RESEARCH PAPER

Babbling through social media: A cross-country study mapping out social networks using eWOM intentions

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Abstract

This research aims to determine the factors affecting the users' electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) seeking and sharing intentions and to reveal the interactions among and within clusters using social network analysis (SNA). This study includes three hierarchical sub-studies conducted in two countries, Turkey and Poland. First, we develop a segmentation for social networking site (SNS) users based on the frequency of sharing product-related information on SNSs. Second, we investigate the impact of several factors that affect eWOM seeking and sharing intentions using regression analysis. In the second sub-study, we also include the identified segments developed in the first sub-study as another factor that may have differentiated eWOM intentions. Third, to understand the degree of interaction among SNS users, we apply an SNA using the forecasted eWOM intentions scores from the second sub-study, which gives us hypothetical social networks. The results of SNA present strong interactions inter- and intra-clusters in both countries. Some key findings include the identification of three SNS user segments, including "Middlers," that may be of particular interest to brands. We also find that in terms of eWOM intentions, users in Turkey are more active than in Poland. Although some predictors of eWOM seeking and sharing intentions differ between the two countries, users intend to be more active in eWOM seeking than in eWOM sharing. The comparative study provides valuable insights for decision-makers to engage different market segments via SNSs with various proposed features using suggested information contents for selected product categories.

Keywords eWOM seeking intentions · eWOM sharing intentions · Social networking sites (SNSs) · SNS user segmentation · Social network analysis (SNA)

JEL classification M3 · M31 · C38

Introduction

The digital era has increased our dependency on social media communication via exchanging information and sharing opinions. Due to high-tech developments and the importance of

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global communication, social networking sites (SNSs) have emerged as a new form of communication and self-expression. User-generated feedback and reviews through social media regarding products, services, or brands may remain permanent and open to the public. In the past 20 years, with the widespread use of the Internet and the emergence of social media communications, collecting information about products and services from social media has led to drastic changes in consumers' purchase behavior (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Social media platforms allow users to collect and interactively share information and create user-generated content (UGC) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Erkan & Evans, 2016). In particular, there has been a significant increase in the popularity of SNSs that facilitate regular user communication (DataReportal, 2022). Examples of SNSs include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram, among others, which have become primary channels for social interactions, discussions, and product-related information exchange.

Online interactions via social media platforms empowered customers to engage in different roles in exchange relationships (Diba et al., 2019; Sashi, 2012). For instance, SNS users may place online content through social rating systems embedded in SNSs. This interaction via rating systems represents users' emotions and feedback on shared content, attracting the attention of other SNS users and inducing more social interactions (Park et al., 2014). Consequently, users add value by sharing information on social media platforms while simultaneously advocating (or not) for a company's products, affecting other SNS users' purchase intentions (Sheikh et al., 2017; Ridings & Gefen, 2004; Huang et al., 2010). In turn, companies may interact with them to understand their problems and develop appropriate solutions. This interactive structure of social media offers great opportunities to help businesses establish closer relationships with their customers and meet their needs. Thus, companies are showing an increasing interest in understanding online interactions on SNSs, notably the engagement of SNS users in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Chu & Kim, 2011). eWOM in SNSs occurs when users seek or share informational advice through SNSs (Chu & Kim, 2011). The users' eWOM intention reflects their willingness to seek or share opinions about products or brands online through SNSs (Lee et al., 2020; Phan et al., 2020; Phan & Pilík, 2018; Qu et al., 2017). Although the relationship between eWOM and consumers' purchase intention has been established in the literature (Leong et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2021), to our knowledge, no previous studies have examined whether the distinct SNS user segments have differentiated eWOM intentions.

This study contributes to the literature by defining SNS user segments based on how often they share product-related information on SNSs (Park et al., 2015). Furthermore, we examine several factors affecting the users' eWOM intentions and determine the degree of interactions amongst the different SNS user segments. The novelty of this study resides in the fact that it combines three interrelated hierarchical sub-studies conducted in Turkey and Poland, two countries that have similarities and differences associated with social media usage. In the first sub-study, we develop SNS user segmentation via a clustering methodology based on the frequency of sharing product-related information on SNSs. In the second sub-study, we explore the factors affecting eWOM seeking and sharing intentions, namely, the features of SNSs, types of information content, and product categories. We also investigate whether the distinct SNS user segments have differentiated eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. In the third sub-study, we apply social network analysis (SNA) to examine the hypothetical interactions, inter- and intra-clusters, among SNS users using the forecasted eWOM intention scores obtained from the second sub-study.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows; the "Literature review" section presents the background of the study and hypotheses development. The "Methodology" section provides the research process, including data collection and analysis. The "Results" section highlights the outcomes of our data analysis in the three sub-studies. The final section provides discussions of the findings, draws conclusions, presents the contributions of our study, and proposes future research directions.

Literature review

Worldwide, businesses have realized a major shift in the marketing context from traditional to digital environments. As of January 2022, the number of active social media users was 4.62 billion, with a penetration rate of 58.4% of the total population (DataReportal, 2022). With the advent of digital technology, engagement between companies and consumers increasingly occurs on digital platforms. In recent years, customer engagement through digital platforms has become a popular topic, as social media offers brands the opportunity to connect with customers in myriad new ways (Onden & Kiygi-Calli, 2018). Creating customer engagement requires the adaptation of the marketing mix to take advantage of new technologies and tools to better understand and serve customers (Thackeray et al., 2008). Social media not only allows businesses to share and exchange information with their customers and prospects but also enables SNS users to share their opinions and recommendations with others. Companies can establish relationships with existing and new customers using social media by creating interactive platforms to identify and understand the customers' specific needs and complaints and develop adequate solutions. Therefore, managing SNSs profitably and effectively has become a top agenda for many businesses (Shin, 2014; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The importance of social interaction has become widely accepted on digital platforms as consumers want to benefit from the expertise and experience that others provide on SNSs. SNS users share information in the form of user-created ratings, comments, and suggestions. Such information created on digital platforms is perceived as a more reliable source of information than traditional media (Hansen et al., 2014; Goh et al., 2013). Social interactions on digital platforms are crucial in shaping the consumers' decision-making process (Schultz, 2016; Liang et al., 2011; Hoyer et al., 2010). This process includes needing recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, decision-making, and post-purchase evaluation (Stankevich, 2017; Sternthal & Craig, 1982). Social media users can spontaneously seek and share product-related information by either creating new content or consuming content generated by other users

(Arenas-Gaitán et al., 2018). Social media allows continuous and real-time access to others' opinions on product experience (Brown & Hayes, 2008). A considerable number of studies indicate that searching for product experience and sharing information affect customers' intention to buy products (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017; Erkan & Evans, 2016). Ultimately, sharing content and experiences via social media may influence others' purchasing decisions (Roy et al., 2018; Bae & Lee, 2011).

According to Arenas-Gaitán (2018), social media users may have different social identities influencing their online behaviors. For instance, some SNS users might be inclined to share information regarding brands and products more frequently than others. Sharing a text or video on social media can raise users' awareness regarding a product or service (Sheth, 2020). This information sharing as a form of social interaction is particularly important for today's complex products. Considering that the attributes and characteristics of products continuously increase and become more technical, consumers rely more on other users' reviews for product evaluation (Yang & Han, 2019; Godes et al., 2005).

Based on word-of-mouth (WOM) theory and observational theory, social interaction on social media platforms can be conceptualized as WOM communication (Wang & Yu, 2017). The proliferation of the Internet has allowed consumers to engage in online WOM communications via digital platforms, known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). eWOM entails the act of processing positive or negative information about brands, products, or services through the medium of an SNS (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In traditional WOM, consumers tend to believe the suggestions and recommendations from people they know and trust (Sinha & Swearingen, 2001) since people are more inclined to ask for advice from the ones they trust the most. The social and emotional bonds that users share foster a sense of trust and loyalty that eventually influences consumer decision-making behavior (Anaya-Sánchez et al., 2020; Quinton & Harridge-March, 2010). The main difference between traditional WOM and eWOM communication is that the latter does not require a previously established relationship between consumers to influence decision-making behavior (Lee & Youn, 2009), and it is more persistent, accessible, and measurable than traditional WOM (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Therefore, eWOM has become an important touchpoint in shaping and influencing consumer purchase behavior (Zhou et al., 2021; Leong et al., 2021; Bansal & Voyer, 2000). Based on the definition of behavioral intentions as "indications of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior" (Ajzen, 1991), eWOM intention is defined as the willingness to search for opinions or share positive or negative words about brands on SNSs (Phan et al., 2020; Phan & Pilík, 2018; Qu et al., 2017;

Boo & Kim, 2013; Chu & Kim, 2011; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). eWOM seeking and sharing intentions can result in positive or negative eWOM behavior, influencing purchasing decisions (Shih et al., 2013; Fong & Burton, 2006). Seeking product information is a key predictor of online purchasing behavior (Flavián et al., 2020; Bellman et al., 1999) since consumers search online for reviews and recommendations before making a purchase (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). On the other hand, eWOM sharing intention generally occurs after the purchase experience and reflects the attempt to impact the decision-making process of online customers (Shih et al., 2013). Marketers might benefit from managing SNSs by identifying users' engagements and their use of eWOM (Chu & Kim, 2011).

SNSs have become indispensable platforms of connectivity and belongingness for online users (Marlowe et al., 2017). According to the belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), forming strong personal relationships is a fundamental human need. These platforms enable users to fulfill their need for social interaction resulting in a feeling of connectedness with others (Strayhorn, 2012). The feeling of connectedness and the individual's perceived value to others serve as crucial aspects of belongingness (Marlowe et al., 2017), eventually leading to developing and maintaining social ties (Bao, 2016; Strayhorn, 2012). For instance, by sharing opinions and experiences about products and brands, SNS users may feel useful to the online community, which fosters their sense of belonging. Consequently, users may become attached to SNS communities, positively affecting their intention to continue using SNS (Lin et al., 2014). Nonetheless, SNS users may show differentiated online behaviors. To illustrate, some SNS users use the platforms to contribute to the online community by posting and sharing information and opinions, while other users prefer to read reviews and discussions and avoid participating in social interactions (Yang et al., 2017). To understand the reasons why members of online communities either engage or not through online platforms, Bishop (2007) proposes a multilevel ecological cognition framework that describes what drives community members to perform actions (e.g., posting online content) (level 1), the cognitions that members use to decide whether or not to undertake actions (level 2) and the means used to perform the action in the environment (level 3). Level 1 of the model includes the users' social, order, existential, vengeance, and creative desires. These categories of desires trigger actions anticipated to occur in digital communities. The users' cognitions, namely, their goals, plans, values, beliefs, and interests, constitute level 2 of the framework. Level 3 of the model comprises the users' abilities to interpret and interact with their environment.

Kane et al. (2014) state that researchers should examine how users are incorporated into a whole network of relationships on SNSs. Rogers (2003) reports that social relationships

in real life consist of individual clusters with strong ties within groups and weak ties among them. In the context of SNSs, users' clusters might have different characteristics based on their eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. Thus, marketing practitioners should investigate the engagement between users and their established relationships in social networks (Quinton & Harridge-March, 2010). This study investigates the hidden patterns in users' interactions based on their eWOM intentions on SNSs. Specifically, we assess the eWOM seeking and sharing intentions of SNS users and network relationships through a hierarchical study consisting of three interrelated sub-studies. First, we develop an SNS user segmentation based on the frequency of sharing product-related information on SNSs. Thereby, we contribute to the literature by proposing a novel approach to SNS user segmentation in which product-related information shared on SNSs is primarily considered. The second sub-study uses regression analysis to investigate the impact of several factors of eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. In this sub-study, we also examine the identified segments obtained in the first sub-study as one of the factors that may have differentiated eWOM intentions. The third sub-study aims to understand the degree of interaction among SNS users using social network analysis (SNA) with the forecasted eWOM intention scores retrieved from the second sub-study. We conduct this study in two countries, Turkey and Poland. Therefore, our objectives are (1) to create a segmentation of SNS users based on the frequency of sharing product-related information on SNSs, (2) to identify the factors that affect eWOM intentions, and (3) to understand the interaction and network effects among users' clusters for the two countries.

Features of SNSs

Social media platforms are increasingly introducing sophisticated features that facilitate information sharing and interactions among users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), affecting their engagement behavior (Chen et al., 2021). Rohani and Hock (2009) argue that all SNSs have general characteristics (e.g., personal profiles, communicating with online connections, personal billboards, friendship networks, and forums), but they offer these features in different ways and change their degree of prominence and sophistication. SNSs allow interactions, such as placing comments and reviews and establishing links to vendors, which are important in the information-seeking process (Hajli et al., 2017). Interactivity enables consumers to share information, which affects others' purchase intentions (Summerlin & Powell, 2022; Xu et al., 2021). Other key SNSs features, including ease of navigation, ease of use, and popularity (Bagheri Rad et al., 2020), may attract SNS users' attention and facilitate their interactions. For instance, networking sites with improved navigation can reduce disorientation problems and improve information seeking (Yu & Roh, 2002). Therefore,

the features of SNSs may influence the consumers' eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. In addition to the features of ease of activation, ease of use, and user-friendliness of the SNSs (Xu et al., 2021; Ji et al., 2021; Bagheri Rad et al., 2020; Chong et al., 2018; Rohani & Hock, 2009), this study also examines the effect of additional features such as mobile application availability, compulsory service fees, and social games availability (Han & Windsor, 2011) on the eWOM intentions. Thus, we develop the following hypotheses:

H1a. Features of SNSs have an impact on eWOM seeking intention.

H1b. Features of SNSs have an impact on eWOM sharing intention.

Information content

With the shift in e-technologies and extensive use of social media, SNSs have become a place where customers and brands share information and communicate with each other. Currently, brands advertise, promote, and make their sales announcements through their social media accounts, and some do their promotional activities through influencers via various digital marketing activities (Ibáñez-Sánchez et al., 2021). Through advertising and collaborations, they influence consumers' responses to the ad (Abernethy & Franke, 1996), positively impacting consumer purchasing behavior (Kumar et al., 2016).

Advertising plays a key role in delivering information sought by customers (Mukherjee & Banerjee, 2017). Advertising enables consumers to engage in eWOM communications by interacting with other users on SNSs (Chu & Kim, 2011). The informative content of advertisements may influence the eWOM seeking and sharing of SNS users (Chetioui et al., 2021). In the context of social media, information content is the type of content that marketing practitioners use the most (Wan & Ren, 2017) since it can help raise brand awareness and increase purchase intention (Wan & Ren, 2017). Information content placed on SNSs can be generated by both brands and SNS users (Ibrahim et al., 2022) and includes the brand name, product attributes and specificities, discounts and freebies, product price, product availability, product value, sales, and brand news (Shilovsky, 2021; Lee et al., 2018). Due to their informative value, these information content types might potentially attract the attention of SNS users, influencing their eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. Additionally, other information content types, such as information on whether the product is worth recommending or not (Fong & Burton, 2008) or providing links to the companies' websites, might be of particular interest to users and affect their eWOM intentions. Hence, we develop the following hypotheses:

H2a. Information content has an impact on eWOM seeking intention.

H2b. Information content has an impact on eWOM sharing
intention.

Product categories

The level of importance assigned to online information placed
on SNSs varies by product category (Cheema & Papatla,
2010). Cheema and Papatla (2010) find that online infor-
mation is more critical for utilitarian products than hedonic
products. Many studies show that product category affects
online purchasing intentions and consumer preferences (Pan
et al., 2013; Kanungo & Jain, 2012; Verhagen et al., 2010;
Korgaonkar et al., 2006). Li et al. (2020) found that the prod-
uct category, classified as search, experience, and credence
products, has a significant moderating role in the relationship
between online reviews and product sales. Social media users
can easily evaluate tangible products compared to experience
products (Verhagen et al., 2010). Customers tend to search for
online opinions and recommendations when lacking product
information. Furthermore, the product category itself affects
online customer posting on social media (Chen et al., 2011).

Santos et al. (2021) find that in fast-moving consumer
goods (FMCG), information sharing on social media
impacts consumer engagement behavior. In our study, we
go beyond this classification to include both search and
experience products. The distinction between search and
experience products may influence how consumers perceive
online reviews (Sun et al., 2019). Nowadays, customers can
easily obtain information on search products before purchas-
ing (Bei et al., 2004). Examples of search products include
cars, electronics (mobile phones and computers), household
goods, cosmetics, and clothes/shoes. Unlike search products,
experience products are not easy to evaluate before purchase
(Jourdan, 2001). They usually include services such as cul-
tural events, language courses, restaurants, and travel pack-
ages (Franke et al., 2004).

Thus, we formulate the following hypotheses on product
categories that are commented on or searched for to deter-
mine their differentiated effects on eWOM seeking and shar-
ing intentions of SNS users.

H3a. Product category has an impact on eWOM seeking
intention.

H3b. Product category has an impact on eWOM sharing
intention.

SNS user segments

Identifying different SNS user segments is crucial for busi-
nesses as they need to develop specific strategies tailored to
each customer segment. For instance, brands take advantage
of the social media influencers segment to reach a larger

number of customers (Harrigan et al., 2021). The fact that
some customers have a more considerable influence than
others on social media raises the question of identifying the
different SNS user segments. Since the heterogeneity of SNS
users engenders differentiated online behaviors, developing
a segmentation of SNS users is essential in predicting online
consumer behavior (Arenas-Gaitán et al., 2018).

Still, there is a gap in the literature on SNS segmentation.
Some studies have examined customer segmentation from
a socio-demographic perspective; however, demographic
variables as discriminators among customer segments pro-
vide inconsistent results (Campbell et al., 2014; Bhatnagar
& Ghose, 2004; Konuş et al., 2008). Harrigan et al. (2021)
provide four dimensions to identify social media influencers
based on user network, user behavior, message readability,
and structure. Besides, other studies present a segmenta-
tion of social media consumers based on their complaints
behavior (Melancon & Dalakas, 2018). In the context of
crisis management, Zhao et al. (2017) determine the fol-
lowing types of social media users based on their infor-
mation-sharing behavior; influentials who create content,
broadcasters who create and share content, followers who
only share information from influentials, and inactive users
who do not create or share any content. In the context of
eWOM, Güngör and Çadırcı (2013) provide a segmentation
of eWOM engagers based on their personality and behavior.
Yet, to our knowledge, no study has determined an SNS
user segmentation based solely on the frequency of shar-
ing product-related information on SNSs. Product-related
information sharing is considered one of the main motiva-
tions for SNSs usage, which can be used to differentiate SNS
users (Park et al., 2015). Product-related information sharing
is particularly critical in SNSs since information providers
can offer useful advice to information seekers and help solve
their problems without establishing a personal connection
with other users (Constant et al., 1996). This study first
identifies SNS user segments using a clustering methodol-
ogy that considers the frequency of sharing product-related
information on SNSs (Park et al., 2015), then investigates
whether the identified customer segments have differentiated
eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. Thus, we develop the
following hypotheses:

H4a. Distinct SNS users' segments have differentiated
eWOM seeking intention.

H4b. Distinct SNS users' segments have differentiated
eWOM sharing intention.

Age and gender

Some previous studies have shown that age affects the
process of technological adaptation and online behaviors.

The use of technology and the Internet may differ between generations; older people perceive mobile applications and websites as less user-friendly compared to younger people (Volkom et al., 2014). Regarding the eWOM intentions of SNS users, Shih et al. (2013) find that age significantly impacts the eWOM intentions of online discussion forum users. On the other hand, some researchers have found different results (Goraya et al., 2021; Sampat & Sabat, 2021; Mishra et al., 2018). For instance, the study conducted by Sampat and Sabat (2021) reveals that age is insignificant in explaining the consumer's intention to spread eWOM for food ordering apps. Besides, Mishra et al. (2018) find that age only indirectly influences teenagers' eWOM intentions. Concerning this controversy, this study examines whether age differences affect eWOM seeking and sharing intentions of SNS users. As for gender, previous studies confirm that gender differences impact eWOM intentions (Zhang et al., 2014). In this regard, Ahn et al. (2020) find that gender can affect eWOM intentions in the context of festival attendees' motivations. Similarly, Bae and Lee (2010) state that there are gender differences in consumers' perceptions of online consumer reviews as they find that females are more affected by others' information shares than males. However, other studies show that gender does not have any significant impact on eWOM intentions (Goraya et al., 2021; Mishra et al., 2018; Shih et al., 2013). Thus, we examine whether or not there are any differences between genders regarding eWOM seeking and sharing intentions on SNSs. Hence, we include age and gender as control variables since they could potentially affect eWOM seeking and sharing intentions.

Methodology

This quantitative empirical research is carried out via a questionnaire. To check the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, we conducted a pretest which provides the most frequently indicated eWOM seeking and sharing activities.

The questionnaire consists of 21 questions in total; the first 16 questions comprise eWOM seeking intention, eWOM sharing intention, the SNSs features, information contents placed on SNSs, and product categories that users seek and share information about; the last 5 questions include demographics. The sources of the scales used in the final questionnaire appear in Table 1. As presented in Table 1, the survey questions regarding the eWOM seeking intention investigate the users' tendency to search for product information and reviews (ALNefaie et al., 2019; Chu & Choi, 2011; Chu & Kim, 2011). The eWOM sharing intention questions aim to determine the willingness of SNSs users to share their shopping experiences, reviews, and recommendations on SNSs (Chu & Chen, 2019; Yang, 2019; Chu & Choi, 2011). The items of SNS features are selected from the existing literature, such as the ease of activation, ease of use of the networking site, and user-friendliness (Ji et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2021; Bagheri Rad et al., 2020; Chong et al., 2018; Rohani & Hock, 2009). Additional features are integrated, such as compulsory service fees, social games availability, and mobile application availability (Han & Windsor, 2011). The information content items are based on previous studies (Shilovsky, 2021; Lee et al., 2018; Fong & Burton, 2008) and include information about new products, sales, product advertisements, other promotions, and information about whether the product is worth recommending, or not, in addition to the link to the company's website. As for the product category; in addition to the cosmetics from the FMCG, we include the following items from both search and experience products; mobile phones, computers, radio and TV, household goods, cars, hospitality (trips, hotels, etc.), events/cultural offers, fashion (clothes/shoes), language courses, films/serials, antiques, and restaurants (Bei et al., 2004; Franke et al., 2004; Jourdan, 2001). Regarding sharing product-related information, the items adopted from Park et al. (2015) are about determining the frequency of opinion sharing, namely, how often they share their positive or negative opinions on SNSs.

Cummins and Gullone (2000)'s review article provides recommendations on which Likert scales to be used and suggests that a measure beyond 5 points could increase sensitivity without affecting reliability. Besides, in the quality test between the 5- and 6-point Likert scale, a 6-point Likert scale is better in terms of discrimination, validity, and reliability (Chomeya, 2010). For this reason, we use a 6-point Likert scale in the questionnaire.

Table 1 Sources of the scales

Variables	Sources of the scales
eWOM seeking intention	Adapted from Chu and Kim (2011); ALNefaie et al. (2019); and Chu and Choi (2011)
eWOM sharing intention	Adapted from Chu and Chen (2019); Chu and Choi (2011); Yang (2019)
Features of SNSs	Adapted from Rohani and Hock (2009); Bagheri Rad et al. (2020); Chong et al. (2018); Ji *et al.* (2021); and Xu *et al.* (2021); Han & Windsor (2011).
Information content	Adapted from Lee et al. (2018); Shilovsky (2021); Fong and Burton (2008)
Product category	Adapted from Jourdan (2001); Franke et al. (2004)
Sharing product-related information	Adapted from Park et al. (2015)

Data

Secondary data

We conduct this study in two countries, Turkey and Poland. These two countries share common characteristics, such as both being emerging markets and close geographically. On the other hand, they differ in other perspectives, including language, history, and religion. The different characteristics of society can influence users' relationships in the context of social networks. For instance, culture is one of the dominant characteristics that may determine the eWOM seeking and sharing intentions of social media users (Fong & Burton, 2008). Culture can be examined through different perspectives. One of the most commonly used frameworks is Hofstede's cultural dimensions, which include power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, short- vs. long-term orientation, and indulgence-restraint (Hofstede, 2011). The scores of Hofstede cultural dimensions for Turkey and Poland are provided in Table A.1, Appendix A. Based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the two countries are similar in terms of power distance and uncertainty avoidance, even though Poland scores slightly higher in these two dimensions (Hofstede Insights, 2022). However, the two countries differ significantly in individualism, with Poland being individualistic and Turkey being collectivistic (Hofstede Insights, 2022).

To examine further the similarities and differences between SNS users in Turkey and Poland, we collect and examine secondary data from the Digital 2022 Global Overview Report (DataReportal, 2022) related to social media use that may reflect the trends in the eWOM seeking and sharing of Turkish and Polish social media users. This report presents statistics on digital adoption and use by country, including the reasons for using social media, online brand research, and time spent on social media (DataReportal, 2022). A summary table of the data related to social media use in Turkey and Poland is provided in Table A.2 in Appendix A. By comparing the social media use in the two countries; we find that Turkish social media users research more brands online before purchasing and spend more time online seeking information about products and brands on different platforms and sharing their opinions on social media. Additionally, they prefer social networks, brand websites, and mobile apps as channels for online brand research. On the other hand, Polish social media users rely more on consumer reviews and price comparison sites for brand research while showing less interest in celebrities and influencers than their Turkish counterparts.

Primary data

The quantitative empirical research is carried out using a paper-based questionnaire. The original questionnaire was in Polish. For Turkish respondents, the survey questions were translated into Turkish. We used forward and backward translation methods to eliminate errors resulting from linguistic, lexical, and contextual differences (Keegan & Green, 2016). The population of the study is defined as social media users older than 15 years of age. While large sections of the population actively use social media, a random sample of social media users may not be representative of the population at large (Shava & Chinyamurindi, 2018). Due to the absence of a sampling frame, the nonprobability sampling method is used in this study (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). We used the convenience sampling method of snowball sampling, which is considered relevant in studies of eWOM and buzz marketing (Jeong & Koo, 2015). Designated researchers collected the questionnaires from respondents in both countries. We conducted a face-to-face survey to improve the validity and reliability of the survey and implement management and information control efficiently. This research is a cross-country study conducted in two emerging markets, namely, Turkey and Poland. The total number of respondents is 687, including 395 from Turkey and 292 from Poland.

Notes: N/A means not applicable

The gender and age distributions of the respondents appear in Table 2. In Turkey, 49.6% of the respondents are female, while in Poland, 72.2% of the respondents are female. In Turkey, 14.2% of the respondents are professionals, 26.3% of the respondents are working undergraduate and graduate students, and 58.5% are nonworking undergraduate and graduate students. In Poland, 30.8% of the respondents are working undergraduate students, and 48.3% of the respondents are professionals. In Turkey, 87.8% of the respondents are single, compared to 54.5% in Poland.

Analysis

Figure 1 illustrates the hierarchical research plan. In this study, we develop an SNS user segmentation and examine whether eWOM seeking and sharing intentions are differentiated by

Table 2 Demographics of the respondents

	Turkey (%)	Poland (%)
Gender		
Female	49.6	72.2
Male	50.4	27.8
Age		
15–20 years	9.7	35.4
21–30 years	76.8	64.3
31–45 years	11.7	0.3
46–59 years	1.8	N/A
>60 years of age	N/A	N/A

the user segments and affected by the features of SNSs, product category, the type of information content obtained from SNSs, and user demographics. In the first sub-study, we aim to cluster SNS users based on the frequency of product-related information sharing using K-means method, which is a non-hierarchical cluster analysis used to obtain user segmentation. The method is commonly used in the literature (Shao et al., 2015; Hill et al., 2013; Oyedele & Minor, 2011; Jain, 2010; Qin et al., 2010). There are several methods to check the validity of the analysis considering the number of iterations, cluster center distance, and hit rate (Churchill, 1991). The significance of the analysis is assessed based on Wilks' lambda provided by K-means analysis (Oyedele & Minor, 2011). In the current research, a validity check is conducted by considering the number of iterations, cluster centers, and Wilks' lambda (Kuo et al., 2002). Wilks' lambda is a test statistic that measures the

discriminatory ability of a tested independent variable on the dependent variable. In addition, it is a measure of how well each independent variable separates cases into groups. Smaller Wilks' lambda values express greater discriminatory ability.

In the second sub-study, regression analysis is conducted to reveal the effects of independent variables on the dependent variables that reflect the eWOM seeking and sharing intentions of SNS users. More specifically, we examine the effects of internal factors (user demographics and user segments) and external factors (features of the SNSs, product category, and information content) on eWOM seeking and sharing intentions of SNS users. The user segments identified in the first sub-study are fed into the regression analysis. Through regression analysis, we test our hypotheses and obtain forecasted scores for eWOM seeking intention and sharing intention independently. The general regression model is given in Eq. 1.

$$
\begin{aligned}
eWOM\ seeking/sharing Intentions = {} & \beta_0 + \sum_{k=1}^{5} \beta_{\text{feature,k}} Feature_k + \sum_{m=1}^{6} \beta_{\text{info,m}} Information_m \\
& + \sum_{l=1}^{12} \beta_{\text{product,l}}\, Product\ Category_l + \sum_{i=1}^{j-1} \beta_{\text{cluster,i}} Cluster_i \\
& + \beta_{\text{gender}} Gender + \sum_{n=1}^{3} \beta_{\text{age,n}} Age_n + \varepsilon
\end{aligned}
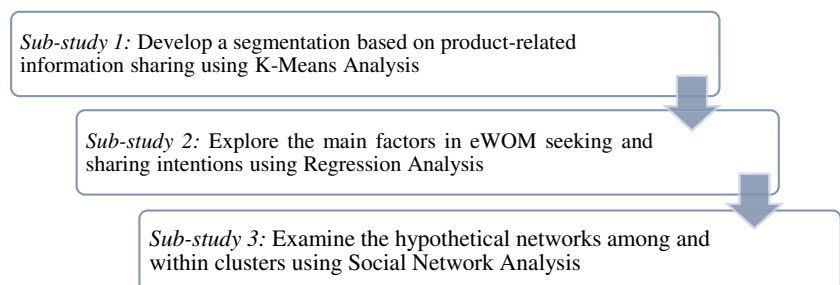\tag{1}
$$

where:

β_0	constant coefficient of the regression equation
$Feature_k$	features of SNSs
$Information_m$	contents of information that influence respondents' purchase decisions
$Product\ category_l$	product category of the product for which the information is looked
$Cluster_i$	SNS users' cluster from 1 to $j - 1$; j, number of clusters
Gender	gender of the respondent

Age_n age of the respondent

In the third sub-study, we examine the hypothetical networks among and within clusters using social network analysis (SNA). SNA is a method that may help identify relationship patterns of social network users by determining the key individuals or groups within the network and the interactions between them. A social network is a collection of social actors and the relationships among them (Tang & Liu, 2011). In SNA, nodes represent individuals, and each node might interact with another within the network, forming links. There are different SNA approaches and indicators

Fig. 1 Hierarchical research plan

Sub-study 1: Develop a segmentation based on product-related information sharing using K-Means Analysis

Sub-study 2: Explore the main factors in eWOM seeking and sharing intentions using Regression Analysis

Sub-study 3: Examine the hypothetical networks among and within clusters using Social Network Analysis

to describe social networks, such as structural and relational social network measures. Typical structural social network measures used to describe entire networks include size, density, centralization, and connectivity, among others. On the other hand, the relational social network measures of ties consist of indicators that focus on the content of the relationships, such as strength, frequency, duration, and direction. While the structural approach assumes that all relationships are the same and treats ties as binary, the relational approach attempts to differentiate the ties and assign values to ties based on frequency or intensity (Brass, 2012). Strength is a typical relational social network measure of ties (Brass, 2012; Granovetter, 1973). In the context of SNSs, social relationships are generally operationalized as ties strength (strong ties versus weak ties) (Ryu & Han, 2009). Strength takes into account both the number of links and their frequency (Jafari et al., 2020). Therefore, in this study, we use the average tie strength to determine the level of interaction between SNS users within and among clusters. In this research, we use a 2-mode matrix (Borgatti, 2009) where rows index SNS users while columns index forecasted scores of eWOM seeking and sharing intentions and cluster memberships. This type of representation is called affiliation data (information is collected on a set of clusters to which each SNS user is affiliated). We use the forecasted eWOM intention scores of the regression analysis as input data for the SNA. We assigned a score for each respondent, representing his or her total intention based on the regression analysis results. The affiliation data is converted into one-node relational data by UCINET matrix mode. Therefore, the SNA gives us the hypothetical networks inter-clusters and intra-clusters.

Results

Results of sub-study 1

We use the K-means clustering method to identify and distinguish different clusters of SNS users based on their frequencies of sharing product-related information on SNSs, which is about how often SNS users share their impressions on SNSs. Clustering analysis aims to maximize the similarity

Table 3 Descriptives for sharing product-related information frequency

	Turkey	Poland
Mean	11.26	12.29
Standard deviation	6.05	4.95
Minimum	4	4
Maximum	24	24
Range	20	20

Table 4 Clusters centers

	Cluster Centers	
	Turkey	Poland
Cluster 1	5.86	4.38
Cluster 2	14.13	10.28
Cluster 3	20.61	18.14

within clusters and minimize the similarity among clusters (Chen et al., 1996). We conduct a two-step cluster analysis to categorize sample respondents based on their responses to the clustering variable: frequency of sharing product-related information on SNSs (Park et al., 2015). The initial hierarchical cluster analysis suggests a three-cluster solution. Then, we use a non-hierarchical k-means clustering procedure (MacQueen, 1967) to develop the three-cluster solution. It groups respondents according to the similarity in their frequencies of sharing product-related information on SNSs. This segmentation might be of particular interest to brands as it relies solely on the SNS users' tendency to share their impressions on purchased products, regardless of other factors. A score is computed for every participant based on how frequently they share their positive or negative opinions. A high score means that the user frequently shares on social media.

Table 3 shows the descriptives of sharing product-related information frequency for Turkey and Poland. The average value of sharing product-related information for Turkey is 11.26, with a standard deviation of 6.05, and the average for Poland is 12.29, with a standard deviation of 4.95.

To check the validity of the K-means analysis, we compare Wilks' lambda, hit rate, and cluster center distance of the results for the different numbers of clusters (e.g., two, three, four, five). The final clusters yielded results after four iterations. We compare cluster analysis results in terms of their Wilks' lambda. In this study, the Wilks' lambda values of Turkey and Poland are 0.120 and 0.128, respectively, in the case of three clusters. If Wilks' lambda is in the range of 0 and 1, the clusters are significantly different from each other. The validity of the analysis indicates that the best hit rate (Churchill, 1991), which is determined by the proportion of customers correctly classified, is provided by the three clusters. Hit rates for Turkey and Poland are 98.7% and 97.6%, respectively. Thus, three cluster groups are used in the study. Table 4 shows the cluster centers of each group.

The clusters' centers provide the score of sharing product-related information of the respondents. The frequency of sharing product-related information incrementally increases with each cluster. After grouping respondents into three clusters, we labeled them according to their frequency of sharing product-related information on SNSs.

Cluster 3 members show the highest frequency of sharing product-related information. In both Turkey and Poland,

Table 5 The number of members and percentages of each cluster

Clusters	Number of members in Turkey	%	Number of members in Poland	%
Followers	201	51	172	59
Middlers	138	35	94	32
Influencers	56	14	26	9

Table 6 Results of the reliability analysis

	Cronbach's alpha	
	Turkey	Poland
eWOM seeking intention	0.794	0.758
eWOM sharing intention	0.827	0.739

the third cluster members heavily share their impressions on social media. Turkey's third cluster members are more active, with an average score of 20.61, than Poland's third cluster members, who have an average score of 18.14. Thus, we refer to this cluster as "Influencers." Cluster 1 members exhibit the lowest means for the frequency of sharing product-related information. In Turkey and Poland, the average scores are 5.86 and 4.38, respectively. Therefore, Cluster 1 is referred to as "Followers." Cluster 2 occupies an intermediate position, with intermediate values for sharing product-related information. Cluster 2 members moderately share their impressions on social media. Turkey's second cluster members have a higher average score than Poland's second cluster. The average scores in Turkey and Poland are 14.13 and 10.28, respectively. We label this cluster as "Middlers." Therefore, we chose the terms "Influencers," " Middlers," and "Followers" to represent the clusters of SNS users in this study. The number of cluster members appears in Table 5.

Results of sub-study 2

We use a *t*-test to determine whether there is a significant difference between eWOM seeking and sharing intentions considering the two countries. The *t*-test result shows a significant difference between eWOM seeking and eWOM sharing intentions in both Turkey and Poland, $t(1367.184) = 6.098$, $p = .00$. Hence, we use different regression models for eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. We also conduct a reliability analysis of eWOM-seeking intention and eWOM sharing intention items. Table 6 shows the reliability statistics of eWOM seeking intention and eWOM sharing intention items, indicating that the measures are internally consistent in our study, as all Cronbach's alpha values are greater than the cutoff value of 0.7 (Keegan & Green, 2016). Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency—that is, how closely related a set of items are as a group.

According to the results, the most important 5 (out of 11) SNS features that affect the usage of social media are "easy to activate," "user-friendliness," "mobile application availability," and "free to use" in both countries. The least chosen six features are aggregated and become the benchmark of social media features. Information in the form of product advertisement is chosen as a benchmark for the contents of information that influence respondents' purchase decisions. As for the product category, the cosmetics category is the benchmark. In the regression model, gender and age are the control variables. In the analysis, the benchmark gender is female, and the benchmark age is between 15 and 20 years. *F* statistics that give the significance of the regression models and the RMSE of each model are listed below.

- Turkey eWOM seeking: $F(29, 365) = 7.876$, $p < 0.000$, with an RMSE of 1.22383.
- Turkey eWOM sharing: $F(29, 365) = 8.741$, $p < 0.000$, with an RMSE of 1.30192.
- Poland eWOM seeking: $F(28, 259) = 4.643$, $p < 0.000$, with an RMSE of 1.19888.
- Poland eWOM sharing: $F(28, 259) = 4.243$, $p < 0.000$, with an RMSE of 1.24414.

The regression coefficients appear in Table 7. The first column of the table displays the significance of the coefficients for eWOM seeking intentions of SNS users in Turkey. The results of the regression analysis show that two types of features, mobile application availability ($\beta_{\text{feature},4}$) and free to use ($\beta_{\text{feature},5}$), and one type of information content, link to the website ($\beta_{\text{info},4}$), have significant effects on the users' eWOM seeking intention; however, only antiques ($\beta_{\text{product},12}$) is significant as a product category. Significant follower effect ($\beta_{\text{cluster},2}$) means that they have differentiated eWOM seeking intentions from the middlers, which is the benchmark cluster in the analysis.

The second column of Table 7 presents the significance of the coefficients for eWOM sharing intentions of SNS users in Turkey. Mobile application availability of SNSs ($\beta_{\text{feature},4}$) and link to the company's website ($\beta_{\text{info},4}$) have a significant impact on respondents' eWOM sharing intentions. Significant influencer effect ($\beta_{\text{cluster},1}$) indicates that this segment has differentiated eWOM sharing intentions, and their eWOM sharing intentions are higher than middlers. Significant follower impact ($\beta_{\text{cluster},2}$) shows that this segment has also differentiated eWOM sharing intentions and their eWOM sharing intentions are lower than middlers. The product category of events and cultural offers ($\beta_{\text{product},7}$) has a significant impact on respondents' eWOM sharing intentions. Contrary to the findings of Godes et al. (2005), indicating that consumers want to benefit from others as products become more complex and technical, we find that SNS users intend to behave differently when the product type is a service or experience product.

Table 7 The coefficients of Eq. 1

	Turkey		Poland	
	eWOM seeking	*eWOM sharing*	*eWOM seeking*	*eWOM sharing*
β_0	0.827* (0.398)	1.424* (0.369)	2.359* (0.484)	2.269* (0.417)
$\beta_{\text{feature},1}$	0.139 (0.129)	−0.032 (0.140)	0.033 (0.172)	0.089 (0.183)
$\beta_{\text{feature},2}$	0.189 (0.146)	−0.028 (0.155)	−0.131 (0.203)	−0.263 (0.210)
$\beta_{\text{feature},3}$	0.110 (0.154)	0.208 (0.165)	−0.336 (0.218)	−0.297 (0.221)
$\beta_{\text{feature},4}$	0.256* (0.132)	0.340* (0.142)	0.058 (0.151)	0.040* (0.154)
$\beta_{\text{feature},5}$	0.254* (0.134)	0.129 (0.143)	−0.179 (0.187)	−0.427 (0.196)
$\beta_{\text{info},1}$	0.020 (0.061)	0.058 (0.065)	0.114 (0.072)	0.155* (0.076)
$\beta_{\text{info},2}$	−0.058 (0.084)	0.006 1(0.086)	0.004 (0.093)	0.009 (0.096)
$\beta_{\text{info},3}$	0.100 (0.080)	0.020 (0.084)	−0.044 (0.092)	−0.123 (0.095)
$\beta_{\text{info},4}$	0.138* (0.054)	0.144* (0.059)	0.212* (0.083)	0.284* (0.087)
$\beta_{\text{info},5}$	0.060 (0.067)	0.032 (0.071)	0.108 (0.092)	0.050 (0.096)
$\beta_{\text{info},6}$	0.010 (0.061)	0.036 (0.064)	0.127* (0.074)	0.145 (0.077)
$\beta_{\text{product},1}$	0.001 (0.078)	0.005 (0.073)	0.043 (0.096)	0.161 (0.100)
$\beta_{\text{product},2}$	−0.003 (0.085)	0.155 (0.086)	−0.121 (0.107)	0.043 (0.112)
$\beta_{\text{product},3}$	−0.024 (0.065)	0.001 (0.079)	0.031 (0.121)	−0.044 (0.108)
$\beta_{\text{product},4}$	−0.018 (0.060)	0.119 (0.073)	0.042 (0.116)	−0.090 (0.129)
$\beta_{\text{product},5}$	0.050 (0.053)	−0.024 (0.067)	−0.014 (0.074)	−0.060 (0.100)
$\beta_{\text{product},6}$	−0.025 (0.059)	0.000 (0.073)	0.149* (0.077)	0.082 (0.086)
$\beta_{\text{product},7}$	0.099 (0.059)	0.141* (0.070)	−0.022 (0.073)	0.036 (0.081)
$\beta_{\text{product},8}$	0.068 (0.059)	0.006 (0.062)	−0.051 (0.078)	−0.111 (0.080)
$\beta_{\text{product},9}$	0.085 (0.058)	−0.119 (0.069)	−0.023 (0.079)	−0.095 (0.108)
$\beta_{\text{product},10}$	−0.027 (0.056)	−0.100 (0.060)	0.037 (0.071)	−0.048 (0.081)
$\beta_{\text{product},11}$	0.000 (0.057)	−0.016 (0.074)	−0.062 (0.085)	0.078 (0.096)
$\beta_{\text{product},12}$	0.112* (0.054)	−0.048 (0.077)	−0.045 (0.074)	−0.009 (0.101)
β_{gender}	−0.005 (0.146)	−0.031 (0.152)	−0.075 (0.186)	0.054 (0.182)
$\beta_{\text{cluster},1}$	0.101 (0.209)	0.530* (0.232)	−0.436 (0.175)	−0.569* (0.184)
$\beta_{\text{cluster},2}$	−0.519* (0.148)	−0.869* (0.163)	0.189 (0.311)	0.003 (0.295)
$\beta_{\text{age},1}$	0.197 (0.216)	−0.033 (0.226)	−0.095 (0.160)	−0.348* (0.162)
$\beta_{\text{age},2}$	−0.402 (0.285)	−0.378 (0.292)	−2.915* (1.260)	−0.778 (1.311)
$\beta_{\text{age},3}$	−0.202 (0.526)	−0.529 (0.548)	N/A	N/A

*$p < 0.05$.

Notes: N/A means "not applicable"; standard errors in parentheses

For Poland, the significance of the coefficients for eWOM seeking intentions of SNS users are provided in the third column of Table 7. The findings show that the link to the website of a company ($\beta_{\text{info},4}$) and information about the fact that a product is not worth recommending ($\beta_{\text{info},6}$) have a significant effect on eWOM seeking intention of Polish respondents. In Poland, unlike Turkey, the product category has a significant effect on eWOM seeking intention. A significant product category on eWOM seeking intention is experienced products, notably hospitality ($\beta_{\text{product},6}$), such as trips and hotels. Polish SNS users between the ages of 31 and 45 years ($\beta_{\text{age},2}$) have distinct eWOM-seeking intentions at a significant level.

The fourth column of Table 7 reveals the significance of the coefficients for eWOM sharing intentions of Polish SNS users. The effect of significant influencers ($\beta_{\text{cluster},1}$) indicates that this segment has differentiated eWOM sharing intentions, and their eWOM sharing intentions are lower than middlers. The feature of mobile application availability ($\beta_{\text{feature},4}$) has a significant impact on the eWOM sharing intention of respondents. Linking to the website of a company ($\beta_{\text{info},4}$) and information about new products ($\beta_{\text{info},1}$) positively affects respondents' eWOM sharing intentions. Polish SNS users aged between 21 and 30 ($\beta_{\text{age},1}$) significantly affect eWOM sharing intentions.

To sum up, for Turkish SNS users, the factors impacting their eWOM seeking intentions include the features of mobile availability and free to use of SNSs, the presence of link to the company's website as a type of information content, the product category of antiques and restaurants, and the cluster of followers. The factors affecting the eWOM sharing intentions of SNS users in Turkey are the feature of mobile availability, the presence of a link to the company's website, the product category of events, and the clusters of influencers and followers. As for Poland, the predictors of eWOM seeking intentions of SNS users are the link to a company's website, the information regarding whether a product is not worth recommending, and the product category related to hospitality. The factors affecting the eWOM sharing intention of Polish SNS users include the link to the company's website, information on

new products, the feature of mobile application availability, and the cluster of influencers. Regarding the control variables, age is not significantly related to eWOM seeking and sharing intentions in Turkey. In contrast, we find that age has an effect in Poland. Interestingly, gender does not significantly affect eWOM intentions in both countries. Table 8 presents the summary of the results from the hypotheses testing. According to the regression analysis results, all the hypotheses for Turkey are validated, while for Poland, five of eight hypotheses are validated. The hypotheses that are not validated for Poland are H1a: Features of SNSs have an impact on eWOM seeking intention; H3b: Product category has an impact on eWOM sharing intention; and H4a: Distinct SNS user segments have differentiated eWOM seeking intention.

Although this study highlights the different significant factors affecting eWOM seeking and sharing intentions that vary across countries, it confirms the existence of some common predictors. For Turkey and Poland, the common factor affecting eWOM seeking and sharing intentions is links to the company's website on SNSs. Influencers cluster have differentiated eWOM sharing intentions in both countries.

To use as an input of SNA, we calculate the forecasted Y ($\hat{Y}$) of eWOM seeking and sharing intentions for each respondent as a measure score using the regression model (Eq. 1). For Turkey, averages of forecasted Ys for each cluster appear in Table 9. The numbers in Table 9 are consistent with our cluster labels and are increasing by the cluster.

Results of the sub-study 3

In the third sub-study, we conduct social network analysis (SNA), which gives us the interactions between the clusters. We analyze the affiliated data where rows index SNS users while columns index forecasted scores of eWOM seeking and sharing intentions and cluster memberships. Tie strength is a measure used to identify social relationships since it takes into account the number of links and their frequency (Jafari et al., 2020). The SNA results provide the average tie

Table 8 The results from the hypothesis testing for Turkey and Poland

No.	Hypothesis	Turkey	Poland
H1a	Features of SNSs have an impact on eWOM seeking intention	Validated	Not validated
H1b	Features of SNSs have an impact on eWOM sharing intention	Validated	Validated
H2a	Information content has an impact on eWOM seeking intention	Validated	Validated
H2b	Information content has an impact on eWOM sharing intention	Validated	Validated
H3a	Product category has an impact on eWOM seeking intention	Validated	Validated
H3b	Product category has an impact on eWOM sharing intention	Validated	Not validated
H4a	Distinct SNS user segments have differentiated eWOM seeking intention	Validated	Not validated
H4b	Distinct SNS user segments have differentiated eWOM sharing intention	Validated	Validated

Table 9 The average of forecasted intention scores in Turkey

Clusters	Turkey	
	eWOM Seeking	*eWOM* Sharing
Followers	3.31	2.78
Middlers	3.82	3.48
Influencers	4.37	4.22

The average of forecasted intention scores in Poland can be provided upon request.

strength representing the interactions among the identified SNS users' clusters for each country.

Table 10 shows the average tie strength matrix of eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. In Turkey, the highest intra-cluster interactions occur between influencers in eWOM seeking and sharing intentions, with scores of 19.7 and 19.0, respectively, followed by middlers, with scores of 13.2 and 10.4. In Poland, we find the highest intra-cluster interactions in eWOM seeking and sharing intentions among followers, with scores of 13.7 and 9.4, respectively, followed by middlers with scores of 10.4 and 7.4. For inter-cluster interactions in Turkey, the highest interactions among groups are followers and influencers, and middlers and influencers, with scores of 12.3 and 16.1, respectively, in eWOM seeking intention. Therefore, the influencers' cluster may be considered as the reference group for both middlers and followers in Turkey. Conversely, in Poland, the highest interactions occur among followers and middlers, and followers and influencers, with scores of 11.9 and 10.8, respectively. Thus, the influencers and middlers are the reference group for followers in Poland.

When we compare the interactions among groups for eWOM seeking and sharing intentions, the results show that in both countries, SNS users intend to interact more

in eWOM seeking than eWOM sharing. For instance, in eWOM seeking intention in Turkey, the interaction between influencers and middlers is 16.1, which is greater than 14.0 in eWOM sharing intention. For Poland, the highest interactions occur between followers and middlers, and followers and influencers for eWOM sharing intentions, with scores of 8.3 and 8.1, respectively. For Turkey, the highest interactions occur between influencers and middlers, and influencers and followers, with scores of 14.0 and 8.9, respectively. In addition, the results reveal that the interactions among groups in Turkey are more than those in Poland, except for the interactions between followers and middlers for both eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. Thus, this yields that SNS users are generally more active in Turkey than in Poland. For example, for eWOM seeking intention in Turkey, the interaction between influencers and followers is 12.3, which is greater than 10.8 in Poland. This result also suggests that middlers are particularly important in increasing interaction among SNS users in Poland.

Discussions and conclusions

This cross-country study examines the factors affecting the eWOM seeking and sharing intentions of SNS users and reveals the interactions inter and intra clusters using SNA. We conduct this study in two countries, Turkey and Poland, that share common characteristics such as being emerging economies and close geographically in addition to being culturally similar in terms of power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Yet, the two counties differ in some aspects, including language, history, and religion, as well as the cultural dimension of individualism. These differences may influence users' relationships in the context of SNSs.

Table 10 The average tie strength matrix of eWOM seeking and sharing intentions

Average tie strength of interactions						
	Turkey: eWOM seeking			Poland: eWOM seeking		
	Followers	Middlers	Influencers	Followers	Middlers	Influencers
Followers	7.7	10.1	*12.3*	**13.7**	*11.9*	*10.8*
Middlers	10.1	**13.2**	*16.1*	*11.9*	**10.4**	9.4
Influencers	*12.3*	*16.1*	**19.7**	*10.8*	9.4	8.5
Sums of interactions	30.1	39.4	48.1	36.4	31.7	28.7
	Turkey: eWOM sharing			Poland: eWOM sharing		
	Followers	Middlers	Influencers	Followers	Middlers	Influencers
Followers	4.2	6.6	*8.9*	**9.4**	*8.3*	*8.1*
Middlers	6.6	**10.4**	*14.0*	*8.3*	**7.4**	7.2
Influencers	*8.9*	*14.0*	**19.0**	*8.1*	7.2	7.0
Sums of interactions	19.7	31.0	41.9	25.8	22.9	22.3

Notes: The highest intra-clusters tie strengths are provided in bold, and the highest inter-cluster tie strengths are given in italic

The findings presented in this study contribute to the research in the field of SNSs and eWOM intentions, provide valuable insights, and identify avenues for future research. The first contribution of this paper consists of proposing a novel approach that considers a hierarchical study composed of three interrelated sub-studies. In the first sub-study, we conduct a cluster analysis to identify different SNS user segments based solely on the frequency of sharing product-related information on SNSs. We determine three groups of SNS user segments in both countries: followers, middlers, and influencers. Although the terms "followers" and "influencers" are frequently used in the literature, we propose the term "middlers" for the third SNS user segment. Followers place information less frequently than middlers and influencers. Influencers are the group that shares information through social media most frequently. Middlers, however, share information on social media less frequently than influencers but more often than followers.

The second main contribution of this cross-country study is examining the factors affecting eWOM seeking and sharing intentions of SNS users using regression analysis. The factors considered in the regression analysis include the features of SNSs, the type of information content placed on social media, and product categories searched for and shared about on social media. We also investigate whether the distinct SNS user segments have differentiated eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. The results of the second sub-study reveal that the segments identified in the first sub-study have differentiated eWOM seeking and sharing intentions in both Turkey and Poland. Regarding the features of SNS, the study shows that SNS features impact eWOM seeking and sharing intentions in Turkey. However, in Poland, features of SNS have an impact on eWOM sharing intentions only. Only SNS users from Turkey value the feature of mobile application availability in eWOM seeking intentions. This finding is consistent with the digital trends in Turkey, as it reveals that Turkish SNS users prefer more mobile applications as channels for online brand research compared to their Polish counterparts (DataReportal, 2022). The fact that Turkish SNS users spend more time on SNSs compared to Polish SNS users may explain their need for eWOM seeking via their smartphones. Polish social media users rely more on consumer reviews and price comparison sites for brand research than Turkish users (DataReportal, 2022). Regarding the information content placed on SNSs, our findings indicate that it impacts eWOM seeking and sharing intentions in both countries. Link to the company's website is the type of information content that is significant in both countries for eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. Unlike Turkey, SNS users from Poland value information placed on SNSs about new products for

eWOM sharing intentions and whether the product is not worth recommending for eWOM seeking intentions. Concerning the product category, in contrast to the findings by Yang and Han (2019) and Godes et al. (2005), we find that SNS users may intend to seek and share eWOM regarding products that are not necessarily complex or technical. Instead, SNS users show more interest in experience products, in line with the study by Park and Lee (2009). We find that although both SNS users in Turkey and Poland have in common a shared interest in experience products, they differ in the product category. Turkish consumers may intend to seek or share eWOM on product categories such as events and antiques, while Polish consumers intend to seek eWOM about hospitality-related experiences (e.g., trips and hotels). Travel products are characterized by having high information risk and involvement (Bart et al., 2005). Therefore, our study suggests that Polish consumers may intend to seek eWOM when the experience product is high-risk.

The third valuable contribution is the application of SNA to understand interactions and network effects within and among clusters using affiliation data where rows index SNS users while columns index forecasted scores of eWOM seeking and sharing intentions and cluster memberships. SNA identifies the hypothetical social networks considering the forecasted eWOM intentions scores obtained from the second sub-study. Social relationships in the context of SNSs are generally operationalized as ties strength, such as in strong ties versus weak ties (Ryu & Han, 2009). Therefore, we use the average ties strength metrics of SNA to determine the level of interactions between SNS users within and among clusters. Brands might have a particular interest in clusters with the highest interactions since these clusters might have more online influence on SNS users. Rogers (2003) reports that there are strong ties in each cluster and that the ties among the clusters are weak in real-life social relationships. In contrast, our study finds that there are also strong ties among clusters in the context of SNSs. The findings of our study suggest that the impact of eWOM may increase the strength of the ties between previously established weak ties, even among distinct SNS user clusters. Since eWOM seeking and sharing is facilitated through the features of SNSs (Ellison et al., 2007), reviews posted on SNS may trigger users to share that information or seek more recommendations from other users and develop stronger relationships through continuous interactions (Ruiz-Alba et al., 2022). Our study reveals that SNS platforms allow users to interact and share opinions or ask for information regardless of whether or not they know each other. Users might consider that the eWOM sources are honest and benevolent (McKnight et al., 2000), leading them to trust other SNS users. Additionally, the product type and the website design may influence online trust among SNS

users (Urban et al., 2009). The fact that trust might be perceived differently by SNSs users could be another reason why our study shows strong ties even among distinct clusters in SNSs. Our findings show that in Turkey, the highest interactions occur between middlers and influencers, and between followers and influencers in eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. In Poland, the highest interactions occur between followers and middlers and between followers and influencers in eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. The results suggest that followers and middlers in Turkey follow influencers and seek information from them; conversely, followers in Poland follow both middlers and influencers and get information from them. The interactions between the different clusters are higher in Turkey than in Poland, except for the interactions between middlers and followers. In Poland, as middlers have higher interactions with followers compared to influencers, companies may want to invest in middlers instead of influencers to attract followers and increase SNS interactions.

The fact that SNS users in Turkey intend to interact more on SNSs than in Poland might be attributed to differences in time perception. Halls (1983) develops the concepts of polychronic and monochronic cultures based on time perception; monochronic cultures tend to give importance to time and schedule, while polychronic cultures are time-flexible. Considering time orientation, Turkey is polychronic, and Poland, which belongs to the Eastern European cluster, is monochronic (Niezgoda et al., 2017; Olejnik Nizielska & Larimo, 2015; Yusuf Yahyagil & Begüm Ötken, 2011). Polychronic cultures are more prone to perform several tasks simultaneously and prefer multitasking (König & Waller, 2010). Therefore, polychrons might be more inclined to engage in online activities (Lee et al., 2005), develop information networks, and explore different sources of information (Conte & Gintoft, 2005). Time perception influences the users' intentions regarding time-consuming activities such as online social interaction (Makri & Schlegelmilch, 2017; Xu-Priour et al., 2014). Being polychrons, Turkish consumers may not mind spending time seeking and sharing eWOM on SNSs compared to their Polish counterparts. Overall, in both countries, consumers intend to engage more in eWOM seeking than in eWOM sharing. Based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Turkey and Poland are similar in terms of power distance and uncertainty avoidance, even though Poland scores slightly higher in these two dimensions (Hofstede Insights, 2022). The fact that Turkey and Poland score high in the uncertainty avoidance dimension may be a determining factor in the consumers' eWOM seeking intention to reduce their uncertainty (Park & Lee, 2009). Fong and Burton (2008) show that participants from collectivist cultures engage more in eWOM seeking but less in eWOM sharing compared to individualistic cultures. According to Hofstede (2022), Turkey is collectivist, while Poland is individualistic.

In contrast to Fong and Burton (2008), our study shows that SNS users in both Turkey and Poland engage in eWOM seeking intention more than eWOM sharing intention. Consumers from collectivist and high-uncertainty avoidance cultures (such as Turkey) may perceive eWOM as more credible than individualistic and low-uncertainty avoidance cultures (Park et al., 2011).

This cross-country study can help managers determine adequate marketing strategies to reach their target customers and increase the level of eWOM interactions on SNSs. The results of the detailed hierarchical analyses provide valuable insights to decision-makers to reach different market segments through key influencers on social media. Investing in middlers, particularly in Poland, seems interesting since SNS users intend to interact more with followers than influencers. For instance, managers may sponsor middlers, and based on the common factors proposed in this study, they can make them place some information about their products on SNSs that are free to use and provide embedded links to their companies' or brands' websites.

Our findings align with the assumption of López and Sicilia (2014) that eWOM may be of particular interest to companies operating in the tourism sector. Our study shows that in Poland, most eWOM seeking intentions of SNS users concern hospitality-related information such as trips and hotels. Besides, this study suggests that brands may target social media users aged between 31 and 45 who intend to seek information and those between 21 and 30 who intend to share more on social media, regardless of gender. The feature of mobile application availability of SNSs is particularly valued by SNS users in Turkey and impacts both their eWOM seeking and sharing intentions. Thus, we recommend this SNS feature for other countries with polychronic time orientation. Our study proposes that managers may also want to share product information on SNSs when introducing new products to the market, which may affect the eWOM sharing intention of Polish SNS users. As Bansal and Voyer (2000) state, eWOM shapes consumers' expectations before purchasing; hence, companies might also create an interactive platform where influencers and middlers produce content for their products and influence others' purchase decisions.

Although our study provides valuable insights and practical implications, they must be considered in light of certain limitations. To address these limitations, we suggest some areas for future research. First, we use convenience sampling, which is a nonprobability sampling technique that may limit the generalizability of our findings. Thus, further studies may verify the results of our research using probability sampling. Second, future studies may apply a mixed-method approach integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods, which reduces biases associated with methods and data and allows a better understanding of the participants' feelings, perspectives,

and experiences (Benítez et al., 2022). Third, this study is conducted in two countries that share common characteristics, such as both being emerging markets and close geographically. In this regard, future studies may confirm or contradict our findings using the same methodology based on primary data in other countries. Particularly, investigating the eWOM intentions of SNSs users and their online interactions in other emerging countries that have different cultures and histories and are distant geographically, such as Brazil, India, and South Korea, might be an interesting research path. Drawing from secondary data collected from DataReportal (2022), Brazil has the highest level of connectivity and SNSs usage, while South Korea scores the lowest among the selected countries (See Table A.3, Appendix A). Therefore, based on our preliminary investigation, we presume that SNS users in Brazil might show differentiated eWOM intentions and SNS usage behaviors. Besides, some factors that significantly impact eWOM seeking and sharing intentions might vary depending on the country. Future studies might be conducted to find other significant factors, such as cultural factors, time perception, and online trust. In this context, future studies may support or contradict that SNS users may be inclined to trust eWOM shared by other users if they trust the platform, regardless of their knowledge or trust of the eWOM source. Fourth, for the SNS user segmentation, together with the frequency of product-related information sharing, variables such as social identity, lifestyle, or financial literacy levels might be considered in creating SNS user segments.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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