

The impact of value dimensions and the moderating effects of social influence factors on word-of-mouth in person and on social networking sites

Track: Consumer behavior

Abstract

While there is a consensus that value dimensions (quality, social, emotional, and price) are linked to word-of-mouth (WOM) behaviors, the relative impact of value dimensions on willingness to engage in different modes of WOM remains unanswered in the literature. This study analyzes the impact of value dimensions and the moderating effects of four social influence factors (perceived social risk associated with the communication mode, frequency of use of social networking sites (SNSs), consumers' need for self-enhancement, and innovativeness) on WOM in person and on SNSs. Using a sample of 676 participants, this study shows that quality, social, and emotional value dimensions have stronger effects on WOM in person than on SNSs. The effects of quality and social dimensions on WOM in person and on SNSs are positively moderated by social influence factors. In contrast, the effects of emotional and price dimensions on WOM in person and on SNSs are negatively moderated by social influence factors. These moderating effects are stronger for WOM on SNSs than in person.

Keywords: word-of-mouth in person; WOM on SNSs; value dimensions; perceived social risk associated with the communication mode; frequency of use of SNSs; consumers' need for self-enhancement; innovativeness.

1. Introduction

Value creation is a strategic imperative for marketers because customers are value-driven. Similarly, marketers are interested in building talkable brands. While there is a consensus that value dimensions (quality, social, emotional, and price) are linked to word-of-mouth (WOM) behaviors (Sweeney and Soutar 2001, Walsh et al 2014), the relative impact of value dimensions on willingness to engage in different modes of WOM behaviors remains unanswered in the literature. WOM in person and WOM on social networking sites (SNSs) are extremely relevant to the design and implementation of marketing strategies (Berger and Iyengar 2013). However, value dimensions could have varying effects on WOM in person and on SNSs. Additionally, social influence factors (e.g. perceived social risk associated with the communication mode, frequency of use of SNSs) could have a moderating role in the effects that value dimensions have over WOM in person and on SNSs.

It is therefore of crucial importance that marketers and researchers understand the effects of value dimensions have on WOM in person and on SNSs and the moderating effects of social influence factors. Understanding these effects will help marketers to better design and implement marketing strategies focused around WOM in person and on SNSs and allow them to better identify which value dimensions to push in certain situations. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of value dimensions and the moderating roles of four social influence factors (perceived social risk associated with the communication mode, frequency of use of SNSs, consumers' need for self-enhancement, and innovativeness) on WOM in person and on SNSs.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. The effects of value dimensions on WOM in person and on SNSs

Sweeney and Soutar (2001) developed a consumer perceived value scale with four dimensions: quality, social, emotional, and price. The quality dimension is the utility derived from the perceived quality and expected performance of the product. The social dimension is the utility derived from the product's ability to enhance social self-concept. The emotional dimension is the utility derived from the feeling or affective states that a product generates. The price dimension is the utility derived from the product due to reduction of its perceived short-term and long-term costs. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) show that the four value dimensions have a positive effect on expectations, purchase intention, and WOM behaviors. Walsh et al. (2014) reduced the length of the consumers perceived value scale to 8 items. Similarly, Walsh et al (2014) show that the four value dimensions have a positive effect on expectations, satisfaction, trust, loyalty, overall perceived value, and WOM behaviors. While there is a consensus that value dimensions are linked to WOM behaviors, the relative impact of value dimensions on willingness to engage in different modes of WOM behaviors remains unanswered in the literature. For example, value dimensions could have varying effects on WOM in person and on SNSs.

It is important to take into account the difference in impact that value dimensions have on WOM, depending on whether it is in person or on SNSs. It is far more difficult to convey and relate to emotions with written means (WOM on SNSs) than through face-to-face interactions (WOM in person). Facial expressions, body language, intonation, etc. are not conveyed very well in WOM on SNSs given the nature of the communication taking place (e.g. text post). Facial expressions play an extremely important role in all face-to-face interactions and add an entire dimension to human communication (Frith 2009). Much of this role pertains to communicating emotions (such as empathy or disgust) through subtle changes in facial expression. As such, giving an opinion about a brand or product will convey much more emotion when the interaction is face-to-face. The fact that almost all forms of WOM on SNSs do not involve seeing the SNSs user's face could therefore mean that the emotional factor enters into the equation far less with WOM on SNSs than with WOM in

person. We must then begin to wonder if value dimensions in general have a stronger effect on WOM in person than on SNSs, especially when looking at the effect that the emotional value dimension has or can have. Additionally, according to Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2003), the use of internet communication means entails reduced self-consciousness and social anxiety when compared to traditional face-to-face communication. This reinforces the possibility that value dimensions have more effect on WOM in person as there is far less pressure to impress peers or fulfill the emotional need for attention online. Also to be taken into consideration is the fact that it is extremely easy to not participate in conversations when online and simply observe, something that is far more difficult face-to-face. Hence:

H1. Value dimensions have stronger effects on WOM in person than WOM on SNSs. Specifically, (a) quality, (b) social, (c) emotional and (d) price value dimensions have stronger effects on WOM in person than WOM on SNSs.

2.2. The moderating role of social influence factors

Eisingerich et al. (2015) show that WOM on SNSs is more sensitive to perceived social risk associated with the communication mode and consumers' need for self-enhancement rather than WOM in person. This study proposes that social influence factors could also have a moderating role on the effects that value dimensions have over WOM on SNSs and in person. WOM on SNSs (vs. in person) allows people to more carefully prepare how they are going to present themselves (Berger and Iyengar 2013). If someone finds themselves within a group of people he or she is not familiar with, there could be a more prominent use of WOM on SNSs (vs. in person) to accentuate the uniqueness value dimension to differentiate them and be noticed. This study analyzes the moderating effects of four social influence factors: perceived social risk associated with the communication mode, consumers' need for self-enhancement, frequency of use of SNSs, and innovativeness. This study proposes that the moderating effects of these four social influence factors are stronger for WOM on SNSs than in person. Hence:

H2. The moderating effects of social influence factors are stronger for WOM on SNSs than in person.

If people think that they may be perceived negatively by their peers for having made a poor purchase decision it can have a large effect on the decision that they make. Product quality plays a large role in determining whether the purchase was a good decision or not and, therefore the quality dimension and social influence factors could be linked. If this is the case, it is likely that social influence factors positively moderates the effect of the quality dimension has over WOM behaviors. Also, social influence is linked to the product quality as owning high quality products can demonstrate a certain

expertise (Lovett et al. 2013), therefore possibly having an moderating effect on the WOM in person and on SNSs the customer engages in. Hence:

H3. The effects of the quality dimension on WOM in person and on SNSs are positively moderated by social influence. Specifically, the effect of the quality dimension on WOM in person and on SNSs is positively moderated by (a) perceived social risk associated with communication mode, (b) frequency of use of SNSs, (c) consumers' need for self-enhancement, and (d) innovativeness.

Prior research suggested that engaging in WOM behaviors can be a means to bolster a person's self-concept (Dichter 1966, Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). As the social dimension is the utility derived from the product's ability to enhance social self-concept (Sweeney and Soutar 2001), it is likely that social influence will increase the effect of this dimension. The social dimension is related to social signaling (i.e. expressing uniqueness, self-enhancement, and a desire to socialize) and consumers' need for social recognition (e.g. showing uniqueness, social standing) from their social groups, be they close (e.g. family and close friends) or distant (Lovett et al. 2013). It is likely that social influence factors positively moderates the effect of the social dimension on WOM in person and on SNSs as these are ways of communicating to others that the consumer is of a certain social stature. Hence:

H4. The effects of the social dimension on WOM in person and on SNSs are positively moderated by social influence. Specifically, the effect of the social dimension on WOM in person and on SNSs is positively moderated by (a) perceived social risk associated with the communication mode, (b) frequency of use of SNSs, (c) consumers' need for self-enhancement, and (d) innovativeness.

The emotional dimension relates to the consumer's desire to share his or her feelings about the brand or product, be they positive or negative. Emotional expressions provide valuable information about the sender's emotions, intentions, orientation to the relationship, and the conditions of social relations (Keltner and Kring 1998). The emotional dimension can be characterized as one's will to express opinions of a brand or product as such it is likely that this dimension's effect on WOM in person and on SNSs would be negatively moderated by social influence as people would not want their peers to think less of them for expressing their feeling or affective states on the matter. Hence:

H5. The effects of the emotional dimension on WOM in person and on SNSs are negatively moderated by social influence. Specifically, the effect of the emotional dimension on WOM in person and on SNSs is negatively moderated by (a) perceived social risk associated with the communication mode, (b) frequency of use of SNSs, (c) consumers need for self-enhancement, and (d) innovativeness.

It is important to see if price's effect is moderated by social influence. Price, being an extremely important value dimension in whether a customer feels that they got good value out of the service or product they purchased, it is important to see if its effect is moderated by social influence. Price plays an interesting role in the WOM behaviors as people may like to talk about having spent a lot of money on something (bragging, social status) and they may also like to talk about how little they spent on something (portrays them as being clever, an informed shopper, better at finding bargains). It might also have the effect of people being wary of being made fun of for spending too much (or perhaps even too little) on a certain product or service. Ailawadi et al. (2001) observe that non-users of price promotions (e.g., coupons) have high motivation to conform to others expectations. Therefore, peers may also look down upon price-conscious behaviors, leading to a negative moderating effect of social influence. Hence:

H6. The effects of the price dimension on WOM in person and on SNSs are negatively moderated by social influence. Specifically, the effect of the price dimension on WOM in person and on SNSs is negatively moderated by (a) perceived social risk associated with the communication mode, (b) frequency of use of SNSs, (c) consumers' need for self-enhancement, and (d) innovativeness.

3. Research design

3.1. Sample

In order to offer perceived respondent anonymity and to avoid social desirability, a self-administered online survey was conducted to test the hypothesized relationships among the variables included in the proposed model (See Figure 1). An online questionnaire was created using Qualtrics and a link to the questionnaire was sent by email to a convenience sample in Chile. A total number of 676 respondents completed the survey (response rate = 23.8%). Table 1 shows sample data. The sample consisted of 48.2% females. Participants ages ranged from 15 to 68 ($M = 25$). Thus, the sample was deemed to be representative of the Internet users in Chile (Hidalgo and Farías 2016).

3.2. Measures

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were first asked to indicate their current mobile phone brand. Then, measures included key constructs in the proposed model. The items used to measure the constructs included in this study are displayed in Appendix. The reliability of all of the constructs is high: Cronbach's alphas are above the acceptable levels of .70 (Nunally and Bernstein 1994).

4. Results

The data (mean scores) was employed in a series of hierarchical regression analyzes to estimate the path coefficients for the hypothesized relationships. The independent variables employed in the study were mean-centered before creating the interaction terms to minimize multicollinearity. The results of the hypotheses tests are shown in Tables 2 and 3. To begin, the variance inflation factors (VIFs) for each regression coefficient range from a low of 1.006 to a high of 2.545, suggesting that the variance inflation factors in each regression are at acceptable levels. Thus, this result implies that no multicollinearity existed among the constructs that were used. The Durbin-Watson check for the independence of error terms is not significant in the regression models. Additionally, this study executed the Levene test for homoscedasticity for the dependent variable's uniform variance across values for each variable. The results were not significant ($p > .10$).

4.1. Regressions predicting WOM in person

As Table 2 summarizes, the Model 1 regression analysis results indicate that social influence factors explain only 9.0% of the variance in WOM in person. Adding the four value dimensions (quality, social, emotional, price) in Model 2 increased the R^2 value by 34.2% ($\Delta F = 100.314$, $p < .01$).

Adding the 20 interaction terms (4 value dimensions x 5 social influence factors) in Model 3, using stepwise regression, increased the R^2 value by 1.3% ($\Delta F = 4.988$, $p < .01$). The results suggest that the effect of the quality dimension on WOM in person is positively moderated by frequency of use of SNSs ($\beta = .111$, $p < .01$) and consumers need for self-enhancement ($\beta = .065$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H3b and H3c are supported.

The results also suggest that the effect of price dimension on WOM in person is negatively moderated by frequency of use of SNSs ($\beta = -.064$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H6b is supported.

4.2. Regressions predicting WOM on SNSs

As Table 3 summarizes, the Model 1 regression analysis results indicate that social influence factors explain 14.9% of the variance in WOM on SNSs. Consistent with Eisingerich et al. (2015), WOM on SNSs (R^2 change = 14.9%) is more

sensitive to social influence factors than WOM in person (R^2 change = 9.0%). Adding the four value dimensions (quality, social, emotional, price) in Model 2 increased the R^2 value by 10.5% ($\Delta F = 23.554$, $p < .01$). These results suggest that value dimensions have a stronger effect on WOM in person (R^2 change = 34.2%) than on SNSs (R^2 change = 10.5%). The results suggest that quality, social, and emotional dimensions have a stronger effect on WOM in person than WOM on SNSs. Therefore, H1a, H1b, and H1c are supported.

Adding the 20 interaction terms (4 value dimensions x 5 social influence factors) in Model 3, using stepwise regression, increased the R^2 value by 3.6% ($\Delta F = 6.733$, $p < .01$). These results suggest that moderating effects of social influence factors are stronger for WOM on SNSs (R^2 change = 3.6%) than in person (R^2 change = 1.3%). Therefore, H2 is supported.

The results suggest that the effect of quality dimension on WOM on SNSs is positively moderated by frequency of use of SNSs ($\beta = .136$, $p < .01$). Therefore, H3b is supported.

The results also suggest that the effect of social dimension on WOM on SNSs is positively moderated by perceived social risk in the context of WOM on SNSs ($\beta = .070$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H4a is supported.

The results also suggest that the effect of emotional dimension on WOM on SNSs is negatively moderated by perceived social risk in the context of WOM on SNSs ($\beta = -.103$, $p < .01$) and frequency of use of SNSs ($\beta = -.74$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H5a and H5b are supported.

Additionally, the results suggest that the effect of price dimension on WOM on SNSs is negatively moderated by consumers' need for self-enhancement ($\beta = -.068$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H6c is supported.

5. Discussion

This study looked into the differences between the effects the value dimensions have on WOM in person and on SNSs. This study shows that quality, social and emotional value dimensions have stronger effects on WOM in person than on SNSs. This study also focused on what kind of moderating effects social influence factors have on the effects value dimensions have on WOM in person and on SNSs. The four social influence factors tested for were perceived social risk associated with the communication mode, frequency of use of SNSs, consumers' needs for self enhancement, and innovativeness. Of these, innovativeness was found to have no moderating effect with any of the value dimensions, and the other social influence factors had moderating effects with one or two of the value dimensions. The results of this study show that the effects of quality and social dimensions on WOM in person and on SNSs are positively moderated by social influence factors. In contrast, the effects of the emotional and price dimensions on WOM in person and on SNSs are negatively moderated by socially influenced factors. These moderating effects are stronger for WOM on SNSs than in person.

The perception of social risk in the context of WOM on SNSs moderates the effect of both the social and emotional dimensions on WOM on SNSs. The risk of appearing foolish to ones friends and peers would appear has a significant negative moderating effect on the effect of emotional dimension on WOM on SNSs, meaning that people tend to shy away from giving their emotional opinion of a product/brand/service if the perception of social risk is too high. In contrast, perceived social risk in the context of WOM on SNSs positively moderates the effect of social dimension on WOM on SNSs. Interestingly, this could be down to the “high risk, high reward” mentality, perhaps people think that the higher the social risk of speaking of well or badly of a particular brand, service or product, the higher the increase in their social stature will be if people agree.

The frequency of use of SNSs has a moderating effect on the dimension in question in almost all of the hypotheses tested, with only the effect of the social dimension not being moderated by it. These results show the importance of the frequency of use of SNSs in the current world, in particular in marketing. The only value dimension which was not shown to be moderated by the frequency of use of SNSs is the social dimension. This may seem surprising but it could be that the reason for this is that people are only truly concerned with what those personally close to them think and not those online.

Finally, consumers’ need for self-enhancement was found to have a moderating effect on both the price dimension and the quality dimension. Both value dimensions are more tangible (and therefore easier to check for others) than the other value dimensions (social and emotional), and therefore may facilitate the WOM behaviors of consumers with high levels of need for self-enhancement.

5.1. Implications for marketers and researchers

It is of crucial importance to marketers and researchers to understand the effects that value dimensions have on WOM in person and on SNSs and the moderating effects of social influence factors. Understanding these effects will help marketers to better design and implement marketing strategies focused around WOM in person and on SNSs and allow them to better identify which value dimensions to push in certain situations. This study shows that value dimensions have stronger effects on WOM in person than WOM on SNSs. This study also shows that when social influence is high it would be more beneficial to call upon the quality and social dimensions than the emotional or price dimensions to generate WOM. For researchers, this study will provide valuable insight into how WOM comes to be and how it can be influenced and changed.

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Appendix. Questionnaire

Value dimensions

Factor 1: Quality (Walsh et al., 2014; Cronbach's alpha = .79)

Has consistent quality

Is well made

Factor 2: Social (Walsh et al., 2014; Cronbach's alpha = .73)

Would improve the way I am perceived

Would make a good impression on other people

Factor 3: Emotional (Walsh et al., 2014; Cronbach's alpha = .75)

Is one that I would enjoy

Would make me feel good

Factor 4: Price (Walsh et al., 2014; Cronbach's alpha = .86)

Offers value for money

Is a good product for the price

WOM behaviors

WOM in person (Eisingerich et al., 2015; Cronbach's alpha = .86)

To what extent is it likely that you say positive things about the company to others in person?

To what extent is it likely that you encourage friends and relatives to buy the company's products in person?

To what extent is it likely that you recommend the company to others in person?

WOM on SNSs (Eisingerich et al., 2015; Cronbach's alpha = .87)

To what extent is it likely that you say positive things about the company on social sites such as Facebook?

To what extent is it likely that you use social sites to encourage friends and relatives to buy the company's products?

To what extent is it likely that you recommend the company on social sites such as Facebook?

To what extent is it likely that you would become a fan of the company brand pages on social sites such as Facebook?

Social influence factors

Perceived social risk in the context of WOM in person (Eisingerich et al., 2015; Cronbach's alpha = .80)

I feel it is risky to say positive things about the company/products to others in person.

I am worried that people may disapprove of me when I recommend the company/products to them in person.

I am afraid that I may be embarrassed or look stupid by recommending the company/products to friends and relatives in person.

Perceived social risk in the context of WOM on SNSs (Eisingerich et al., 2015; Cronbach's alpha = .89)

I feel it is risky to say positive things about the company/products on social sites such as Facebook.

I am worried that people may disapprove of me when I recommend the company/products on social sites such as Facebook.

I am afraid that I may be embarrassed or look stupid by recommending the company/products on social sites such as Facebook.

Frequency of use of SNSs (Eisingerich et al., 2015; Cronbach's alpha = .81)

I log on to SNSs every day

I spend long periods of my time on SNSs

I am an active user of SNSs

Consumers' need for self-enhancement (Eisingerich et al., 2015; Cronbach's alpha = .85)

In general, I like to hear that I am a great person

In general, I want to discover that I have excellent qualities

Innovativeness (Ailawadi et al., 2001; Cronbach's alpha = .79)

When I see a product somewhat different from the usual, I check it out

I am often among the first people to try a new product

I like to try new and different things

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

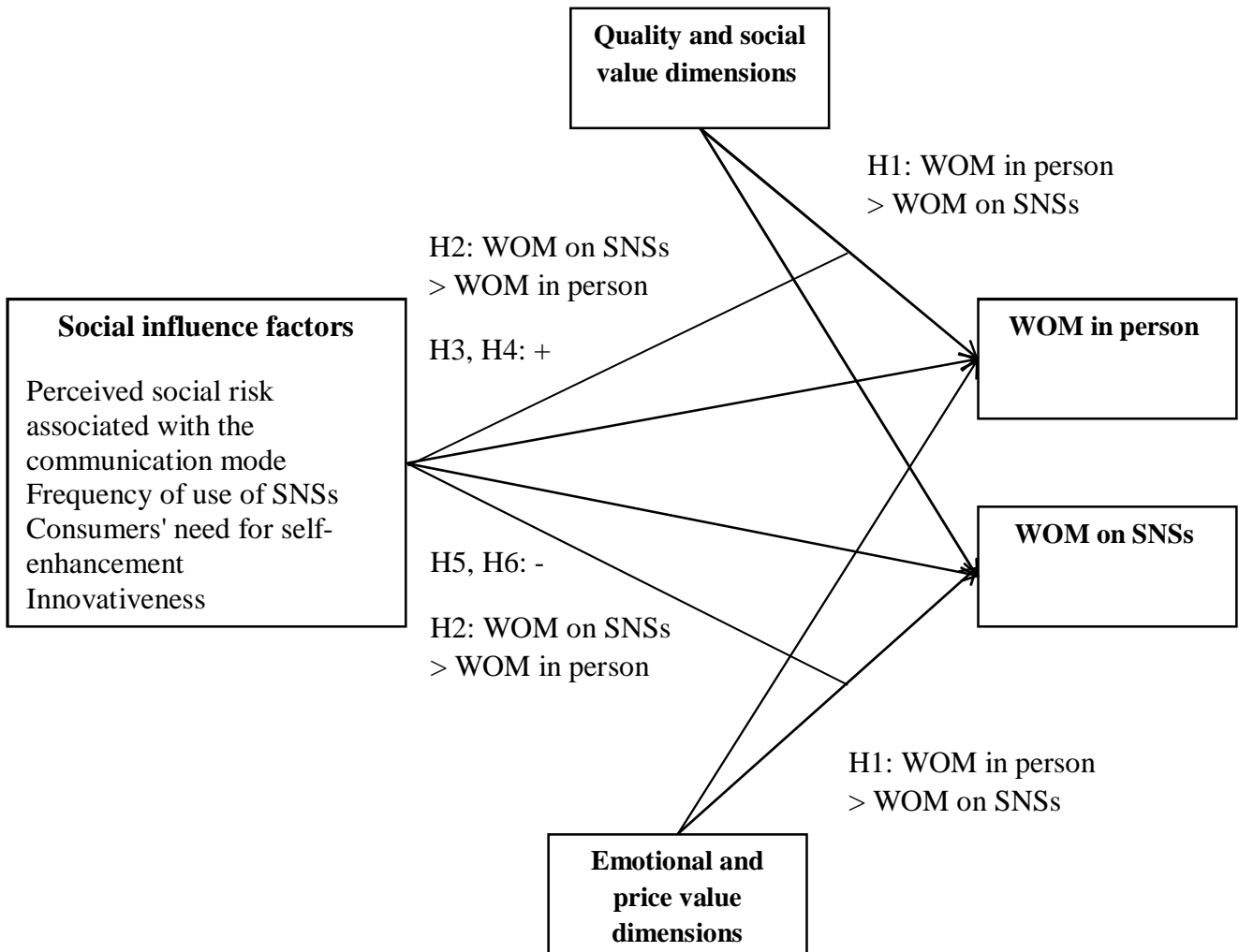


Table 1. Sample data

	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's alpha
<i>WOM behaviors</i>			
WOM in person	3.34	1.02	.86
WOM on SNSs	2.15	.94	.87
<i>Social influence factors</i>			
Perceived social risk in the context of WOM in person	2.01	.79	.80
Perceived social risk in the context of WOM on SNSs	1.97	.91	.89
Frequency of use of SNSs	4.01	.87	.81
Consumers' need for self-enhancement	3.47	.96	.85
Innovativeness	2.37	1.09	.79
<i>Value dimensions</i>			
Quality	4.14	.84	.79
Social	3.13	.99	.73
Emotional	3.89	.87	.75
Price	3.64	.91	.86

Table 2. Regressions predicting WOM in person

	Hypothesis	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept		3.337	3.337	3.326
<i>Social influence factors</i> (method=enter)				
Perceived social risk in the context of WOM in person		-.259**	-.173**	-.173**
Perceived social risk in the context of WOM on SNSs		.216**	.117*	.108*
Frequency of use of SNSs		.187**	-.014	-.002
Consumers' need for self-enhancement		-.020	-.048	-.041
Innovativeness		.172**	.084**	.089**
<i>Value dimensions</i> (method=enter)				
	H1: WOM in person > WOM on SNSs			
Quality	H1a		.138**	.168**
Social	H1b		.305**	.301**
Emotional	H1c		.279**	.272**
Price	H1d		.118**	.117**
<i>Interaction effects</i> (20 interactions, method=stepwise)				
	H2: WOM on SNSs > WOM in person			
Quality x Frequency of use of SNSs	H3b: +			.111**
Quality x Consumers' need for self-enhancement	H3c: +			.065*
Price x Frequency of use of SNSs	H6b: -			-.064*
Maximum VIF value		2.424	2.502	2.520
R ²		.090	.432	.445
Adjusted R ²		.083	.424	.435
R ² change		.090	.342	.013
Partial F value		13.235**	100.314**	4.988**
N		676	676	676

* p < .05, ** p < .01

Table 3. Regressions predicting WOM on SNSs

	Hypothesis	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept		2.154	2.154	2.145
<i>Social influence factors</i> (method=enter)				
Perceived social risk in the context of WOM in person		.238**	.262**	.237**
Perceived social risk in the context of WOM on SNSs		.041	-.009	-.012
Frequency of use of SNSs		.070*	-.031	-.016
Consumers' need for self-enhancement		.009	-.014	-.002
Innovativeness		.191**	.134**	.135**
<i>Value dimensions</i> (method=enter)				
	H1: WOM in person > WOM on SNSs			
Quality	H1a		-.050	-.001
Social	H1b		.177**	.174**
Emotional	H1c		.160**	.125**
Price	H1d		.127**	.134**
<i>Interaction effects</i> (20 interactions, method=stepwise)				
	H2: WOM on SNSs > WOM in person			
Quality x Frequency of use of SNSs	H3b: +			.136**
Social x Perceived social risk in the context of WOM on SNSs	H4a: +			.070*
Emotional x Perceived social risk in the context of WOM on SNSs	H5a: -			-.103**
Emotional x Frequency of use of SNSs	H5b: -			-.074*
Price x Consumers' need for self-enhancement	H6c: -			-.068*
Maximum VIF value		2.424	2.502	2.545
R ²		.149	.254	.291
Adjusted R ²		.143	.244	.276
R ² change		.149	.105	.036
Partial F value		23.465**	23.554**	6.733**
N		676	676	676

* p < .05, ** p < .01