 56% Syrians (113) and 44% Hungarians (90). In the Syrian sample 2 respondents belonged to the “<20” age segment, 24 respondents to the “21-25” segment, 61 respondents to the “26 -30” segment and 26 respondents to the “31-35” segment representing 1.8%, 21.2%, 54% and 23% of the sample. The Hungarian sample consisted of 27 respondents in the “<20” age segment, 42 respondents in the “21-25” segment, 16 respondents in the “26-30” segment and 5 respondents in the “31-35” segment representing 30%, 46.7%, 17.8% and 5.6% of the sample. It is noted that the Hungarian sample includes significantly younger ages than the Syrian sample, and the reason for this may be due to the difference in the nature of society with openness towards social media, as Hungarian young people seem to be more familiar with social media. Data was analysed with the SPSS 26 programme.

2.3. Validity and reliability

The translation of the questionnaire into the native language of the respondents, the use of pre-validated items and the pre-test on a total of 10 Arabic and Hungarian respondents are believed to cater for the face, construct and content validity of the questionnaire. Concurrent validity, i.e. “the criterion on which cases are known to differ and that is relevant to the concept in question” (Bryman, 2012, p. 171) was considered through the introduction of the age criterion; the responses of 40 subjects over 35 years of age were excluded in an effort to study only respondents who are believed to keep up with the latest social media platforms.

Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was used to test the consistency of measures. As shown in Table 1, most indicators yielded Cronbach Alpha scores higher than 0.7, which is considered a very good level of internal reliability. There is lower correlation in case of the trust measure (0.641), which is thought to be due to the low number of items and thus considered acceptable (Bryman 2012).

Table 1: Internal reliability of measures

Indicators (construct)	Cronbach’s Alpha	N of Items
Tie strength	0.845	3
Homophily	0.817	3
Trust	0.641	2
Normative influence	0.851	7
Informational influence	0.750	4
Opinion giving	0.846	3
Opinion seeking	0.864	4
Opinion passing	0.857	4

(Source: own data)

3. Results and Discussion

Regression analysis was carried out to test the hypotheses. Adjusted R-square values were evaluated as follows: 0.1-0.3: weak correlation, 0.4-0.6: moderate correlation, 0.7-0.9: strong correlation (Dancey & Reidy, 2007). In the present research, in case the correlation coefficient was lower than 0.1 but the impact was found significant ($p < 0.05$) we did not reject the hypothesis since it means there is very weak impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

3.1. H1: Tie strength

As shown in Tables 2-4, the regression analysis revealed the significant positive impact of tie strength on opinion giving, opinion seeking and opinion passing for the Syrian sample while the impact was not significant in case of the Hungarian sample. Thus, H1 ‘Tie strength with social media contacts has a more

positive effect on young adults in Syria than in Hungary on (a) giving opinion (b) seeking opinion (c) pass-along behaviour in social media' was supported by the analysis and accepted.

Table 2: Regression analysis for impact of tie strength on opinion giving

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.333 ^a	.111	.103	13.808	.000 ^b	.272
Hungarian	.136 ^a	.018	.007	1.649	.202 ^b	.146

Table 3: Regression analysis for impact of tie strength on opinion seeking

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.203 ^a	.041	.033	4.769	.031 ^b	.187
Hungarian	.195 ^a	.038	.027	3.495	.065 ^b	.220

Table 4: Regression analysis for impact of tie strength on opinion passing

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.320 ^a	.102	.094	12.639	.001 ^b	.284
Hungarian	.001 ^a	.000	-.011	.000	.993 ^b	.001

3.2 H2: Homophily

As shown in Tables 5-7, the regression analysis showed no significant impact of homophily on opinion giving, opinion seeking or opinion passing either for the Syrian sample or for the Hungarian sample. Thus, H2 'Homophily with social media contacts has more positive effect on young adults in Syria than in Hungary on (a) giving opinion (b) seeking opinion (c) pass-along behaviour in social media' was not supported and rejected as homophily with social media contacts does not seem to have a more positive effect in Syria than in Hungary on eWOM in the social media.

Table 5: Regression analysis for impact of homophily on opinion giving

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.175 ^a	.031	.022	3.511	.064 ^b	.186
Hungarian	.059 ^a	.003	-.008	0.304	.583 ^b	.085

Table 6: Regression analysis for impact of homophily on opinion seeking

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.127 ^a	.016	.007	1.830	.179 ^b	.152
Hungarian	.019 ^a	.000	-.011	.031	.861 ^b	.028

Table 7: Regression analysis for impact of homophily on opinion passing

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.102 ^a	.010	.002	1.175	.281 ^b	.118
Hungarian	.082 ^a	.007	-.005	.600	.441 ^b	.119

3.3 H3: Trust

As shown in Table 8, the regression analysis revealed no significant impact of trust on opinion giving for the Syrian sample but significant positive impact for the Hungarian sample. With opinion seeking and passing, significant positive impact of trust was found both for the Syrian sample and for the Hungarian sample (Tables 9-10). Thus, H3 'Trust in social media contacts has more positive effect on young adults in Syria than in Hungary on (a) giving opinion (b) seeking opinion (c) pass-along behaviour in social media'

was not supported by the analysis and rejected as trust in social media contacts does not seem to have a more positive effect in Syria than in Hungary on eWOM in social media.

Table 8: Regression analysis for impact of trust on opinion giving

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.165 ^a	.027	.018	3.106	.081 ^b	.139
Hungarian	.289 ^a	.084	.073	8.030	.006 ^b	.340

Table 9: Regression analysis for impact of trust on opinion seeking

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.203 ^a	.041	.033	4.790	.031 ^b	.194
Hungarian	.340 ^a	.115	.105	11.468	.001 ^b	.418

Table 10: Regression analysis for impact of trust on opinion passing

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.235 ^a	.055	.047	6.497	.012 ^b	.216
Hungarian	.240 ^a	.057	.047	5.357	.023 ^b	.283

3.4 H4: Susceptibility to normative influences

As shown in Tables 11-13, the regression analysis showed significant impact of normative influences on opinion giving, seeking and passing for both the Syrian and the Hungarian sample. Thus, H4 'Susceptibility to normative influences has more positive effect on young adults in Syria than in Hungary on (a) giving opinion (b) seeking opinion (c) pass-along behaviour in social media' was not supported and rejected, since, according to the results, Hungarian young adults are more positively affected than their Syrian counterparts.

Table 11: Regression analysis for impact of normative influences on opinion giving

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.400 ^a	.160	.152	21.136	.000 ^b	.439
Hungarian	.496 ^a	.246	.238	28.736	.000 ^b	.543

Table 12: Regression analysis for impact of normative influences on opinion seeking

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.425 ^a	.180	.173	24.421	.000 ^b	.525
Hungarian	.492 ^a	.242	.234	28.161	.000 ^b	.565

Table 13: Regression analysis for impact of normative influences on opinion passing

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.337 ^a	.114	.106	14.260	.000 ^b	.403
Hungarian	.500 ^a	.250	.241	29.259	.000 ^b	.549

3.5 H5: Susceptibility to informational influences

As shown in Tables 14-16, the regression analysis showed significant impact of informational influences on opinion giving, seeking and passing for both the Syrian and the Hungarian sample. Thus, H4 'Susceptibility to informational influences has more positive effect on young adults in Syria than in Hungary on (a) giving opinion (b) seeking opinion (c) pass-along behaviour in social media' was not supported and rejected, since, according to the results, Hungarian young adults are more positively affected than their Syrian counterparts.

Table 14: Regression analysis for impact of informational influences on opinion giving

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.221 ^a	.049	.040	5.700	.019 ^b	.277
Hungarian	.366 ^a	.134	.124	13.594	.000 ^b	.436

Table 15: Regression analysis for impact of informational influences on opinion seeking

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.427 ^a	.183	.175	24.808	.000 ^b	.603
Hungarian	.556 ^a	.309	.301	39.410	.000 ^b	.694

Table 16: Regression analysis for impact of informational influences on opinion passing

Nationality	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.	β
Syrian	.331 ^a	.109	.101	13.629	.000 ^b	.450
Hungarian	.543 ^a	.295	.287	36.775	.000 ^b	.649

3.6 Overview and discussion of the findings

On the basis of the above statistical analyses, which were used to test the validity of the hypotheses, only the first hypothesis was accepted whereas the other four were discarded. Table 17 summarizes the findings in terms of what effect the respective indicators have been found to exert on young adults in Syria and Hungary with regard to eWOM.

Table 17: Overview of findings

Indicators	Syria	Hungary
Tie strength impact on opinion giving	weak positive	N/A
Tie strength impact on opinion seeking	weak positive	N/A
Tie strength impact on opinion passing	weak positive	N/A
Homophily impact on opinion giving	N/A	N/A
Homophily impact on opinion seeking	N/A	N/A
Homophily impact on opinion passing	N/A	N/A
Trust impact on opinion giving	N/A	weak positive
Trust impact on opinion seeking	weak positive	moderate positive
Trust impact on opinion passing	weak positive	weak positive
Normative influence impact on opinion giving	moderate positive	moderate positive
Normative influence impact on opinion seeking	moderate positive	moderate positive
Normative influence impact on opinion passing	moderate positive	moderate positive
Informational influence impact on opinion giving	weak positive	moderate positive
Informational influence impact on opinion seeking	moderate positive	moderate positive
Informational influence impact on opinion passing	moderate positive	moderate positive

(Source: own compilation)

Thus, the findings indicate that tie strength has a positive impact on eWOM in Syria but does not have an impact in Hungary, therefore, the influence of tie strength on eWOM is higher among young adults in collectivistic societies than in individualistic societies, which confirms the findings discussed in Farias (2017). As for homophily, the results showed that there is no impact of homophily on eWOM in either Syria or Hungary, therefore the influence of homophily on eWOM does not seem to differ in collectivistic and

individualistic societies. A weak positive impact of trust was found in Syria on opinion seeking and opinion passing but not on opinion giving, which means that trust in social media friends plays an important role in young Syrian opinion seekers' information seeking and passing, while Syrian opinion leaders give their opinion regardless of the degree of trust in their social media friends. On the other hand, in Hungary both opinion leaders and seekers are affected by trust when they want to give or seek information from others; however, Hungarian opinion seekers are more affected than opinion leaders and therefore, regarding the impact of trust, it does not seem to make a difference whether the society is collectivistic or individualistic, which contradicts the findings discussed in Farias (2017).

Normative influences have been found to exert a moderate positive impact on eWOM in both Syria and Hungary, which means that cultural value differences have no effect as members of both collectivistic and individualistic societies seem to be positively affected by their normative influences when they want to engage in eWOM. Finally, for Syrian young people, informational influences have weak positive impact on opinion giving and moderate positive impact on opinion seeking and passing, which indicates that opinion leaders are affected by informational influences less than opinion seekers, while in Hungary informational influences exert moderate positive impact on both opinion seekers and opinion leaders, so Hungarian opinion leaders are affected more than their Syrian counterparts even though Hungary is considered an individualistic society while Syria is a collectivistic society, which contradicts the findings discussed in Lee and Kacen (2008).

4. Conclusions

eWOM through social media has become a critical factor in marketing activities, which may vary from country to country according to many factors, including cultural ones. In this study, the difference in the effect of young adults' social relationships on eWOM in social media between two different cultures was tested. The results indicate that tie strength has positive impact on eWOM in Syria (and to a lesser extent in Hungary as well) confirming the findings of previous studies (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Wallace, Buil, & De Chernatony, 2012), which claimed that tie strength is one of the most significant factors which affect the traditional and electronic word of mouth. At the same time, the findings of the present study contradict outcomes of previous studies regarding the positive (Thelwall, 2009; Wang, Walthe, Pingree, & Hawkins, 2008) and negative (Chu & Kim, 2011) impact of homophily on eWOM as the correlation analysis showed that there was no relationship between homophily and eWOM. As for the trust factor, our results confirmed the positive impact of trust on eWOM in Syria and Hungary in a manner consistent with prior investigations (Wang, Yeh, Chen, & Tsydypov, 2016), which discussed the significant role that trust in friends plays in creating a desire in clients to engage in eWOM. Similarly, the two dimensions of interpersonal influence (normative and informational) were found to have a positive impact on eWOM in Syria and Hungary, confirming the findings of previous studies (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989; Castellano & Vincent, 2017).

Regarding the effect of the cultural dimension, our results indicate that tie strength has a more positive impact on eWOM in Syria than in Hungary, while no homophily impact on eWOM was found in either. As for the other social relationships variables under investigation (trust, normative and informational influences), the results showed that they do not appear to have a more positive impact on eWOM in Syria than in Hungary, which means that even though Syria is considered a collectivistic society and Hungary an individualistic one, most social relationship variables do not exert a more positive impact on eWOM in Syria than in Hungary, therefore, our results did not agree with previous examinations (Farias, 2017; Lee &

Kacen, 2008) as individualism and collectivism are not apparent in Syrian and Hungarian young adult consumers' behaviour, at least as far as the impact of social relationships on eWOM is concerned.

The results and discussion of our research yields some suggestions for future researchers. The present study has found that there is very little cultural value-based difference in the influence of social relationships on eWOM in social media, which contradicts the results of previous studies (Farias, 2017; Lee & Kacen, 2008). Therefore, the study could be repeated in countries other than Syria and Hungary to verify the validity of these results. Moreover, we used convenience sampling to collect the data and a limited sample, which restrict the possibility of generalization, so future research could use the random sampling method with larger sample for more accurate information that helps generalization. Future research could investigate eWOM behaviour in each social media platform separately for example, focusing on how the behaviour of Facebook users may differ from that of Tik Tok users since different age groups seem to use these platforms. Another limitation of this study is that it investigates a limited set of social relationships dimensions that have an impact on eWOM via social media. Future studies could investigate other factors that may affect eWOM, such as the content of a published post and its multimedia. Finally, our study focused on young adults, who represent the majority of social media users, yet whose perceptions may not accurately reflect those of the total social media population. Future research could explore and discuss how eWOM behaviour in social media varies across generations.

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