

**THE IMPACT OF RELATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS ON CONSUMER RESPONSES  
TO WORD-OF-MOUTH ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

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# **THE IMPACT OF RELATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS ON CONSUMER RESPONSES TO WORD-OF-MOUTH ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

## **ABSTRACT**

Previous research has consistently found an effect of the valence (positive vs. negative) of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in general and of word-of-mouth on a social networking site (sWOM) specifically on consumer responses. The current study investigates how interpersonal and person-to-site relational characteristics (homophily, tie strength and source credibility) moderate this effect on consumer responses to sWOM (behavioral and positive word-of-mouth intention). The results show that interpersonal homophily and source credibility both significantly reinforce the effect of sWOM valence on behavioral intention and positive word-of-mouth intention. Only considering person-to-site relational characteristics as antecedents, (person-to-site) homophily and source credibility reinforce the effect of sWOM valence on behavioral intention and on positive word-of-mouth intention. However, including both the interpersonal and the person-to-site relational characteristics as antecedents results in all person-to-site relational characteristics becoming nonsignificant as moderators. This study advances the sWOM literature by concurrently examining how both interpersonal and person-to site relational characteristics moderate the effect of message valence on sWOM responses. The findings imply that marketers should try to stimulate sWOM from credible sources that are homophilous to the target audience as these relationships reinforce the positive impact of sWOM valence on behavioral intentions.

**KEYWORDS:** electronic word-of-mouth, social networking sites, Facebook, relational characteristics, homophily, tie strength, source credibility

## INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to imagine a world today without social networking sites (SNSs), applications such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn “that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other” [39, p. 63]. More than ever, SNSs play an important role in people’s lives, outgrowing their function as merely a medium or platform through which communication takes place, to actually shaping conversations and becoming an actual “actor” in the communications process [11; 41]. As a result of its significance in many people’s daily lives, Facebook, for example, has become one of the top 10 Best Global Brands [38].

Because of the popularity SNSs, electronic word-of-mouth on social network sites (sWOM) has become increasingly important for both consumers and marketers [17]. For example, 38% of online shoppers have posted messages on Facebook about products they used and 62% percent of online shoppers read product-related messages from Facebook connections [71]. sWOM influences sales, especially for services [5]. One study found that 75% of people who read sWOM on Facebook actually click through to the retailer’s website [71]. sWOM is expected to become increasingly influential since SNSs are easy to operate and do not require a lot of Internet-related knowledge [35]. Despite its frequent occurrence, consumers’ responses to sWOM are underresearched [2].

sWOM about a product or service can be positive or negative. For example, a consumer can post a positive comment about a product or even recommend the product (‘I really liked the comfy bed in my hotel room: if you’re looking for a place to stay, go there!’). On the other hand, a consumer can post a negative comment or even advise against buying it (‘My hotel room was infested with cockroaches: don’t stay there!’). Previous research found that the valence of eWOM

or sWOM strongly affects readers' attitudes and behavioral intentions [17; 63]. A positively (negatively) valenced message positively (negatively) impacts consumers' attitudes [e.g. 48; 65], purchase intentions [e.g. 6] and even sales [e.g. 5].

Although the effect of eWOM/sWOM valence appears to be quite consistent, moderating factors can reinforce or weaken this effect [e.g. 21; 46; 65]. WOM, both offline and online, does not take place in a social vacuum. The relationship between the receiver of the message and the source of the message is part of the context in which the interaction takes place. Interpersonal relational characteristics are important to understand how people react to sWOM [18; 42]. SNSs are designed to build and maintain relationships [10]. In contrast to many review sites, people on SNSs are identifiable. This also means that the sWOM reader can attribute an sWOM message to a specific sender and can therefore evaluate his or her interpersonal relationship with the sender, which may not be the case for other types of eWOM. Therefore, a better understanding of the effect of relational characteristics on the impact of sWOM is essential to both marketers and scholars [43]. Previous research has taken first steps in uncovering the effects of interpersonal relational characteristics in the context of sWOM [2; 11; 18]. For example, Chu and Kim [18] investigated the effects of interpersonal homophily, tie strength, trust, normative and informative influence on (general) opinion seeking, opinion giving and pass-along behavior in social networking sites.

Importantly, based on qualitative research, J. Brown, et al. [11] argue that, in online social networks, individuals develop relationships with the (social network) site on which they are communicating, rather than with other individuals using the site. As a result, they claim that sWOM responses are not so much influenced by the interpersonal relational characteristics between the sender and the receiver, but rather by the relational characteristics between the SNS and the receiver of the message (person-to-site relational characteristics). This proposition could represent a major

step forward in theory building on sWOM effects, as prior research has almost exclusively focused on message and interpersonal aspects, largely ignoring effects of the platform. At the same time, as mentioned, the goal of SNSs is to build relationships with and between PEOPLE. The proposition of J. Brown, et al. [11] that the site relationship trumps interpersonal factors therefore comes across as somewhat counterintuitive. Empirical validation of the proposition would aid to contribute to the debate. As a result, there is clearly a need to empirically test the proposition of J. Brown, et al. [11]. Recently, S. Kim, et al. [41] have offered a partial test of this proposition by studying the effects of person-to-site homophily, tie strength and source credibility on “sWOM effectiveness” (the ability of sWOM to influence purchase decisions). They show that the person-to-site variables indeed explain some of the variance in sWOM effectiveness. At the same time, they only use person-to-site variables without taking interpersonal relational characteristics (or other relevant variables) into account, which makes it an invalid, or at least incomplete, test of J. Brown et al.’s [11] proposition.

Based on the framework provided by J. Brown, et al. [11], this study focuses on three relational characteristics: homophily (the extent to which a sender and receiver are alike), tie strength (the strength of relations) and source credibility (the trustworthiness and expertise of the source) [12; 57]. We test the extent to which these three characteristics, defined both interpersonally and with respect to person-to-site, moderate the influence of sWOM valence on recipients’ behavioral intention (in this case, intention to watch a movie) and positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) intention (intention to positively mention the product (movie) to others).

The contribution of the current study is thus that it explicitly tests and challenges the proposition of J. Brown, et al. [11], and its empirical validation by S. Kim, et al. [41]. Furthermore, we contribute to theory development by suggesting theoretical frameworks to explain why person-to-

site relational characteristics would influence sWOM responses. Building on these two articles, our study allows for an empirical assessment of the relative importance of both interpersonal and person-to-site relational characteristics (homophily, tie strength and source credibility) for responses to sWOM messages. To our knowledge, our study is the first to do this. Moreover, we test both a positively and a negatively valenced message, and analyze how the relational characteristics under study moderate the effects of sWOM valence. Many prior studies on eWOM/sWOM have focused on either purely positive or purely negative WOM [48], and consider the relational characteristics as direct antecedents to sWOM responses. Advertising practitioners may also use these insights to stimulate sWOM from certain types of people or on certain types of sites in order to use social media more effectively.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES**

### ***The influence of message valence on consumer responses to sWOM***

Social media are used to communicate both positive and negative sWOM. As mentioned before, the valence effect has been consistently found in previous research. For example, with regard to social media research Rui, Liu, and Whinston [69] found that positive tweets about a movie positively influence movie sales, whereas negative tweets have a negative effect. At the same time, research documents that, for example, consumer characteristics such as brand familiarity [65] or sender identification [46] can play a moderating role. One potential category of moderators that is not extensively explored yet in the context of sWOM, is the relation between an sWOM sender and its receiver.

As mentioned, the purpose of this paper is to study the moderating effects of homophily, tie strength and source credibility on the relationship between sWOM valence and consumer

responses. Unlike previous papers, we hereby consider these relational characteristics both from an interpersonal and a person-to-site perspective. We begin by developing hypotheses for the interpersonal relational characteristics.

### *The role of interpersonal relational characteristics*

#### *Homophily*

Interpersonal homophily is the extent to which pairs of individuals are alike, and share, for example, the same age group, gender, education, lifestyle, social class, or interests [12; 67]. Mcpherson, Smith-lovin, and Cook [55] posit that similarity in sex, age, religion, education, race and ethnicity structure our interpersonal relationships. Even though some cues that are present in an offline context are not always available in online relationships, research has found that, for instance, perceptions of interests and opinions are used to evaluate interpersonal homophily online [9; 30].

Research in an offline context has indicated that perceived interpersonal homophily increases the likelihood of perceiving the other as being more persuasive [30]. According to Lazarsfeld and Merton [47] this is because people who are similar are more likely to interact with each other in comparison to people who are dissimilar. Therefore, information is mostly exchanged between individuals who are homophilous [66; 67]. Festinger's [23] social comparison theory posits that people implicitly assume that individuals similar to themselves have similar needs and preferences, and thus they tend to compare themselves with others who are similar. Therefore, perceived interpersonal homophily stimulates a greater level of interpersonal attraction, trust and understanding [67; 68] as it can serve as a cue to indicate that the product or service is suited for people 'like them'[19]. Moreover, perceived interpersonal homophily stimulates the diffusion of

information about products and services [80]. For these reasons, perceived interpersonal homophily has a positive influence on the chance that information is used. As a result, information from a homophilous source has more influence in the decision-making process compared to information from a heterophilous (dissimilar) source [30; 53; 59; 73].

Research on the effect of interpersonal homophily in an online context has extended these findings. Wang, Walther, Pingree, and Hawkins [79] show that the stronger perceived interpersonal homophily in websites and online discussions groups, the more likely people are to adopt the advice provided there. Steffes and Burgee [73] used the eWOM forum RateMyProfessors.com to examine the impact of social ties on eWOM. Students were not only more likely to engage with homophilous sources, the information they provided was also more likely to influence their decision making than heterophilous sources. In a study on the review site yelp, Pentina, et al. [59] found that perceived interpersonal homophily positively influences perceived perceptions of the review message (e.g. helpfulness). Based on this evidence, we expect that interpersonal homophily will reinforce the effects of sWOM valence. In general, positive sWOM should result in more positive consumer responses than negative sWOM. If homophilous sources are indeed more influential than heterophilous sources, responses to positive sWOM should be more positive, and responses to negative sWOM more negative when the sWOM is posted by more homophilous sources. In other words, the differential effects of positive and negative sWOM should become greater with increasing interpersonal homophily. Therefore, we expect:

*H1: Interpersonal homophily moderates the effect of sWOM valence on receivers' a) behavioral intention and b) positive word-of-mouth intention: the more the sender is perceived by the receiver as homophilous, the stronger the effect of sWOM valence.*

### ***Tie strength***

Interpersonal tie strength is “a multidimensional construct that represents the strength of the dyadic interpersonal relationship in the context of social networks” [57, p. 79]. It is characterized by the importance attached to the social relation, the frequency of social contact, the type of social relation, and the intimacy between two parties [11; 31; 52]. In a social networking context, interpersonal tie strength could be reflected, for instance, by the number of common friends [25; 77], shared activities [18], recency of communication [29] or the number of interactions between two people [18; 29].

Previous research has found that a strong tie between a sender and a receiver has more impact on the receiver’s behavior than a weak tie [e.g. 12; 18]. De Bruyn and Lilien [19] show that tie strength has an impact on opening a received email: when the tie is stronger, people are more likely to open the email. Furthermore, the strength of a tie affects the information flow: individuals in a strong tie relationship interact more frequently and exchange and spread more information [12]. Moreover, information from a strong tie is perceived as more trustworthy, and can therefore reduce potential risks [19; 66]. As a result, strong ties are more influential than weak ties. In a study on Facebook, Bitter and Grabner-Kräuter [8] found that readers’ visiting intentions in response to positive sWOM were significantly higher when the message was sent by a strong tie. They suggest that tie strength acts as a reference point for Facebook users in their evaluation of brand-related information. sWOM from a strong tie will result in more in-depth processing of the information in the message [8]. Therefore, we posit that perceived interpersonal tie strength should reinforce the effect of sWOM valence in such a way that sWOM coming from a strong tie will have a stronger impact on consumer evaluations than sWOM coming from a weak tie.

*H2: Interpersonal tie strength moderates the effect of sWOM valence on receivers' a) behavioral intention and b) positive word-of-mouth intention: the more the sender is perceived by the receiver as a strong tie, the stronger the effect of sWOM valence.*

### ***Source credibility***

Source credibility refers to the perception of “a message sender’s positive characteristics that influence receivers’ acceptance of the message communicated” [78]. Source credibility consists of two dimensions: expertise and trustworthiness [58]. Sources that are perceived as competent in a certain matter (for example, based on knowledge on or experience with a certain topic, occupation or social training) and/or perceived as trustworthy (for instance, not acting out of self-interest), will be considered as more credible [58]. Source credibility, in turn, causes receivers to pay more attention to the message, perceive it as more useful [49], reliable [15] and credible [16], making the message more persuasive [75]. For example, people often seek advice from experts, because they are expected to possess more knowledge about a certain topic and to be able to provide accurate information [62]. As a result, these experts are more likely to influence consumers’ decisions than non-expert sources [36]. Therefore, we expect that interpersonal source credibility moderates the effect of sWOM valence: sWOM originating from a source that is perceived as more credible should have a stronger impact on consumer responses than sWOM originating from a source that is perceived as less credible:

*H3: Interpersonal source credibility moderates the effect of sWOM valence on receivers' a) behavioral intention and b) positive word-of-mouth intention: the more the sender is perceived by the receiver as credible, the stronger the effect of sWOM valence.*

### ***The role of person-to-site relational characteristics***

### *People's relationships with brands*

J. Brown, et al. [11] suggest that people use the website (rather than people or their avatars) as a social proxy for individual identification. This implies that the “source” for online information is not the individual that posts it, but the website it is posted on. This has recently been confirmed by S. Kim, et al. [41]. They conclude that “even without face-to-face interactions, consumers still develop various types of relationships with websites, the strength of which has a strong influence on their evaluations of the website, its reviews and ultimately, their purchase decisions”[41, p. p. 251]. J. Brown, et al. [11] and S. Kim, et al. [41] draw on theories in social psychology, branding and media equation theory to underpin this proposition. Social psychologists and advertisers have long acknowledged that inanimate objects (such as brands) can be associated with human characteristics. The reasoning behind this is that these objects can be associated with personality traits that help consumers express themselves or that are symbolic for the consumer [1]. In the marketing literature, it is widely accepted that consumers do not only develop relationships with other people, but also with brands, websites or social networking sites [1; 27]. For instance, brand personality, a set of human characteristics associated with a brand [1], is used to describe a brand as a partner in a relationship [74]. Self-congruity theory posits that consumers prefer brands (and, by extension, sites) that are congruent to their own personality [1]. Congruity between an individual's characteristics and those of a brand, store or product could therefore improve attitudes, preferences and even behavior [34]. People thus also compare themselves to brands and other objects (e.g., holiday destinations) to develop perceptions of how well the object fits with their own self-concept, a process referred to as self- congruity [3]. For example, Koo, Cho, and Kim [44] find that self-congruity with an online store positively affects the evaluation of visual and information atmospheric cues of the online store, which causes delight and consequently increases purchase intention. J. Brown, et al. [11] found evidence for the humanization of websites (see also below)

and this has been confirmed by S. Kim, et al. [41]. Website personalities share attributes with human personality due to their interactive features (dialogue and customization), as well as with brand personality due to the association with the brand or organization that owns the website [14]. Finally, media equation theory suggests that interactions with media, e.g. social networking sites, are similar to interactions in real life [11]. Social networking sites can therefore also be seen as actors in the evaluation of sWOM.

### ***Homophily***

J. Brown, et al. [11] define person-to-site homophily as “the congruence between a user’s psychological attributes and the website content, such as shared group interests and a shared mindset between a user and the site” [11, p. 10]. Here, content refers to the actual textual content (i.e., the information content) of the site, rather than who actually provides that information (i.e., the individual users). According to J. Brown, et al. [11] shared group interests reflect a match between the information seeker’s own interests and the content provided by the SNS . For example, a consumer that is very much interested in movies might find a movie review website to represent “shared interests”. A broad range of information and lack of specificity tend to contribute to a greater feeling of “shared interests”. More specifically, sites with a broad range of relevant content are seen as more likely to introduce unexpected things of interest. Also, J. Brown, et al. [11] state that social networking sites that are more general tend to attract users because they know that they will be able to find an issue that engages them. Shared group mindset is based on psychological similarity, members perceiving the online social network as a unit that thinks and feels in a convergent way. In the study by J. Brown, et al. [11] this is illustrated through gratifications (posts thanking other contributors, showing appreciation and generally supporting the consensus opinion) and collective postings (using collective words such as “our,” “we,” and “us”) [11].

The results from the qualitative research by J. Brown, et al. [11] indicate that, in online social networks, respondents' social affiliations which display homophily are with the website rather than with individuals. S. Kim, et al. [41] find that when a review site provides information consistent with a consumers' own interests the website is rated as more homophilous. Moreover, consumers tend to be more positive about a homophilous review site and reviews presented on the site. Drawing on literature on the relationship between individuals and brands, websites and media, and based on Brown et al.'s (2007) proposition and S. Kim, et al. [41] findings, it could be expected that a similar moderating effect of person-to-site homophily occurs as that of interpersonal homophily in H1:

*H4: Person-to-site homophily moderates the effect of sWOM valence on receivers' a) behavioral intention and b) positive word-of-mouth intention: the more the social networking site is perceived by the receiver as homophilous, the stronger the effect of sWOM valence.*

### ***Tie strength***

J. Brown, et al. [11] propose that the idea of individual-to-individual social ties is less relevant in an online environment than offline. In their qualitative study, none of their respondents explicitly mentioned any type of "interpersonal relationship" between themselves as information seeker and another individual as the information source. Rather, they suggest that the online information "source" is the site. They describe person-to-site tie strength as "the intensity of an interactive and personalized relationship between an individual and a website" [11, p. 10]. For example, they document that people refer to websites in ways as "[...] like they know me" or "always understand me". J. Brown, et al. [11] characterize person-to-site tie strength by dimensions such as website reciprocity ("interaction") and emotional closeness [11]. Interaction is influenced by regular emails and updates automatically generated by the website. S. Kim, et al. [41], following J. Brown, et al.

[11], conclude that individuals might form strong ties with a site that they frequently visit and perceive as important. J. Brown, et al. [11] conclude that people want to develop close relationships with online community websites (rather than with individuals in the community). For example, one respondent commented “I like the recommendations ’cos it makes me feel like they know me.” Their study also provides evidence of a website relationship through a substantial number of collective rather than individual posts together with the “humanization” attributed to the Web site (e.g., “You always understand me”).

S. Kim, et al. [41] found that consumers with a strong relationship with a review site indicated more favourable attitudes toward the site itself as well as the content provided on it. Pentina, Gammoh, Zhang, and Mallin [60] found that people who perceived their tie with the SNS as strong were more likely to visit websites of brands hosted on the SNS, to purchase from these sites and to recommend the brands to their friends and acquaintances. Building on the balance theory, they advocate that the perceived tie strength with the SNS can be transferred to brands active on the SNS and, in turn, can influence behavioral intentions toward these brands [60]. As a result, we expect that perceptions of tie strength with the SNS can transfer to the perceptions of a brand mentioned in an sWOM message and, thus, can influence behavioral intentions toward that brand, such as a movie that is recommended or advised against in sWOM:

*H5: Person-to-site tie strength moderates the effect of sWOM valence on receivers’ a) behavioral intention and b) positive word-of-mouth intention: the more the social networking site is perceived by the receiver as a strong tie, the stronger the effect of sWOM valence.*

### ***Source credibility***

J. Brown, et al. [11] and S. Kim, et al. [41] mainly ascribe, online source credibility to website factors, rather than people. They state that the credibility of a website as a source of information reflects “the perceived competence of the site and its membership, characterized by the site’s trustworthiness and its actors’ expertise” [11, p. 10]. Trustworthiness is determined by the site’s perceived intentions [40]: e.g., is it an “independent” site seeking to inform, or a brand-sponsored site seeking to persuade? Prior experience with the site also influences how people evaluate the credibility of information from a site. S. Kim, et al. [41] confirm that consumers evaluate the credibility of a review based on perceptions of credibility of the review site. A common theme in the results of J. Brown, et al. [11] was concerned with some kind of “authority” that the Web site could generate, which then gave any information on that site more weight. If a website is not perceived as credible, the information and services will not be trusted and information needs will be filled elsewhere [24]. The effect of sWOM valence will, in that case, be weaker:

*H6: Person-to-site source credibility moderates the effect of sWOM valence on receivers’ a) behavioral intention and b) positive word-of-mouth intention: the more the social networking site is perceived by the receiver as credible, the stronger the effect of sWOM valence.*

### ***The relative importance of interpersonal vs. person-to-site relational characteristics***

Next to formally testing the hypotheses, the analysis will also allow us to investigate the key question of the current study, i.e. the relative importance of interpersonal and person-to site relational characteristics as moderators of the effect of sWOM valence on movie watching and positive word-of-mouth intention. As mentioned, J. Brown, et al. [10] claim to have “strong evidence” that, in online social networks, people behave as if the platforms themselves are primary

“actors” and that online communities (not individual users) act as a social proxy for individual identification. Moreover, they argue that it are relations to the Web site that should be considered as the basis for sWOM effectiveness, as relations with individual actors on the site are “not particularly relevant”. For example, they write (p. 9) “our findings suggest that homophily of an interpersonal relationship, as based on an evaluation of individual characteristics, is not particularly relevant in an online context. Rather, the findings suggest that it is notions of shared group interests and group mind-set, evaluated at the level of the Web site itself, which drive online homophily.” Similar statements are made for tie strength and source credibility. In the context of the current study, that would imply that the extent to which the person-to-site variables moderate the effects of sWOM valence (H4-H6) should be greater than the extent to which interpersonal relations (H1-H3) do.

We argue that J. Brown et al. [10] overvalue the importance of person-to-site relation characteristics relative to interpersonal relationships. Other than their own study, there is little evidence to support the idea that individuals develop person-to-site relations rather than interpersonal ones. While S. Kim, et al. [41] support the idea that person-to-site relational characteristics influence sWOM effectiveness, theirs is the only empirical study and they do not test the relative importance of these person-to-site relational characteristics compared to interpersonal characteristics. On SNSs, people are identifiable and individuals therefore have plenty of access to information to evaluate homophily, tie strength and source credibility of the sender. There is plenty of evidence that interpersonal relational characteristics determine the effectiveness of eWOM and sWOM, as described in the development of H1-H3. If the proposition of J. Brown et al. [10] were true, none of these studies should have found any effect of interpersonal variables. Given the nature of SNSs, namely to build relationships with and between PEOPLE, we

believe that individuals will be influenced by which person sends out the sWOM, rather than what platform it is on. After all, the information content is created by an identifiable, individual user; not the platform. While we do not contest that people do also form relations with the platform and this, too, can influence sWOM responses (as developed in H4-H6), we argue that those relations are subordinate to the interpersonal relations. When it comes to sWOM, people will still often consider the platform as just the medium, and rather see the individual sender as the “sender”. As such, the influence of the site should be smaller than that of the sender. We expect

*H7: The moderating influence of the person-to-site relational characteristics on the effect of sWOM valence on a receivers’ a) behavioral intention and b) positive word-of-mouth intention is weaker than that of interpersonal relational characteristics.*

The conceptual framework and hypotheses are summarized in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 about here  
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## **EMPIRICAL STUDY**

### ***Design***

To test our conceptual framework (Figure 1), we created a 2 (sWOM valence: positive versus negative) x 2 (interpersonal homophily: low versus high) x 2 (interpersonal tie strength: low versus high) x 2 (sender source credibility: low versus high) full-factorial between subjects experiment. Due to the popularity of Facebook as a social networking site, we set our study on Facebook. Worldwide, each day on average 1.45 billion users visit Facebook [22] and it accounts for 42% of all social media visits in the US [72].

We designed 16 versions of a fictitious (non-interactive) Facebook profile (see Appendix A and B for examples) including an sWOM message. Because the Facebook profile was drafted for a fictitious person (the sWOM sender), we manipulated interpersonal homophily (low vs. high), interpersonal tie strength (low vs. high) and sender source credibility (low vs. high) in order to induce variance in perceived interpersonal homophily, tie strength and source credibility. Person-to-site homophily, tie strength and source credibility were not manipulated, but measured (see hereafter), because Facebook is a site with which most participants are highly familiar and for which people naturally vary in their perceptions of the three variables under study.

sWOM valence was manipulated by a short post on the profile wall recommending (positive: Go see it, it's very good!) or advising against (negative: Don't go see it, it's not very good.) the movie 'Dirty'. The experiment took place before this American thriller was officially released in the United States, in order to rule out that participants had already seen the movie prior to the experiment. Eight respondents that reported to have seen the movie were filtered out of the data set.

To manipulate interpersonal homophily, the profile pages were adapted on four aspects (age, gender, ethnicity and interests) based on research by Thelwall [76] and Mcpherson, et al. [55]. In the highly homophilous condition, these four aspects were all consistent with what respondents indicated applied to themselves earlier in the questionnaire. For example, a woman of 22 years old of Hispano-American ethnicity interested in basketball and dancing would be exposed to a profile page of a (fictitious) Hispano-American woman of 25 years old (held constant for all "high homophily" conditions, as all respondents were between 22 and 36 years old) that included a dancing and basketball page as two of her "page likes". In the "low homophily" condition, we made sure that the profile of the sWOM sender was substantially different. The profile was kept

constant across the “low homophily” conditions, with an age of 55 years old, of Chinese ethnicity (Asian Americans were therefore excluded from the sample), with more “general” page likes (Facebook and Coca Cola). The profile was also of the opposite sex as the respondent’s.

To manipulate interpersonal tie strength, we differentiated three aspects based on Marsden and Campbell [52], Liu-Thompkins [50] and Gilbert and Karahalios [29]: interaction frequency, the number of common friends, interaction recency. First, in the instructions immediately preceding exposure to the Facebook profile, participants were either told that the profile was that of an acquaintance with whom the respondent rarely interacted (low tie strength condition) or of a close friend with whom they interacted almost daily (high tie strength condition). Second, our research used 1 common friend to manipulate the low tie strength condition and 35 common friends to manipulate the high tie strength condition. Finally, the profile page included an open Facebook chat box which either read ‘Hi! It’s been a long time! Want to grab a drink this Friday to catch up?’ (low tie strength condition) or ‘Hi! Do you want to grab a drink this Friday? Same place, same time as last week?’ (high tie strength condition).

Finally, we used four dimensions to manipulate sender source credibility, based on Purnawirawan, Dens, and De Pelsmacker [64]. In the high source credibility condition, the sWOM sender had studied film studies, liked movie-related pages (HBO, Netflix and Inception), was a member of a film club, and mentioned that the focal movie (Dirty) was the fiftieth he or she had reviewed. In the low credibility condition, the sWOM sender had studied law, liked more general, non-movie related pages (CBS News, Stephen King and Walmart), was a member of a book club and mentioned that the focal movie was the first he or she had reviewed.

### ***Data collection***

Respondents (n = 801) were actual American Facebook users between the age of 22 and 36 recruited for an online survey via a professional recruitment service. Participants could proceed through the questionnaire at their own pace. The questionnaire started with a welcome screen informing respondents that their answers would be processed in full anonymity and used in the context of academic research. Participants indicated whether or not they had a Facebook account, and those who did not were redirected to the end of the questionnaire. The remaining participants were asked to complete socio-demographic information (gender, birth year, education, ethnicity, and interests), which were used to describe the sample and (with the exception of education) manipulate interpersonal homophily. Next, as an introduction, they were asked how many days and how many minutes per day they had used Facebook in the past week, together with a scale to measure Facebook Intensity (3 items,  $\alpha = .840$ , De Keyzer, Dens, and De Pelsmacker [20]). Next, respondents rated their degree of perceived homophily with Facebook (FBHM) (4 items,  $\alpha = .901$ , L. L. McCroskey, McCroskey, and Richmond [54] and S. Kim, et al. [41]), perceived tie strength with Facebook (FBTS) (3 items,  $\alpha = .892$ , [41]; Shan and King [70] and S. Kim, et al. [41]) and source credibility of Facebook (FBSC) (5 items,  $\alpha = .870$ , Ohanian [58]) (see Table 1 for construct items and reliabilities).

The average age of the respondents was 27.97 (SD = 3.62) and 53.1% of the sample was male. 43.7% of participants were at least undergraduates. On the 7-point Facebook Intensity scale (see hereafter) respondents scored on average 4.21 (SD = 1.71). Moreover, 56.6% of respondents indicated to use Facebook every day. A majority (52.7%) used Facebook less than 30 minutes per day.

Respondents were then randomly exposed to one of the 16 fictitious (non-interactive) Facebook profiles with the instruction to imagine that this was an actual profile of one of their Facebook

contacts. They were asked to look at the profile attentively and to try and get a picture of what this person would be like: what kind of things he/she was interested in, what kind of people he/she interacted with, etc. We then measured the perceived valence of the sWOM message (1 item, De Keyzer, et al. [20]). Next, participants rated their perceived interpersonal homophily (HM) with (3 items,  $\alpha = .899$ , L. L. McCroskey, et al. [54]), perceived interpersonal tie strength (TS) with (3 items,  $\alpha = .902$ , Shan and King [70]) and perceived source credibility (SC) of (5 items,  $\alpha = .860$ , Ohanian [58]) the (fictitious) sWOM sender. Finally, we measured their behavioral intention (MWI, intention to watch the movie) (1 item, De Keyzer, et al. [20]) and positive word-of mouth intention (PWOM) (3 items,  $\alpha = .807$ , De Keyzer, et al. [20]). All constructs were measured by means of 7-point Likert scales or semantic differentials. The means and standard deviations of these measures are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that all Cronbach' Alpha's are above .807. Per construct, mean scores across items were used in further analyses. As can be seen in Table 1, there is substantial variation in both the person-to-site and interpersonal measurements. Furthermore the variance induced by the interpersonal manipulations is similar to the variance naturally occurring in the person-to-site aspects. Prior research indicates that actual and perceived attributes do not automatically match [67]. As perceptions are more likely to drive responses than actual attributes [53; 67], we used the measured scores on perceived interpersonal and person-to-site homophily, tie strength and source credibility in the analyses, instead of the manipulated conditions.

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Insert Table 1 about here  
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### *Confirmatory factor analysis*

We first performed confirmatory factor analysis on the six interpersonal and person-to-site variables, using Maximum Likelihood estimation in AMOS 22. Indices of model fit indicate an acceptable fit of the CFA model ( $\chi^2/df = 4.639$ ), CFI and TLI were over .90 (i.e. CFI = .926, TLI = .917), RMSEA (.067) was below .07 [32] and AFGI (.840) was over .80 [37]. Table 1 shows that the factor loadings for all indicators are large and significant, providing strong evidence of convergent validity. Also, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each factor was above .50. Composite reliability estimates range between .833 and .928, which are well over the recommended .70 [32]. To ensure discriminant validity, we tested if the square root of the AVE of a construct is greater than the correlation of that construct with all other constructs [26]. Table 2 shows that this is the case: the diagonal shows the square root of the AVE per construct and the off-diagonals show the correlations between each pair of constructs. No correlation was found to be higher than the square root of the AVE. Moreover, Table 2 shows that the average shared variance is larger than the maximum shared variance. Thus, we can conclude that discriminant validity is confirmed [32]. Nevertheless, examining the bivariate correlations between the constructs, we find that the correlations between homophily and tie strength for both interpersonal and person-to-site relational characteristics are above .60, which is rather high. This might result in multicollinearity issues that need to be taken into account in the analysis (see below).

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Insert Table 2 about here  
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### ***Common method bias analysis***

To test for common method bias we first performed Harman's single factor test. The first factor of our explanatory factor analysis only accounts for 33.237% of the variance explained, indicating

that no common method bias is present [61]. We further tested for common method bias by adding an unmeasured latent factor to the original CFA model. Then, the standardized regression weights from this model were compared to the standardized regression weights of the original model without the common latent factor [61]. Only one difference over .200 was found. Due to the rather small changes in the standardized regression weights, we can say that adding the unmeasured latent factor did not change the original CFA model and, thus, we can assume that no common method bias was present [61].

### ***Manipulation checks***

Respondents rated the positive sWOM ( $\bar{X} = 5.44$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) as significantly more positive than the negative sWOM ( $\bar{X} = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ,  $t(689.224) = -26.513$ ,  $p < .001$ ). We can therefore conclude that our manipulation of sWOM valence was successful. The score for perceived homophily was significantly different between the “high homophily” ( $\bar{X} = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) and the “low homophily” conditions ( $\bar{X} = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ,  $t(799) = -2.995$ ,  $p = .003$ ). Furthermore, the score for perceived tie strength was significantly different between the “high tie strength” ( $\bar{X} = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ) and the “low tie strength” conditions ( $\bar{X} = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ,  $t(799) = -2.989$ ,  $p = .003$ ). Finally, respondents rated the “highly credible source” conditions ( $\bar{X} = 5.05$ ,  $SD = 1.045$ ) as significantly more credible than the “lowly credible source” conditions ( $\bar{X} = 4.36$ ,  $SD = .930$ ,  $t(787.058) = -9.872$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Because the perceived measures are more fine-grained, we have performed our analysis with the perceived measures.

### ***Analyses and Results***

We used stepwise linear regression analyses to test the model in Figure 1 because the correlations between homophily and tie strength, both interpersonally ( $r = .651$ ) and person-to-site

( $r = .774$ ), exceeded .6. The stepwise regression procedure improves the reliability of the estimation results that may otherwise be jeopardized by multicollinearity issues. We conducted a series of stepwise regressions to test, in order, (1) H1 to H3, (2) H4 to H6 and (3) H7. We conducted separate analyses for the two dependent variables: positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) and movie watch intention (MWI). To test H1 to H3, we conducted a stepwise analysis in which the independent variables were perceived sWOM valence, the three perceived interpersonal relationship variables and the interactions between perceived sWOM valence and the three interpersonal relationship variables.

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Insert Table 3 about here  
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Tables 3 and 4 show the variables and their regression coefficients in each step. We discuss the results of the final selected models (Model 4, Table 3 and Model 5, Table 4). In line with previous research, the effect of perceived sWOM valence on both MWI ( $\beta = .306$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and PWOM ( $\beta = .241$ ,  $p < .001$ ) is positive and significant. In H1, we hypothesize that this effect would be reinforced by interpersonal homophily. The results show a positive interaction effect between sWOM valence and interpersonal homophily on both MWI ( $\beta = .162$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and PWOM ( $\beta = .109$ ,  $p = .002$ ). H1 is therefore confirmed. The interaction between sWOM valence and interpersonal tie strength was present in the results of our stepwise linear regression and therefore not significant for MWI nor for PWOM. H2 is not confirmed. H3 hypothesized a positive interaction effect between sWOM valence and interpersonal source credibility; this interaction was positive and significant for both MWI ( $\beta = .153$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and PWOM ( $\beta = .236$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

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Insert Table 4 about here

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Next, to test our hypotheses 4 to 6, we conducted two stepwise regression analyses with perceived sWOM valence, the three perceived person-to-site relationship variables and the interactions between perceived sWOM valence and the three person-to-site relationship variables as independent variables (Table 5 and Table 6).

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Insert Table 5 about here

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In H4, we hypothesized a positive interaction effect between sWOM valence and person-to-site homophily. We indeed find this interaction for MWI ( $\beta = .076$ ,  $p = .049$ ), but not for PWOM. Only H4a is confirmed. Next, we expected that person-to-site tie strength would reinforce the effect of sWOM valence. We do not find an interaction effect of sWOM valence and person-to-site tie strength on MWI or on PWOM. H5 is not confirmed. The interaction effect between sWOM valence and person-to-site source credibility was positive and significant for both MWI ( $\beta = .083$ ,  $p = .032$ ) and PWOM ( $\beta = .092$ ,  $p = .019$ ), confirming H6.

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Insert Table 6 about here

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Finally, to test H7, we included perceived sWOM valence, the three perceived interpersonal relationship variables, the three perceived person-to-site relationship variables, and the interactions between perceived sWOM valence and each of the six relationship variables as independent variables (Table 7 and Table 8).

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Insert Table 7 about here  
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In hypothesis 7, we hypothesized that the moderating impact of the person-to-site variables would be weaker than that of the interpersonal variables. The final model (Model 5 for MWI and Model 6 for PWOM) includes the interaction between sWOM valence and interpersonal homophily (MWI:  $\beta = .161$ ,  $p < .001$ ; PWOM:  $\beta = .107$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and the interaction between sWOM valence and interpersonal source credibility (MWI:  $\beta = .155$ ,  $p < .001$ ; PWOM:  $\beta = .239$ ,  $p < .001$ ), in line with our conclusions for H1 and H3. None of the interactions between sWOM valence and any three of the person-to-site relational characteristics were retained, meaning that they were not significant. Thus, while 2 out of 3 interpersonal relational characteristics exert a highly significant moderating effect, none of the person-to-site relational characteristics do. This is a clear indication to accept H7.

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Insert Table 8 about here  
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## **DISCUSSION**

The present study shows that, when considering interpersonal and person-to-site relational characteristics separately, they indeed both moderate the effect of sWOM valence on consumer responses. More specifically, for both interpersonal and person-to-site characteristics, homophily and source credibility that moderate the effect of sWOM valence on movie watch intention and word-of-mouth intention. Although interpersonal relationships with SNS connections are not as concrete as real-life relationships, they do have an impact on how people respond to word-of-mouth in online social networks. Both interpersonal homophily and source credibility moderate the effect

of sWOM valence on sWOM responses. The more receivers perceive that the individual sender is like themselves, and the more credible the sender is, the more positive the impact of a positive recommendation and the more negative the impact of a negative recommendation on the receivers' behavioral intention. These effects extend the findings of previous WOM research in both offline [e.g. 13] and online contexts [e.g. 2; 4; 59] that homophily and source credibility impact WOM responses by showing that they actually moderate the effect of WOM valence.

In contrast to our expectations, we did not find a significant moderating effect of tie strength (neither interpersonal nor person-to-site). This might be due to the correlation between homophily and tie strength. Aghakhani, et al. [2] also did not find an effect of tie strength (on sWOM readers' cognitive attitude). They argue that consumers accept eWOM from their close ties because they perceive them as a credible source of eWOM. In other words, tie strength may have an indirect effect by influencing perceived source credibility. In our study, this explanation is less likely, as both factors were manipulated independently and the correlation between tie strength and source credibility is less than .4. The lack of effect of tie strength could also be explained by the fact that we used an unfamiliar "brand" (or movie, in this case). Bitter and Grabner-Kräuter [8] also did not find an interaction between valence and tie strength on visiting intentions for a restaurant that review readers were not familiar with (where it was significant when review readers were familiar with the reviewed restaurant).

## CONCLUSION

Our core research question was to examine the claim made by J. Brown, et al. [11] that person-to-site relational characteristics are significantly explain the responses of consumers to sWOM. S. Kim, et al. [41] have offered a partial test of this claim by studying the effects of person-to-site homophily, tie strength and source credibility on eWOM effectiveness, without taking other relevant variables, such as interpersonal relational characteristics, into account. By concurrently entering interpersonal and person-to-site relations, we believe to have provided a more accurate test of J. Brown, et al. [11]'s proposition.

Our findings provide no evidence for their proposition. On the contrary, our findings indicate that, when concurrently testing the moderating effect of interpersonal and the person-to-site relational characteristics, the moderating effects of the person-to-site relational characteristics are no longer significant. Consequently, the person-to-site relational characteristics do not outweigh the interpersonal relational characteristics in a social network site context. Rather, it seems to be the other way around: the interpersonal relational characteristics, and in particular homophily and source credibility, moderate the relationship between sWOM valence and our dependents, movie watch intention and WOM intention. Even though it should be acknowledged that person-to-site homophily still had a significantly positive main effect on sWOM response, the lack of interactions is most important. We believe that this results from the fact that in SNSs, a sender is highly identifiable, compared to other online communities such as review sites. Therefore, the sender can be held accountable for his own messages, and receivers' relations with the platform, which serves only as a medium, do not add additional arguments to account for their responses [7].

Our results also provide insights for practitioners. It is generally acknowledged that (e)WOM influences box office revenues of movies [51] and sales [69]. The reason for this impact is twofold.

First of all, as movies reach a broad audience, it can be expected that WOM impacts this audience. Consequently, WOM will promote awareness of and interest in a movie [51]. Second, when it is difficult to evaluate alternatives before purchase, which is the case for movies, consumers will use WOM to get more information about the product [66]. Research by Liu [51] and Rui, et al. [69] indicates that pre-release eWOM can be used to forecast box office sales. The authors further suggest that eWOM is a complementary source of information rather than a substitute, thus existing next to other types of marketing information. The findings of our research indicate that it is the interpersonal relational characteristics, and primarily perceived homophily and source credibility, that moderate the effect of sWOM valence on PWOM and movie watch intention. Yang, et al. [80, p. 74] already suggested that practitioners should identify interpersonal relationships in order to “influence the user, encouraging participation and improving the performance of social commerce activities”. Our research implies that marketers should try to stimulate sWOM from credible sources that are homophilous to the target audience as these relationships reinforce the positive impact of sWOM valence on behavioral intentions. The relationship of the sWOM receiver with the site on which the sWOM appears seems less important, but it does not hurt to consider this any way. Our findings suggest that a more homophilous website could lead to a higher movie watch intention as well as word-of-mouth intention. Therefore, managers could try to stimulate sWOM especially on sites that are true “matches” with the interests of their target audience.

## **LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Limitations of the present study provide opportunities for future research. First, Chu and Kim [18] suggested that, next to interpersonal homophily, tie strength and trust (which is a dimension of source credibility), sWOM behaviour, such as opinion seeking and passing is also influenced by

normative and informational interpersonal influence. We have not included these concepts into our framework, because our main objective was to test the propositions of J. Brown, et al. [11] and the empirical findings of S. Kim, et al. [41], who provide clear guidelines on what constitutes homophily, tie strength and source credibility in online social networks. Future research should explore the extent to which other relationship variables that up to now have always been studied interpersonally can be translated to person-to-site equivalents and test their influence on sWOM responses as well. To date, theoretical work on the mechanisms through which person-to-site characteristics might impact consumer responses to messages on social media sites is lacking. Future research should further investigate these underlying mechanisms. Moreover, there is a need to study how to measure person-to-site relational characteristics in a reliable and valid way. Additionally, the operationalisation of interpersonal relational characteristics should be further explored. For example, based on research by Fogués, et al. [25] and Tuna [77], we used the number of common friends to manipulate tie strength. However, it has also been used to operationalize homophily [33]. While our manipulation checks confirm that our manipulations were successful, the potential overlap between homophily and tie strength (due to the number of common friend could explain the correlation between interpersonal homophily and tie strength in this study.

Future research should also explore other social networking sites than Facebook, as Facebook typically contains a lot of (inter)personal information on which a user can base his/her evaluations of his/her relationship with the sender. In other online contexts, such as review sites, this information is more often lacking and users of these sites might therefore appear to be more inclined to evaluate their relationship with the website [41], which may influence the relative importance of interpersonal versus person-to-site variables. Future research should therefore

examine whether our findings hold in other online social networks, and whether the framework can and should be expanded.

Second, we only use one type of buying motivation: movies can be categorized as hedonic products. People use hedonic products for their aesthetic or sensory experience, for amusement, fantasy and fun. These products are evaluated on subjective characteristics, such as shape, taste or look [20]. Compared to utilitarian products, hedonic products might be more congruent with the specific use of social networking sites, as they are primarily used to pass time and for amusement [45]. Future research should also include more utilitarian products, such as non-fiction books, personal computers, etc., because these are more cognitively evaluated [20].

The role of other boundary conditions should be further explored. First of all, product category involvement and prior product knowledge might impact our findings: more involved consumers or consumers with more prior knowledge about the product might process sWOM messages more centrally, which might affect the relative importance of the relational variables under study [21]. As mentioned, Bitter and Grabner-Kräuter [8] found that in case a respondent is unfamiliar with the brand, tie strength with the sWOM sender or the interaction between sWOM valence and tie strength do not impact visiting intentions. They explain this effect by suggesting that consumers need prior knowledge about the brand, as well as a prior positive brand attitude, before a Facebook message can impact visiting intentions. In our study we tried to rule out potentially confounding effects of brand associations and pre-existing positive or negative beliefs, attitudes or feeling, which is in line with suggestions by Geuens and De Pelsmacker [28]. Therefore, we used an unfamiliar movie. Future research could either use many existing brands to neutralize the confounding effects or use a control group to examine the effect of familiar brands [28].

Next, it might be interesting to examine users' motivations to use the SNS as a potential moderator. In general, three motivations to use a medium can be distinguished: pass time, amusement and information seeking. Research has indicated that SNSs are primarily used to pass time, and for amusement [45]. Users that mainly use SNSs for these motivations, are less likely to assess the aspects of the relationship with the source (both personal and with the site) compared to users who use SNSs for information seeking [56]. Our research did not take user motivations into account. Therefore, future research could examine the role of users' motivation to use SNS in a real-life setting. Also, as mentioned in the discussion section, the context in which our sWOM message was placed contained a lot of interpersonal information. This might explain the missing impact of person-to-site relational characteristics. Future research should study the model at hand in other online contexts, such as review sites or other social media in which less interpersonal relational characteristics are present.

Moreover, personality traits might also impact the (relative) effects of the relational antecedents. For example, previous research has indicated that susceptibility to interpersonal influence might have a strong impact on consumers responses to eWOM messages [18]. Users who are more susceptible to interpersonal influences are more likely to comply with eWOM messages overall [18]. When they do so, they may be more likely to disregard their perceptions of interpersonal homophily, tie strength and source credibility.

Finally, we measured self-reported behavioral intentions. Future research could examine real social network data, user log records or other data sources. There are a number of measures that can be applied to measure homophily and tie strength (e.g. mutual friends, last interaction, etc.) [e.g. 29]. This would strengthen theoretical development in the field of social networking sites.

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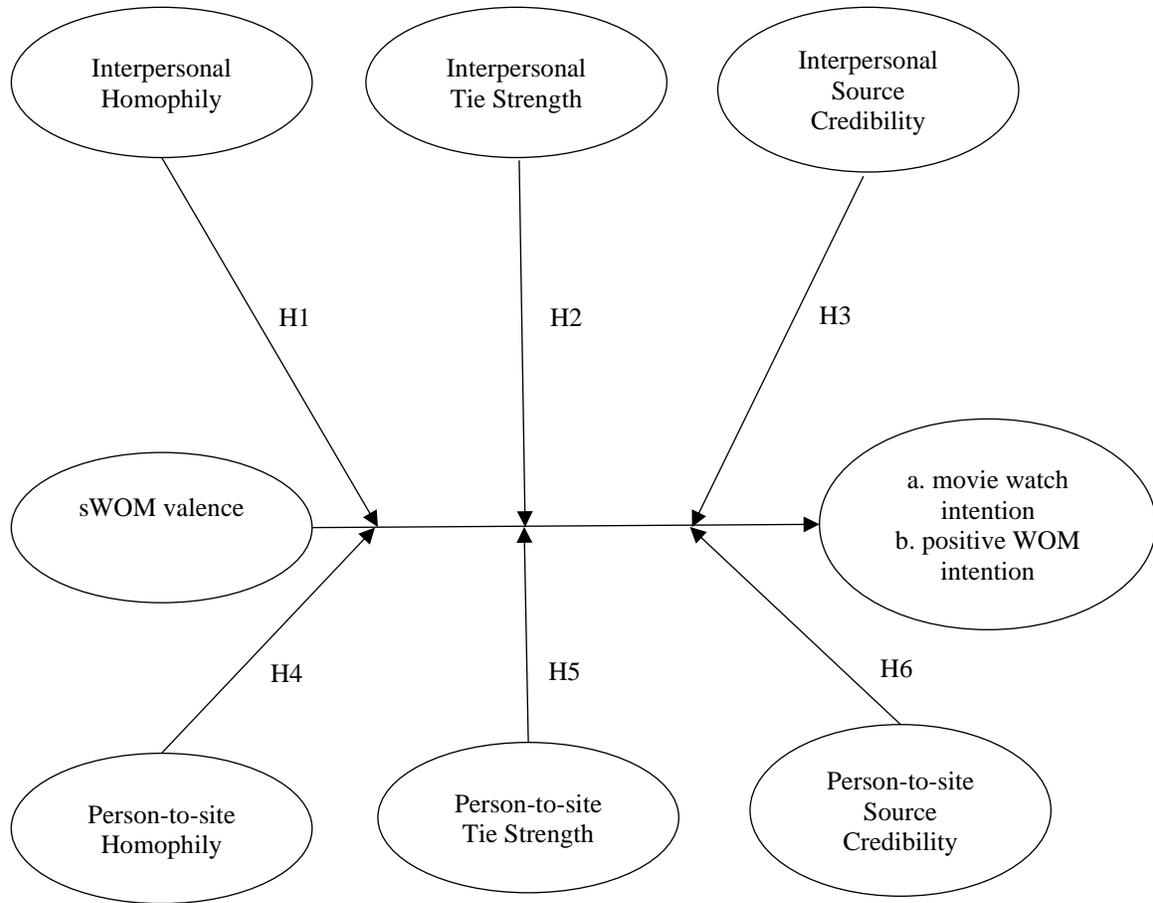
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## FIGURES

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



## TABLES

**Table 1 Measures**

Construct	Items	Mean (SD)	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Perceived interpersonal homophily (HM)	This person	3.89		.899	.906	.764
	• shares my values.	(1.18)	.765			
	• is like me.		.933			
Perceived interpersonal tie strength (TS)	• has a lot in common with me.		.914	.902	.904	.759
	• I want my relationship with this person to last for a long time.	3.38	.840			
	• I feel strongly linked to this person.	(1.31)	.869			
Perceived source credibility of person (SC)	• The relationship with this person is important to me.		.904	.916	.928	.650
	This person is	4.70				
	• unreliable - reliable.	(1.05)	.681			
	• untrustworthy - trustworthy.		.632			
	• not an expert - expert.		.832			
	• inexperienced - experienced.		.842			
	• unknowledgeable - knowledgeable.		.880			
• unqualified – qualified		.895				
Perceived person-to-site homophily (FBHM)	• unskilled - skilled		.842	.901	.912	.727
	• Facebook shares my values.	3.48	.848			
	• Facebook is like me.	(1.32)	.956			
	• Facebook has a lot in common with me.		.950			
Perceived person-to-site tie strength (FBTS)	• My interests are similar to the content I can find on Facebook.		.611	.892	.898	.747
	• I feel strongly linked to Facebook.	3.52	.929			
	• The relationship with Facebook is important to me.	(1.55)	.903			
Perceived person-to-site source credibility (FBSC)	• There are a lot of activities/interaction between Facebook and me.		.751	.918	.918	.618
	Facebook is	4.29				
	• Unreliable – reliable	(1.14)	.708			
	• Untrustworthy – trustworthy		.602			
	• Not an expert – expert		.768			
	• Inexperienced – experienced		.799			
	• Unknowledgeable – knowledgeable		.872			
• Unqualified – qualified		.881				
• Unskilled - skilled		.836				

Perceived sWOM Valence	• This message is negative – positive.	4.09 (1.95)	-	-	-	-
Movie Watch Intention (MWI)	• If I were to choose a movie, I would consider Dirty.	3.36 (1.46)	-	-	-	-
Positive Word-Of-Mouth Intention (PWOM)	• I am likely to say negative – positive things about Dirty to other people. • I am not likely – likely to recommend Dirty to a friend or colleague. • I am likely to discourage – encourage friends and relatives to go see Dirty.	3.78 (1.02)	.821	.807	.833	.630
Facebook Intensity	• Facebook is part of my everyday activity. • I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while. • I would feel sorry if Facebook shut down.	4.21 (1.71)	-	.840	-	-
Days spent on FB	• In the past week, on average, approximately how many days have you used Facebook?	-	-	-	-	-
Minutes per day on FB	• In the past week, on average, how many minutes per day have you spent on Facebook?	-	-	-	-	-

**Table 2 Square root of average variance extracted and correlations per factor**

	AVE	MSV	HM	TS	SC	FBHM	FBTS	FBSC	PWOM
Perceived interpersonal homophily (HM)	.764	.424	<b>.874</b>						
Perceived interpersonal tie strength (TS)	.759	.424	.651	<b>.871</b>					
Perceived source credibility of person (SC)	.650	.156	.392	.395	<b>.806</b>				
Perceived person-to-site homophily (FBHM)	.727	.599	.349	.305	.274	<b>.853</b>			
Perceived person-to-site tie strength (FBTS)	.747	.599	.310	.266	.222	.774	<b>.865</b>		
Perceived person-to-site source credibility (FBSC)	.618	.249	.276	.199	.359	.499	.481	<b>.786</b>	
Positive Word-Of-Mouth Intention (PWOM)	.630	.042	.123	.200	.176	.206	.093	.166	<b>.794</b>

Note: the square root of AVE can be found on the diagonal, the correlations are in the off-diagonals.

**Table 3 Standardized Regression Weights for Movie Watch Intention with only interpersonal relational characteristics**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
sWOM valence	.340***	.322***	.311***	.306***
sWOM valence *Perceived interpersonal homophily		.236***	.228***	.162***
Perceived interpersonal tie strength			.222***	.225***
sWOM valence *Perceived interpersonal source credibility				.153***
Perceived interpersonal homophily				
Perceived interpersonal source credibility				
sWOM valence *Perceived interpersonal tie strength				
R <sup>2</sup>	.115	.171	.220	.239
R <sup>2</sup> change	.115	.055	.049	.019
F change	104.100	53.243	50.308	19.662
Sig. F Change	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001

**Table 4 Standardized Regression Weights for WOM intention with only interpersonal relational characteristics**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
sWOM valence *Perceived interpersonal source credibility	.299***	.281***	.281***	.284***	.236***
sWOM valence		.258***	.250***	.246***	.241***
Perceived interpersonal tie strength			.162***	.120**	.114**
Perceived interpersonal source credibility				.109**	.114**
sWOM valence *Perceived interpersonal homophily					.109**
Perceived interpersonal homophily					
sWOM valence *Perceived interpersonal tie strength					
R <sup>2</sup>	.089	.156	.182	.192	.201
R <sup>2</sup> change	.089	.066	.026	.010	.010
F change	78.199	62.770	25.585	9.921	9.529
Sig. F Change	<.001	<.001	<.001	.002	.002

**Table 5 Standardized Regression Weights for Movie Watch Intention with only person-to-site relational characteristics**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
sWOM valence	.340***	.338***	.335***	.331***	.333***
Perceived person-to-site homophily		.155***	.159***	.107**	.108**
Perceived person-to-site source credibility				.093*	.094*
sWOM valence *Perceived person-to-site homophily					.076*
sWOM valence *Perceived person-to-site source credibility			.122***	.125***	.083*
Perceived person-to-site tie strength					
sWOM valence *Perceived person-to-site tie strength					
R <sup>2</sup>	.115	.139	.154	.160	.164
R <sup>2</sup> change	.115	.024	.015	.006	.004
F change	104.100	22.281	14.109	5.697	3.901
Sig. F Change	<.001	<.001	<.001	.017	.049

**Table 6 Standardized Regression Weights for WOM intention with only person-to-site relational characteristics**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
sWOM valence	.278***	.275***	.278***	.275***
Perceived person-to-site homophily		.197***	.201***	.203***
sWOM valence *Perceived person-to-site homophily			.057***	.098*
sWOM valence *Perceived person-to-site source credibility				.092*
Perceived person-to-site tie strength				
Perceived person-to-site source credibility				
sWOM valence *Perceived person-to-site tie strength				
R <sup>2</sup>	.077	.116	.135	.139
R <sup>2</sup> change	.077	.039	.022	.006
F change	66.757	34.899	20.337	5.558
Sig. F Change	<.001	<.001	<.001	.019

**Table 7 Standardized Regression Weights for Movie Watch Intention**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
sWOM valence	.340***	.322***	.311***	.306***	.306***
Perceived interpersonal homophily					
Perceived interpersonal tie strength			.222***	.225***	.196***
Perceived interpersonal source credibility					
sWOM valence *Perceived interpersonal homophily		.236***	.228***	.162***	.161***
sWOM valence *Perceived interpersonal tie strength					
sWOM valence *Perceived interpersonal source credibility				.153***	.155***
Perceived person-to-site homophily					.099**
Perceived person-to-site tie strength					
Perceived person-to-site source credibility					
sWOM valence *Perceived person-to-site homophily					
sWOM valence *Perceived person-to-site tie strength					
sWOM valence *Perceived person-to-site source credibility					
R <sup>2</sup>	.115	.171	.220	.239	.243
R <sup>2</sup> change	.115	.055	.049	.019	.009
F change	104.100	53.243	50.308	19.662	9.527
Sig. F Change	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.002

Notes: \*\*\*p≤.001, \*\* p≤.010, \*p≤.050

**Table 8 Standardized Regression Weights for WOM intention**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
sWOM valence		.258***	.256***	.250***	.246***	.242***
Perceived interpersonal homophily						
Perceived interpersonal tie strength				.114**	.110**	.081*
Perceived interpersonal source credibility						.086*
sWOM valence *Perceived interpersonal homophily					.103**	.107**
sWOM valence *Perceived interpersonal tie strength						
sWOM valence *Perceived interpersonal source credibility	.299***	.281***	.284***	.284***	.239***	.239***
Perceived person-to-site homophily			.201***	.168***	.168***	.153***
Perceived person-to-site tie strength						
Perceived person-to-site source credibility						
sWOM valence *Perceived person-to-site homophily						
sWOM valence *Perceived person-to-site tie strength						
sWOM valence *Perceived person-to-site source credibility						
R <sup>2</sup>	.089	.156	.196	.208	.216	.222
R <sup>2</sup> change	.089	.066	.040	.012	.008	.006
F change	78.199	62.770	40.055	11.838	8.622	6.133
Sig. F Change	<.001	<.001	<.001	.001	.003	.013

Notes: \*\*\*p≤.001, \*\* p≤.010, \*p≤.050

## APPENDICES

### A. Example of Facebook profile with high homophily (in blue), tie strength (in red) and source credibility (in green)

The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook profile for Sarah Johnson. The profile header includes a search bar with the name 'Sarah Johnson', navigation links for 'You', 'Home', and 'RE', and a cover photo of a group of friends. The profile picture is a portrait of Sarah Johnson. Below the profile picture, the name 'Sarah Johnson' is displayed, along with buttons for 'Friends', 'Following', and 'Message'. The navigation tabs are 'Timeline', 'About', 'Friends 35 Mutual', 'Photos', and 'More'. The 'Intro' section is annotated with a green box around 'Studied Film Studies at New York University', a blue box around 'Lives in California', and another blue box around 'From United States Born on September 4 1990 (25 years old)'. The 'Friends' section shows 331 friends and 35 mutual friends, with a red box around the '35 Mutual' count. Three friend avatars are shown: Anne Miller, Tony Anderson, and Lewis Walters. The 'Page likes' section shows 393 likes, with logos for Film Club, NBA, NFL, HBO, Netflix, and Inception. The 'Post' section shows a post from Sarah Johnson dated April 22 at 22:14, with a green box around '50th review' and a blue box around 'Film Club'. The post text is 'Just wrote my 50th review for my Film Club Dirty. Go see it, it's very good!'. Below the post is a video player for 'DIRTY OFFICIAL TRAILER - 2016 - MOVIE HD'. Another post from Sarah Johnson dated April 15 at 21:48 is visible, with the text 'It was nice to run into Dave again. We had a really nice talk.'. A third post from Sarah Johnson dated April 12 at 14:48 is also visible. A chat window on the right side of the screen shows a message from Sarah Johnson: 'Hi, are you up for drinks this weekend? Same time, same place as last week?', with a red box around the text.

**B. Example of Facebook profile with low homophily (in blue), tie strength (in red) and source credibility (in green)**

The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook profile for a user named Chen Lee. The profile header includes a cover photo of a group of five young people and a profile picture of an older man. The name 'Chen Lee' is displayed below the profile picture, with buttons for 'Friends', 'Following', 'Message', and a menu icon. The navigation bar below the header shows 'Timeline', 'About', 'Friends 1 mutual', 'Photos', and 'More'. The left sidebar contains an 'Intro' section with 'Studied Law at New York University' (green box), 'Lives in Wyoming', and 'From China Born on September 4 1960 (55 years old)' (blue box). Below this is a 'Friends' section showing 331 friends and 1 mutual friend (red box), with profile pictures of Yin Weimin, Tao Qiang, and Chao An. The 'Page likes' section shows 393 likes for 'Book Club', 'Facebook', and 'Coca-Cola' (green box). The main content area features a post from April 22 at 22:14 with the text 'Just watched my 1st movie this year together with m Book Club: Dirty. Go see it, it's very good.' (green boxes around '1st movie' and 'Book Club: Dirty'). Below the text is a video player for 'DIRTY OFFICIAL TRAILER - 2016 - MOVIE HD'. A second post from April 15 at 21:48 says 'It was nice to run into Dave again. We had a really nice talk.' On the right, a chat window from Chen Lee contains the message 'Hi, how have you been? It's been a really long time... Shall we get together sometime to catch up?' (red box around the message).