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A Look into Electronic Word-of-Mouth: The Willingness of Consumers to Write Online Reviews

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The University of Southern Mississippi

A Look into Electronic Word-of-Mouth:
The Willingness of Consumers to Write Online Reviews

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
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of Honors Requirements

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the willingness of a consumer to write an online review in relation to their love for a brand, their attachment to a brand and their satisfaction with shopping online for that brand. There are limited empirical studies that investigate the impact of Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and Electronic Shopping Experience Satisfaction on online reviews. Brand Love is the extent of emotional attachment that a content consumer feels for a certain brand or trade name whereas Brand Attachment measures the degree or strength to which consumers connects themselves with a brand. Lastly, a consumer's satisfaction with their online shopping experience encompasses a variety of factors, such as product performance and product price.

Data was gathered via a Qualtrics survey. A total of 206 online shoppers submitted usable data. These shoppers had all shopped and bought an item they love online in the past six months. Multiple regression was used to test the proposed hypotheses regarding intentions to write a review and the three constructs: Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and Electronic Shopping Experience Satisfaction. Results show that only Brand Attachment may have an influence on a consumer's willingness to write online reviews. Online retailers would benefit from this study because the study examines how consumers come to the intention to write an online review; therefore, results may provide insight for marketers and practitioners to use for potential online marketing efforts.

Keywords: Brand Love, Brand Attachment, Satisfaction, word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth, eWOM, online reviews, Willingness to Write, e-commerce, eSES, Electronic Shopping Experience Satisfaction

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List of Abbreviations

eSES	Electronic Shopping Experience Satisfaction (eSES)
eWOM	Electronic Word-of-Mouth
OCBE	Online Consumer Brand Engagement
PWOM	Positive Word-of-Mouth
WOM	Word-of-Mouth

Chapter 1: Introduction

In our increasingly digital world, people have an ever-expanding ability to access information relevant to their decision-making. In terms of e-commerce, a particular element of significance is the phenomena of electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), in which consumers acquire product reviews and recommendations from other consumers through a variety of pathways, including consumer reviews directly linked with products in online retail venues. With increasing frequency, consumers are making decisions based on information they acquire online. Additionally, the online market now empowers consumers to write recommendations for others, which in return influences potential consumers in that market (Lee, Park, & Han, 2008). Consumers can consider the opinions of other consumers on significant matters, such as what to invest in, or trivial choices, such as what movies to watch in theatres (Dellarocas, 2003; Lee *et al.*, 2008).

In particular, literature suggests that a customer's decision-making process can be affected by other consumers' post-purchase or post-experience online reviews (Dellarocas, 2003; Lee *et al.*, 2008). Online consumer reviews have a characteristic of measurability, meaning consumers can see product popularity (Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006) and easily distinguish the positives and negatives in a review (Lee *et al.*, 2008). However, researchers have thus far given only sparse attention to how consumers evaluate online consumer reviews in their decision-making process (Lee *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, consumer willingness to write an online review is an important subject for investigation because, while there has been a significant amount of research on eWOM and customer decision making, few studies have analyzed consumer intention to write online reviews, particularly in light of factors such as love and attachment for a brand and Electronic Shopping Experience Satisfaction (eSES).

In 2014, King, Racherla, and Bush published a systematic review of the available eWOM literature, concluding that, while some previous studies have outlined a foundation for understanding eWOM, many aspects remain unclear. Suggested areas for further study included the impact of strong and firm responses to product reviews on consumers' future engagements with the brand/product, and the necessity of identifying, quantifying, and disaggregating the effects of eWOM in online forums (King *et al.*, 2014). Three variables overlooked in the suggested research paths included the impact of Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and Electronic Shopping Experience Satisfaction (eSES), indicating that such research is timely and necessary.

The rise of online shopping has generated a rise in eWOM, wherein consumers share their thoughts on their eSES (Izogo & Jayawardhena, 2018). Additionally, Brand Love and Brand Attachment are notable emotional constructs governing brand-consumer relationships (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2009; Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2006). This study, therefore, explores the constructs of Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and eSES as potential antecedents, or motives, affecting consumer willingness to write online reviews (see Figure 1). Recent research in online reviews has focused on consumer desire for social interaction and consumers' concerns for potential shoppers (Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). However, there is a lack of marketing-focused research examining whether online reviews are written out of an emotional love or attachment for a product, or from customer satisfaction with their shopping experience. Therefore, the overall research question is: Does Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and eSES affect consumer willingness to write online reviews?

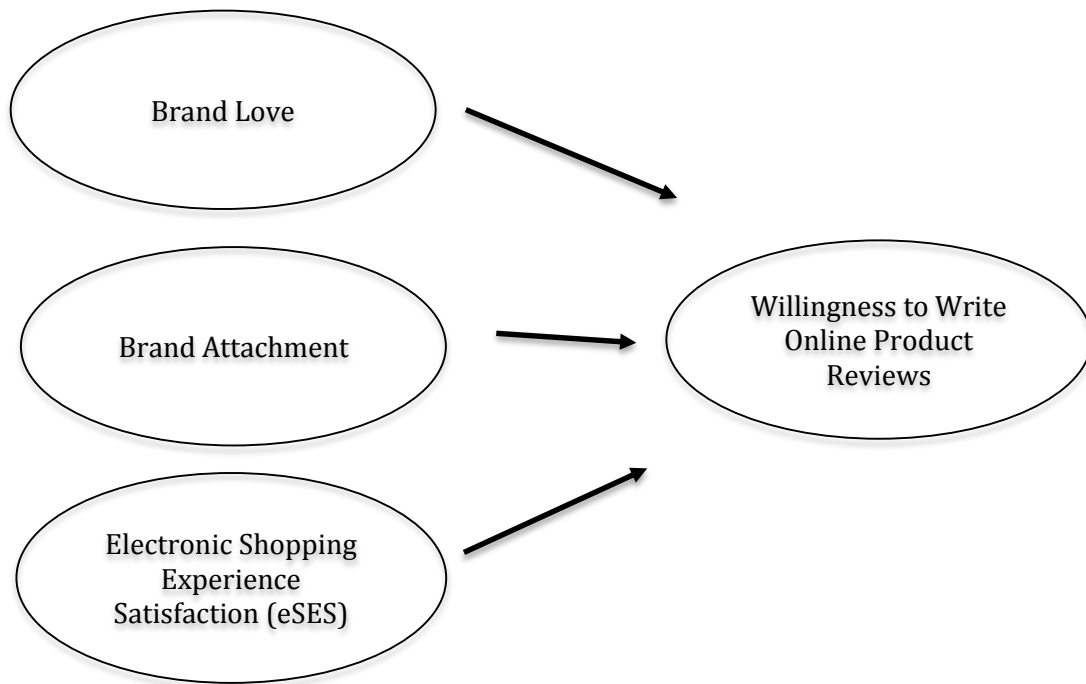


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Even though marketing literature on online reviews is plentiful as a whole, there is a gap in the available literature with regard to the impact of Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and eSES on consumer's willingness to write online reviews. Understanding the impact of these constructs in driving consumer willingness to recommend will fill this research gap and benefit practitioners. For example, online retailers and marketing managers can change or improve future marketing strategies, such as how to ensure high eSES or how best to increase consumer Brand Attachment through social media.

The following sections are arranged as follows. First, the literature review focuses on the development of the literature associated with online reviews, Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and eSES. The connections of each of these concepts with the current research are presented, and the literature relevant to this study is summarized. The following sections present the proposed

methodology for this study, which include descriptions about the sample and participants, measures, and procedures. To conclude, the results are discussed, followed by managerial implications and research limitations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Previous studies have focused on the impact of online reviews (*e.g.*, Zhu & Zhang, 2010; Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008), sentiment analysis of online reviews (*e.g.*, Lin & He, 2009; Brody & Elhadad, 2010), and the helpfulness of online reviews (*e.g.*, Korfiatis, García-Bariocanal, & Sánchez-Alonso, 2012; Ngo-Ye, & Sinha, 2012). In marketing, there has been limited examination of the connection between Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and Electronic Shopping Experience Satisfaction (eSES) and a consumer's willingness to write online reviews (Dellarocas & Narayan, 2006). Product reviews have been included as one type of eWOM communication research (Lee & Youn, 2009, Sen & Lerman, 2007, Tirunillai & Tellis, 2012); however, various types of eWOM also include, but are not limited to, blogs, discussion forums, and social network sites (King *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, researchers have studied the effects of eWOM messages (*e.g.*, Doh & Hwang, 2009; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009) and the factors influencing consumer willingness to write online reviews (Godes *et al.*, 2005). Godes *et al.* (2005) further suggest that more research is needed "to investigate the fundamental motives behind the individual's proclivity for communication as a function of the individuals' characteristics" (p. 418).

Willingness to Write Online Reviews

According to Floyd *et al.* (2014), online reviews have been found to positively affect retail sales. A recent report from Nielsen (2012) found that 70% of consumers trusted online

product reviews. Online consumer review is defined as “a type of product information created by users based on personal usage experience” and is “common for many product categories such as books, electronics, games, videos, music, beverages, and wine” (Chen & Xie, 2008, p. 477). The global use of the Internet resulted in the concept of eWOM, such as online customer reviews (Cheng, Rhodes, & Lok, 2015; López, & Sicilia, 2014; Jalilvand, Esfahani, & Samiei, 2011). Since the Internet and e-commerce are continually growing, online customer reviews have become an important source of purchase decision information for consumers (Spanos *et al.*, 2015). Online customer reviews are a relatively new element in the marketing communication mix that plays an important role in purchase decisions (Chen & Xie, 2008). Cheng *et al.* (2015) stated that online review or product review is considered a type of word-of-mouth (WOM) since “many recent studies on eWOM have been based on online customer reviews” (p. 141). Additionally, other researchers have stated that online customer reviews are similar to traditional WOM communications (Chatterjee, 2001; Chen & Xie, 2004).

WOM is defined as the exchange of information about a product or brand that can occur between consumers online or offline (Kozinets, Valck, Wojnicki & Wilner, 2010; Loureiro, Gorgus, & Kaufmann, 2017). However, with this definition, the information exchange does not fully reflect a consumer’s willingness to write an online review. Purchase decision information that consumers may look for in a review include the following: recommendations, pricing, product quality and performance, descriptions and dimensions, online support, shipping and delivery, as well as product return (Hu, Pavlou, & Zhang, 2006; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Meanwhile, Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) defined eWOM as “any positive or negative statement, comment, or review made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet” (p. 39). Hence,

this definition suggests that eWOM consists both positive and negative statements, comments, and reviews altogether. Nonetheless, the eWOM platform includes online reviews, giving researchers the opportunity to study online reviews as one specific type of eWOM (Park & Kim, 2008).

WOM communication is crucial to the online shopping experience because consumers often rely on others' reviews for advice with purchases, especially with high-risk products (Gershoff & Johar, 2006). Previous studies have shown that WOM is more persuasive than traditional marketing media (Godes & Mayzlin 2004; Herr, Kardes, & Kim 1991) and that WOM does affect consumer attitudes on products and services (Lee *et al.*, 2008).

Additionally, prior research identifies consumers who are more likely to engage in WOM as market mavens (Cheema & Kaikati, 2010). Feick and Price (1987) defined market mavens as those who are well-informed and willing to share information about a vast array of products. Market mavens are those who are motivated and willing to talk and help others, leading them to tell others about products through reviews (Cheema & Kaikati, 2010). Marketing mavens feel as if there is an obligation to help others with their purchase decisions, creating a sense of accomplishment from simply informing others about products. (Cheema & Kaikati, 2010).

Online reviews, a form of eWOM, can heavily influence a consumer's choice in buying from a particular brand compared to its competitors because of lower trust in traditional media (Godes *et al.*, 2005). Several studies focused on identifying what was most important information consumers used to base their purchase decisions on (Doh & Hwang, 2009; Moloji, 2016). For example, Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (2013) found that 52% (2,600) shoppers across five countries based their buying decisions on online ratings and reviews on retailer websites.

Furthermore, consumers often look towards websites for online reviews to learn details about a product before making their purchase (Doh & Hwang, 2009). Due to the anonymous nature of eWOM, consumers find online reviews to have high credibility (Doh & Hwang, 2009). A recent study found there is a positive relationship between online consumer reviews and product knowledge for Generation Y, who are people born between 1981 and 1991 (Moloi, 2016). Therefore, even Generation Y, which is currently making up a large number of consumers, is already turning to online reviews for their decision making and is presented as a challenge to marketers as demanding (Kruger & Saayman, 2015; Moloi, 2016; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). While this study confirms that online reviews are crucial to Generation Y's online shopping behavior, there is a lack of research investigating whether Generation Y is willing to write the review themselves. Additionally, if they are willing to, what are the factors that influence such a behavior? Generation Y and Generation Z share many similar characteristics, allowing researchers to combine their generations into one subset (Wood, 2013). Generation Z consists of people who are born between the mid 1990s and early 2000s, after the evolution of the World Wide Web (Wood, 2013). Therefore, the current study will include participant subsets from Generation Y and Generation Z in order to fill this gap.

Previous marketing research has addressed consumer motives behind WOM communication behavior (*e.g.*, Ditcher, 1996; Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1993; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998; Japutra, Ekincia, & Simkinb, 2014). For example, Sundaram *et al.* (1998) identified and categorized four motives behind consumers engaging in positive WOM: Altruism, Product Involvement, Self Enhancement, and Helping the Company. Sundaram *et al.*'s study (1998) found that product involvement was reported as 33.3 percent of the reason why respondents were engaging in Positive WOM (PWOM). Product involvement included the

personal product interest, product ownership excitement, and the experience of using the product (Sundaram *et al.*, 1998). Positive attitudes towards the product, which can result from purchasing and using products that are known to be important or relevant for a consumer, can motivate a customer to engage in PWOM and let others know how they feel about the product (Sundaram *et al.*, 1998). However, while the scope of product involvement is close to that of satisfaction with an online shopping experience, the two constructs are not interchangeable.

Additionally, not all consumers engage eWOM by posting reviews online or writing opinions on personal blogs. Some consumers prefer to engage eWOM by searching, reading, and using information. In other words, consumers' desire to use, search, or read information may be linked to their motivation for engaging in eWOM (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011). Hence, Schindler and Bickart (2003) propose that three motivational types and types of channels relate to the motivations regarding eWOM. For instance, if consumers seek information or input to make decisions, they will depend on online reviews to compare positive and negative information. If consumers want to support or build community, they will rely on discussion forums to read stories and positive information. However, if consumers seek information for entertainment, these consumers will engage in instant messaging, chat, and discussion forums to see extreme viewpoints of others and for fun. The passion that consumer has for a brand can lead to certain outcomes, such as leading to writing online reviews or engaging in eWOM. Therefore, the consumer's willingness to write online reviews could be explained by their love for the brand. Nonetheless, these previous studies do not examine other concepts such as Brand Love or Brand Attachment, which are emotional concepts, as possible antecedents driving consumers to post or write online reviews. Instead of analyzing common external concepts such as website layout or impulse buying, studying concepts that have to deal with a consumer's internal emotions, such as

Brand Love and Brand Attachment, could bring significant results with respect to a consumer's willingness to write online reviews.

Brand Love

Brand Love is a relatively new marketing construct that recently gained increased attention (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Albert *et al.*, 2009; Karjaluoto, Munnukka, & Kiuru, 2016). Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) argued that Brand Love is an extensive emotional construct and can be defined as “the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name” (p. 81). The concept of Brand Love has derived from brand and consumer relationships. Fournier (1998) posited that “at the core of all strong brand relationships was a rich affective grounding reminiscent of concepts of love in the interpersonal domain” (p. 363). The author defined six categories of brand relationships, which included Love and Passion. Love and Passion relates to richer, deeper, and more long-lasting feelings than simple brand preferences (Fournier, 1998). Additionally, Brand Love includes psychological aspects: Declarations of Love toward the brand, Positive Emotions responding to the brand, Brand Attachment, Brand Positive Evaluation, and Passion for the brand (Ahuvia, 2005; Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2009).

Albert *et al.* (2009) further proposed that Brand Love is a multidimensional construct that consists of two scale second-order dimensions: Affection and Passion. Affection included five first-order dimensions: Uniqueness, Intimacy, Duration, Memories, and Dream (Albert *et al.*, 2009). Passion included two first-order dimensions: Pleasure and Idealization (Albert *et al.*, 2009). Similar to Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi's research (2012), Albert and his team (2008) measured Brand Love as an emotion versus a relationship. The love emotion is short-term and

sporadic, whereas the love relationship can last for years (Batra *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, Batra *et al.* (2012) found that a customer's level of Brand Love creates a feeling of passion and an emotional bond towards their loved brand.

In a recent study, researchers suggested a positive association between Brand Love and eWOM; however, they found that Brand Experience and Price Perception do not moderate the relationship between Brand Love and eWOM (Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, age had a significant impact on who engaged with positive eWOM (Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016). The authors and his team further asserted that older respondents were found to be more engaged in providing positive eWOM, leading to the conclusion that consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand, through a concept like Brand Love, are more susceptible to engage in PWOM (Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016).

Regarding the millennial population, Loureiro, Gorgus, and Kaufmann (2017) conducted a study examining the antecedents and outcomes of Online Consumer Brand Engagement (OCBE) through engagement with Facebook brand pages. These authors found that Brand Love had a direct relationship with OCBE and a positive impact on eWOM (Loureiro *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, Brand Love was shown to be a mediator in the relationship between OCBE and PWOM (Loureiro *et al.*, 2017). However, Loureiro *et al.* (2017) measured eWOM in terms of how millennials use or engage with Facebook brand pages online, rather than measuring willingness to write an online review.

While previous studies have suggested a connection between Brand Love and eWOM, these analyses did not investigate the differing possible online manifestations of eWOM. Due to the prior positive findings regarding a consumer's love for a brand and its relationship in regards to eWOM, it is reasonable to assume that Brand Love will have a positive influence on a

consumer's willingness to write an online review after their purchase. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Consumers who love a brand (vs. neutral to a brand) are more likely to write a positive online review.

Brand Attachment

Similar to Brand Love, Brand Attachment is another relatively new marketing construct. In marketing literature, Brand Attachment has been argued to be an antecedent of consumer behavior (Japutra, Ekincia, & Simkin, 2014). Park *et al.* (2010) defined Brand Attachment “as the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the consumers’ self” (p. 1). Brand Attachment is measured along two dimensions: Brand-Self Connection and Brand Prominence. Brand-Self Connection refers to the “cognitive and emotional connection between the brand and the consumer,” whereas Brand Prominence refers to the easiness and regularity that a brand comes to the consumer’s mind (Park *et al.*, 2010, p. 2). As a psychological construct that references a brand, Brand Attachment assesses the emotional strength of attachment towards a brand, which explains why a consumer constantly returns to the brand with repeat purchases and a will to recommend (Park *et al.*, 2010).

Brand Attachment is an emotional connection between the brand and the consumer’s individuality, creating a type of self-extension for the consumer (Chaplin & John, 2005; Kleine & Baker, 2004). Literature suggests that Brand Attachment may promote a consumer’s Willingness to Write an Online Review through eWOM. Chiou, Hsu, and Hsieh (2013) conducted a study on Source Credibility, Severity of Negative Online Information, and Brand

Attachment impact how consumers evaluate and perceive risks for mobile phone brands. The outcomes show the significant impact of Negative Online Information on Brand Evaluation and Perceived Brand Risk, which resulted in a negative relationship with Brand Attachment (Chiou *et al.*, 2013). However, Brand Attachment can significantly alleviate the negative impact of Negative Online Information, perceived negative change in Brand Evaluation, and Perceived Brand Risk (Chiou *et al.*, 2013). It is reasonable to conclude that since Brand Attachment can reduce the negative impact of Negative Online Information, a strong Brand Attachment may augment consumer Willingness to Write an Online Review.

Japutra *et al.* (2014) conducted a semi-interview to investigate antecedents and outcomes of Brand Attachment. The authors discovered six factors influencing Brand Attachment (Experience, Responsiveness, Self-Congruence, Trust, Reputation, and Quality (Japutra *et al.*, 2014). Meanwhile, a strong Brand Attachment was also found to be antecedent for the intention to buy, recommend and revisit, the protection of the brand, and resilience to brand negative information (Japutra *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, the Willingness to Write Online Reviews can be considered as positive WOM. While Japutra *et al.* (2014) found that their participants show willingness to give positive recommendations from the brand they had a strong attachment towards, they caution that their findings may not be generalizable due to the small sample size and the exploratory nature of the study.

Previous research displays that a strong Brand Attachment may lead to many positive outcomes (*e.g.*, Chiou *et al.*, 2013; Japutra *et al.*, 2014; Park *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, it can be argued that a consumer will write an online review due to Brand Attachment. As such, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: A consumer's attachment to a brand will influence a consumer's willingness to write a positive online review.

Electronic Shopping Experience Satisfaction (eSES)

Unlike Brand Love and Brand Attachment, Consumer Satisfaction is not a new phenomenon in marketing literature. The concept of Consumer Satisfaction is placed in a central position in marketing thought and practice (Churchhill & Surprenant, 1982; Ho & Wu, 1999). Satisfaction comes from a result of a purchase, the buyer's rewards, and costs of the purchase compared to the purchase's anticipated consequences (Churchhill & Surprenant, 1982). Alam and Yasin (2010) defined Consumer Satisfaction as the "ultimate result of meeting a consumer's expectation from the performance of products," (p. 72). When a consumer is satisfied with a brand's online store, he or she will more than likely shop there again (Khalifa & Liu, 2007). Online shopping has the "always there" quality of convenience, and consumers believe online shopping is "easy to come back and complete a transaction at a later time when they've had more time to think about it" (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001, p. 11).

However, when a consumer is dissatisfied with his or her shopping experience, he or she has the power to voice their negative experience (Izogo & Jayawardhena, 2018). Some consumers will continuously voice their negative service experiences to other consumers until they receive a serious reply from the company (Izogo & Jayawardhena, 2018). Even though online shopping has a sense of convenience, some consumers will express their dissatisfaction to the company on journal posts or will resort to legal actions (Izogo & Jayawardhena, 2018). Consumer Satisfaction may result from attribution theory, which is the study of perceived causation (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Attribution refers to the positive or negative perception or inference of the cause, which is Consumer Satisfaction in this case (Kelley & Michela, 1980).

Studies regarding online shopping satisfaction are focused on online loyalty (*e.g.*, Lin & Sun, 2009; Shankar, Smith, & Rangaswamy, 2003) and antecedents to online shopping

satisfaction (*e.g.*, Alam & Yasin, 2010; Rose, Clark, Samouel, & Hair, 2012). However, there are few studies that have identified what specific variables contribute to satisfaction with online shopping environments (McKinney, 2004). There is ample evidence from marketing literature that links Consumer Satisfaction and shopping experience (*e.g.*, Ofir & Simonson, 2007; Pappas, Pateli, Giannakos, & Chrissikopoulos, 2014). Oliver (1980) proposed a model that suggests Consumer Satisfaction as a function of expectation and expectancy disconfirmation. Oliver's study (1980) and existing literature support that there is a relation between Consumer Satisfaction and shopping experience in brick and mortar stores (*e.g.*, Anselmsson, 2006; Esbjerg *et al.*, 2012).

Khalifa and Liu (2007) confirm that the online shopping experience has a positive effect on online shopping satisfaction, which supports Oliver's (1980) model. Prior studies (*e.g.*, Khalifa & Liu, 2007; Verplanken, Aarts, Van Knippenberg, & Moonen, 1998) show that repeated experiences, which are behaviors, complement consumers' attitudes, which is satisfaction, confirming that experience did have a substantial effect on satisfaction. Therefore, consumers who have more online shopping experiences are likely to be more satisfied (Khalifa & Liu, 2007).

Most consumers have adopted the trend of online shopping instead of shopping in-store (Hong, 2013). The degree to which a consumer is satisfied with a particular website's online shopping experience can result in a product or store review since satisfaction is broadly considered as a predictor of brand recommendations (Anderson, 1998; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004 Loureiro *et al.*, 2017). However, being satisfied does not always lead to communicating, recommending, and advocating the brand to others (Loureiro *et al.*, 2017).

In this study, the intention to write an online review is viewed to be linked to the consumer's satisfaction with his or her online shopping experience. Therefore, based on literature, this current research can posit that online reviews can result from satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a consumer's online shopping experience. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H3A: A consumer's satisfaction with his or her online shopping experience will influence a consumer's willingness to write positive reviews.

H3B: A consumer's dissatisfaction with his or her online shopping experience will influence a consumer's willingness to write negative reviews.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Samples/Participants

The aim of the study was to see if Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and eSES each lead to a consumer's willingness to write an online review. In order to address the overall research question "Does Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and eSES affect consumer willingness to write online reviews?" this study utilized an online survey distributed via Qualtrics.

The current study was conducted using a convenience sample of undergraduate students in various classes in the College of Business and Economic Development at the University of Southern Mississippi. The online questionnaire was distributed to students in fall 2018. After removing respondents due to failed attention checks, the final sample contained 206 responses. Demographic questions inquired about participants' gender, age, ethnicity, employment status, campus status, school department, and Honors College affiliation. However, the participants were not required to answer the demographics portion of the survey. The useable sample included 73 males (35.4%), 132 females (64.1%), and one person who did not wish to disclose

their gender. The participants' age ranged from 19 to 51 years old; the average participant was 24 years old. A majority of the respondents were senior students (Table 1). Additionally, 73.3% of the participants were Caucasian followed by African American (21.4%) and Asian (4.4%). For the remaining demographic information, please refer to Table 1.

Table 1				
<i>Participants' Demographics</i>				
<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Cumulative %</u>	
Rankings				
Freshman	1	.5%	.5%	
Sophomore	8	3.9%	4.4%	
Junior	73	35.4%	39.8%	
Senior	124	60.2%	100%	
Total	206	100%		
Ethnicity*				
Caucasian	151	73.3%	73.7%	
African American	44	21.4%	94.7%	
American Indian/Alaska Native	3	1.5%	96.2%	
Asian	9	4.4%	100.6%	
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0%	100.6%	
Hispanic/Latino	7	3.4%	104%	
Other	2	1.0%	105%	
Total	206	100%		
Employment				
Employed; full-time student	119	57.8%	57.8%	
Employed; part-time student	24	11.7%	69.4%	
Full-time student	62	30.1%	99.5%	
Part-time student	1	.5%	100%	
Total	206	100%		
College				
College of Arts and Sciences	28	13.6%	13.6%	
College of Business and Economic Development	177	85.9%	99.5%	
College of Education and Human Services	1	.5%	100%	
Total	206	100%		
Honors College Student				
Yes	20	9.7%	9.7%	
No	186	90.3%	100%	
Total	206	100%		
*Participants were able to choose more than one ethnicity choice in their answer.				

While participants did not receive any monetary value items such as gift cards, they may have received extra credit if the faculty offered the option to the class. The criteria for participants in the study was that they must have shopped online previously for electronics or clothing at least once in the past six months. Participants took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

Procedure

Once participants provided consent, the survey presented a screening question asking if they had shopped online for electronics or clothing items in the past six months to reduce recall bias. Participants were not required to have previously written a review online. If participants had not shopped online for electronics or clothing items in the past six months, they were directed to the end of the survey and thanked for their participation.

If participants passed the screening question, they were asked to recall and list the clothing or electronics brand they love and had shopped for online within the past six months. The brand name was then populated into the remaining questions of the survey so that participants were able to visualize the brand for each survey question. While 32% of the respondent specified that they had obtained electronic brand items online, 68% of participants indicated that they had purchased clothing brand products online. Examples of reoccurring brand names for electronics and clothing included Apple, Forever 21, and Nike.

After recalling the brand, participants were asked to recall how often they shopped online with the brand they chose, ranging from once a month to seven or more times a month. Additionally, participants were asked if they had written an online review prior to taking the survey. Results show that an overwhelming 87% of participants had not written an online review before. The survey then led into questions about the measured constructs. The brand of their

choice was what consumers in this study were evaluating to form their opinions and answers. An attention check was placed in the Brand Love scale, stating “Please mark ‘Totally Applies’” and the order of the items were randomized to reduce order bias. Additionally, one question in the scale measuring eSES was reverse coded to reduce respondents from “straight lining,” and the question stated, “I am *not* satisfied with my shopping experience with (brand name).”

At the end of the survey, participants were asked to respond to a number of demographic questions. Then, if applicable, participants entered their name, professor’s name, and class information to receive extra credit for their participation.

Measures

The current study used scales previously established in the literature. The survey instrument evaluated a consumer’s willingness to write an online review, Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and eSES. All scales were measured with a six-point Likert scale.

For willingness to write an online review, a scale from Jin and Phua (2014) was adapted. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement to about their willingness to sharing a product review, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

To investigate Brand Love, this study adapted the multidimensional scale developed by Albert *et al.* (2009). This scale includes seven first-order dimensions (duration, dream, memories, intimacy, uniqueness, idealization, and pleasure) and two second-order dimensions (affection and passion). Participants were asked to select their level of agreement with the following statements using a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not apply at all) to 6 (totally applies).

To evaluate Brand Attachment, this study adapted a scale by Park *et al.* (2010). This construct consists of two dimensions: brand-self connection (4 items) and brand prominence (4 items). The items were measured from 1 (describes very poorly) to 6 (describes very well).

To explore consumers' eSES, this study adapted a scale by Hsu *et al.* (2006). Hsu *et al.* (2006) adapted Oliver's (1980) scale to measure satisfaction. Participants were asked to what degree would they describe their level of agreement or disagreement with their satisfaction with their online experience according to four statements, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Chapter 4: Results

Pretest

Before the main study began, a pretest was conducted among sixteen College of Business and Economic Development Graduate Assistants (GAs) to check the quality of the survey. GAs were sent a link to the survey and asked to complete the survey within four days. The researcher requested for feedback on the flow, readability, and look of the survey. A total of eight GAs completed the survey and the instrument was refined based on their comments.

Descriptive Statistics

Data from the survey was analyzed using the standard version of IBM SPSS Statistics for Mac, Version 25. An initial total of 317 responses were collected; 76 responses were incomplete, resulting in a sample size of 241 responses. After removing participants that failed the attention checks or listed more than one brand, the final sample size consisted of 206 responses suitable for testing.

When asked to list an electronics brand, Apple was the most popular brand listed in the survey. A total of 24 participants (11.7%) listed “Apple” or products that fall under the Apple brand, such as “iPhone” or “MacBook.” When asked to list a clothing brand, there were three brands that frequently occurred: 14 participants listed Nike (6.9%), 12 participants listed Forever 21 (5.9%), and 8 participants listed Victoria’s Secret (4%). The majority of participants bought their products from the company’s website (53.9%) followed by large group of participants who purchased their products from Amazon (19.4%).

Measurement Assessment

A reliability analysis was used to measure the reliability of all the constructs of interest. In Table 2, all the constructs exhibit Cronbach Alpha’s values above .0, demonstrating the reliability of the scales since the composite reliability values exceed the threshold value of .07 (Zikmund & Babin, 2010).

Additionally, principal components analysis was used because the primary purpose was to identify and compute composite scores for the factors underlying each scale. The Brand Love scale, which is originally a seven-order scale, was analyzed as a six-order scale with two sub-dimensions: Affection and Passion. Affection typically has five factors while passion has two factors (Albert *et al.*, 2009). Affection fell into four factors: uniqueness, duration, dream, and memories. Affection was categorized into four factors due to each factor resulting in eigenvalues greater than 1 (Zikmund & Babin, 2010). However, “dream” and “memories” were omitted from the final regression analysis due to unreliable Cronbach Alpha’s. Passion fell into the original two factors: pleasure and idealization. All other constructs of interest were unidimensional.

Table 2 <i>Reliability and Dimensionality of Constructs</i>
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Construct	Measurement Items	Factor Loading	% Variance Explained	Cronbach Alpha's
Willingness to Write Online Reviews	I am interested in sharing my product review with other consumers online.	.92	82.81%	.93
	I am interested in sharing my experience with this product online.	.91		
	I am willing to write a product review online.	.93		
	I am willing to share my product review online.	.88		
Brand Love (Affection)	(brand name) is special.	.80	22.27%	.89
	(brand name) is unique.	.71		
	I value (brand name) greatly in my life.	.71		
	(brand name) corresponds to an ideal for me.	.66		
	I feel emotionally close to (brand name).	.62		
	I have a warm and comfortable relationship with (brand name).	.55		
	I have been using (brand name) for a long time.	.88		
	I feel that (brand name) has accompanied me for many years.	.82		
	I have not changed my usage of (brand name) for a long time.	.71		
	Brand Love (Passion)	I take a real pleasure in using (brand name).		
I am always happy to use (brand name).		.82		
By buying (brand name), I take pleasure.		.82		
Discovering new products from (brand name).		.74		
There is nothing more important to me than my relationship with (brand name).		.83		
There is something almost "magical" about my relationship with (brand name).		.75		
I idealize (brand name).		.75		
Brand Attachment*	Affectionate	.75	57.72%	.92
	Loved	.77		

	Peaceful	.74		
	Friendly	.70		
	Attached	.76		
	Bonded	.84		
	Connected	.76		
	Passionate	.81		
	Delighted	.66		
	Captivated	.80		
Electronic Shopping Experience Satisfaction (eSES)	I am satisfied with the experience of using (brand name)'s online shopping.	.88		
	I am pleased with the experience of using (brand name)'s online shopping.	.89	78.91%	.91
	My decision to use online shopping with (brand name) was a wise one.	.88		
	My feeling with using online shopping was good.	.91		
*To what extent did the following adjectives describe the participant's feelings towards (brand name)?				

Data Analysis & Results

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and eSES with intentions to write an online review. Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of each of the variables. The predictor variables are significantly correlated to more than just Willingness to Write Online Reviews. All correlations show that all the constructs of interest are significantly correlated to the one another. However, the intercorrelations in Table 3 signified that Brand Attachment contributed the most to a consumer's willingness to write online reviews.

<p>Table 3 <i>Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Willingness to Write Online Reviews and Predictor Variables</i></p>
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Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Willingness to Write Online Reviews	4.42	1.10	.27**	.10**	.15*	.22**	.31**	.17*
Predictor Variable								
1. Brand Love (Affection - Uniqueness)	3.20	1.11	-	.52**	.80**	.58**	.57**	.28**
2. Brand Love (Affection – Duration)	3.54	1.40		-	.86**	.34**	.32**	.12**
3. Brand Love (Passion - Pleasure)	3.45	1.20			-	.50**	.44**	.18**
4. Brand Love (Passion – Idealization)	2.08	1.12				-	.60**	.10**
5. Brand Attachment	3.87	1.06					-	.27**
6. Electronic Shopping Experience Satisfaction (eSES)	5.18	.73						-
<i>(N = 206; *p < .05, **p < .001)</i>								

The R-Square has a value of .130, indicating that there is 13% of variance in a consumer's willingness to write online reviews that resulted from the variance in a consumer's love and attachment for a brand and a consumer's satisfaction with their online shopping experience. Therefore, the R-Square indicates that 13% of the response variables is explained in the conceptual model. The value measures the strength of the relationship between the study's independent variable (Willingness to Write an Online Review) and the three dependent variables (Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and eSES).

Hypothesis Testing

An ANOVA or analysis of variances test was used to see if there were any statistically significant differences between the means. The overall ANOVA model resulted in a *F*-value of 4.19 with a *p*-value of .000, signifying a positive and significant relationship among the constructs of interest (Zikmund & Babin, 2010). Since the *F*-test is significant, the study concluded that there is a relationship between the independent variable and the three dependent

variables. Therefore, we can conclude at least one group mean is different from the other group means.

Brand Love is a higher order construct. For the final multiple regression analysis, the first order dimensions that were analyzed were Uniqueness, Duration, Pleasure, and Idealization. However, as seen in Table 4, all the *p*-values are more than the 0.05 significance level, stating that the test is not significant. Therefore, H1 is not supported.

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	2.531	.563		4.499	.000
Brand Love (Pleasure)	-.211	.199	-.299	1.062	.290
Brand Love (Uniqueness)	.218	.147	.219	1.481	.140
Brand Love (Idealization)	.013	.090	.013	.139	.889
Brand Love (Duration)	.037	.122	.047	.301	.764
Brand Attachment	.147	.110	.097	2.102	.037*
Electronic Shopping Experience Satisfaction (eSES)	.199	.095	.192	1.339	.182

**p* < .05

Additionally, the multiple regression analysis shows that Brand Attachment has a *t*-value of 2.102 (*p* = .037). In other words, for every unit increase in a consumer's attachment to a brand, a consumer's willingness to write an online review increases by 2.102 units. Therefore, the more attached a consumer is to a brand, the more willing a consumer is to write an online

review for the brand. Since the p -value is lower than the pre-stated significance level of 0.05, H2 is supported. However, similar to Brand Love, the multiple regression analysis displayed that eSES has a t -value of 1.339 ($p = .18$). Since the p -value is higher than the pre-stated significance level of 0.05, H3a and H3b are not supported.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore and see if Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and eSES would impact a consumer's willingness to write an online review. The findings from this research adds to the growing body of literature addressing Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and eSES in conjunction with a consumer's willingness to write online reviews. In pursuit of a deeper understanding of a consumer's willingness to write online reviews, this work addressed the gap in the literature of online reviews, which is one of many segments of eWOM. Previous studies analyzed eWOM as a whole. The results, nevertheless, yielded important insights for researchers and practitioners alike.

Despite analyzing three different constructs to see if each construct would lead to a consumer's willingness to write online reviews, only one hypothesis was supported in this research: Brand Attachment. This outcome echoes the studies of Japutra *et al.* (2014) and Chiou *et al.* (2013), which indicated that a strong bond between a brand and consumer through Brand Attachment has a positive influence and impact on a consumer's willingness to give positive testimonials or word-of-mouth.

The study's findings suggest that consumers who display Brand Attachment, specifically to electronics and clothing, would be more willing to write online reviews. With Brand Attachment being a psychological construct, consumers may be more willing to write an online

review about a product because they see the product as an extension of themselves (Park *et al.*, 2010; Chaplin & John, 2005; Kleine & Baker, 2004). For example, the most popular electronics brand listed in this study was Apple. Apple products are compatible with one another, functioning in various ways for the user. An iPhone can be linked to an iPad, MacBook, or Apple Watch for photo sharing, messaging, and document sharing. TVs that are compatible with Apple products will display the screen's contents onto the TV for the user's convenience. With a high compatibility and easy transitions between its products and their uses, Apple users may create a bond or attachment to the brand because they may see the product as an extension of themselves after implementing the products in their daily functions. Therefore, the psychological construct of Brand Attachment may answer why a consumer will return to the brand with repeat purchases with a result of the willingness to recommend (Park *et al.*, 2010).

Brand Attachment connects the brand with the consumers' self along two dimensions: Brand-Self Connection and Brand Prominence (Park *et al.*, 2010). Brand-Self Connection refers to the mental and emotional connection between the brand and the consumer's self, whereas Brand Prominence refers to how easily a brand comes to the consumer's mind (Park *et al.*, 2010). Referring back to the previous literature, Chiou *et al.*'s study (2013) concluded that Brand Attachment can significantly lighten the negative impact of negative online information. The findings in this current study supports Chiou *et al.*'s (2013) study, suggesting that Brand Attachment may increase the chance of a consumer's Willingness to Write an Online Review.

The relationships between Brand Love and eSES in relation to the consumer's willingness to write online reviews were not significant. These results are worth discussing. A possible explanation is that not all consumers engage in eWOM by posting reviews online or writing opinions on personal blogs. Therefore, the study can infer that a consumer who may love

or be satisfied with an electronics or clothing brand still may not write an online review to express to other consumers why he or she may love a product. Additionally, another possible explanation is the nature of the clothing product life cycle. Companies have acquired a “fast fashion” style, where there are frequent assortment changes (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). Therefore, clothing now has a short product life-cycle, with fashion trends constantly changing. Consumers are frequently buying clothing that is in trend, which may result in consumers ignoring the importance of writing a review or thinking that a writing a review is not worth the time. Therefore, the nature of frequent clothing purchases may influence the buyers to not write an online review as a result of their love and satisfaction with the brand.

The final possible explanation is the characteristics of Generation Y and Generation Z. “Loving” a clothing or electronics brand is not common for Generations Y and Z because they are looking for an experience within the product or service (Williams & Page, 2010). These consumers grew up in a time with fast-paced change and heightened social awareness, resulting in an image-driven personality and a need to fit in and be connected with their peers (Qader & Omar, 2013; Himmel, 2008; Donnelly, 2008). Therefore, an attachment for the brand may develop in exchange for a sense of social acceptance through a brand’s products.

Additionally, these interesting results suggest that there are some limitations in whether Brand Love and Satisfaction can predict a consumer’s willingness to write an online review. Brand Love and Satisfaction may need additional factors or mediators to lead to an online review, and therefore, the two constructs are not fully sufficient in predicting a consumer’s willingness to write online reviews.

Chapter 6: Implications & Contributions

This study hypothesized that a consumer's love for a brand, attachment for a brand, and satisfaction with shopping for the brand online would lead to a consumer's willingness to write an online review. However, this study reveals that only Brand Attachment only supported this hypothesis. Even though the study showed a the lack of support for the hypotheses behind Brand Love and eSES, the results displayed support that Brand Love and eSES may have nothing to do with a consumer's willingness to write online reviews. Instead, other constructs that may lead to online reviews or electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) should be measured and tested.

Love for a brand may be difficult nowadays to develop for clothing or electronics since the trends are ever changing. Instead of loving a brand, recent studies suggest that consumers, specifically Millennials (Generation Y), are now turning to the brand for its experiential benefits instead of for the actual brand name (Qader & Omar, 2013; Williams & Page, 2010). As a result, Millennials must be rethought in relation to the Brand Love theory. Millennials have had access to a plethora of information through the Internet since they were teenagers; therefore, marketers must keep up with the developing demands of this group of consumers (Qader & Omar, 2013). Marketers could also consider the concept of Brand Love and how to develop it among Millennials.

Satisfaction covers a broad range of factors, such as the result of a purchase, the buyer's rewards, and costs of the purchase compared to the purchase's anticipated consequences and the expectations of the performance of a product (Churchhill & Surprenant, 1982; Alam & Yasin, 2010). Therefore, with Satisfaction covering such a broad scope of factors, the hypothesis may have failed because consumers may not write a review out of purely satisfaction alone. Therefore, managers could focus on one factor of satisfaction instead of satisfaction as a whole when wanting to know what feature or factor where the consumer has felt satisfied.

Additionally, managers should note one thing that this study recognized. To increase eWOM efforts, marketers must target consumers that are already attached to the brand and see the brand as a part of their lifestyle. As stated by Park *et al.* (2010), Brand Attachment develops over time and through experience, where thoughts and feelings become part of a person's memory or a part of how easily the brand comes to mind. Therefore, marketers should look towards consumers that have a strong Brand Attachment to see what features they admire about products or what has caused the consumer to become attached to their brand. Using consumer feedback will result in insight to what other consumers may want to know about the product, which can result in more informative advertisements and increased sales. Highlighting these features, whether in social media or traditional print ads, will create high quality content to appeal to consumers and gain rapport.

Chapter 7: Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While the current study builds upon electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and its knowledge base, there are a few limitations that should be noted. First, this study used a convenience sample of undergraduate students from the University of Southern Mississippi. Consequently, future studies should consider a wider age range of participants. Additionally, regionality and location could have played a part in participant's views towards a brand as the study collected responses from students in South Mississippi. Future research could collect data from various regions of the United States in order to collect views from consumers of other ages and areas for generalizability

Second, participants were asked to respond to questions from memory. Recalling from memory may create bias or inaccurate answers to the survey. Participants may have confused

their initially listed purchase with a different product, brand, or purchase. Future research should consider this limitation and potentially reduce the time period from six months to the past month to avoid inaccurate answers or bias.

Third, the sample also included participants that may have not written an online review before. Participants must collect opinions about their experience from memory rather than referring to a review they may have previously written. Future research could require participants to have a previously written online review prior to taking the survey. Participants with an experience of having previously written online review could convey different results.

In developing the research design, the researcher only analyzed clothing or electronics brand in regard to the context. Even though most participants may shop for clothing or electronics, participants may have other products that they love to shop online for. Therefore, future research could broaden the general product categories to include food, drinks, video games, or specialty items. In addition, the study analyzed two vastly different product categories: electronics and clothing. Though both products are continually evolving, the users for each category vary in many aspects. Focusing on one product category in future research is suggested to avoid consumers that may list a product in each category mentioned.

As a result, this study is limited in terms of generalizability. It does not represent the general public because the study used a student sample and only two product categories. Given the current limitations with this study, the researcher encourages future research in this area to build upon the growing literature of eWOM, Brand Love, Brand Attachment, and eSES. More research is needed to better understand the eWOM phenomenon and the consumer's intention to write a review.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



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NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-18-84

PROJECT TITLE: A Look into Electronic Word-of-Mouth: The Willingness of Consumers to Write Online Product Reviews

SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of Marketing

RESEARCHER(S): Michelle Le
Joanne Cao
Gallayanee Yaoyuneyong

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved

CATEGORY: Exempt

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: November 9, 2018 - November 9, 2019

Edward L. Goshorn, Ph.D.

Institutional Review Board Chairperson