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Abstract
This study intends to investigate the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in consumer review websites and social media by analysing its effects on expectations and beliefs around the Covid-19 pandemic infectious diseases. According to a previous study, users view information on social media as the primary resource for gaining a broad perspective. However, relatively few research examine people's opinions during global health emergencies and their reactions to online content. This study examined a research model of a framework for online social networking that incorporates tie strength, homophily, and source credibility. Approximately 209 persons responded to an online survey. The findings demonstrated that all hypotheses were accepted. There was a strong relationship between the factors tie strength, homophily, source credibility and people's perceptions toward e-WOM content. The effectiveness of e-WOM has dramatically altered people's perceptions of online information. This demonstrated that most respondents comprehended the suggestion provided on the social networking site to remain indoors to ensure a flattening of the positive case graph. Most respondents responded that they depended on authentic online content throughout the pandemic, indicating that e-WOM delivery during the pandemic was deemed adequate. The results of this study imply that efforts should be made to improve the public's perception of the strength of ties and homophily with social media/websites. The public, who is perpetually concerned about the possibility of catching an infectious disease, could feel less nervous if relevant, credible web content were developed.
Keywords: Covid19, Homophily, Tie Strength, Movement Control Order (MCO). E-WOM

Introduction

Word of mouth (WOM) has been well recognised in consumer behaviour literature (Cheung et al., 2008) as an informal type of communication. The advancement of information technology in the current digitalisation era makes the role of WOM evolve into e-WOM (electronic Word of Mouth) (Gosal et al., 2020). E-WOM has evolved from WOM and is being expressed on the Internet and has emerged with the advent of information technology (Cheung et al., 2008). According to Nam et al (2020), e-WOM is any positive or negative

statement made by actual, potential, or former customers about a product or service made available online to people or institutions. In this era of globalisation, people usually use the Internet to seek information online rather than through traditional usage (Yan et al., 2016).

Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has been declared a public health emergency. More than 512,000 people were killed, with 23,495 confirmed deaths in 202 countries by 28 March 2020. Due to the peculiar characteristics of the virus (extraordinary genetic diversity, extremely infectious, simple mode of spread, relatively unaffected by climate change), it spreads rapidly throughout the world (Mackenzie, 2020). Since then, many countries have declared lockdown that restricts the people's movement to curb the spreading of disease among the public. Notably, the crowd was at risk of fallacious and misleading health information on social media. It was believed that such medical conspiracy theories might affect harmony (Waszak et al., 2018). Individuals also tend to be attracted to the information they find on the Internet. Generally, they use the Internet to search for contagious disease information to avoid being infected and methods to alleviate the risks of becoming a potential victim. This e-information attracts people to become much more assured and have a deeper understanding of a particular subject (Ohanian, 1990). Unfortunately, lack of knowledge about any health information and incompetency of medical science knowledge would allow some room for misinterpretation. Health subjects can be the main topic to be shared through the e-WOM channel. But sometimes, the dissemination of fake news seemed much faster than that from credible sources. This misleading information will affect the information-carrying connections or the tie strength between people and the e-WOM messages about health news.

When e-WOM is widely used as another medium of information interpreters, people tend to feel a sense of homophily or be attracted to those similar to themselves (e.g., mutual and close friends). People utilise e-WOM to seek substitution of what is desired by them. However, e-WOM cannot be fully applied because scholars argue that the platform promotes socially vindictive behaviour, e.g., self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, aggressiveness, self-objectification, and narcissism (Fox & Rooney, 2015). So, such information is intolerant to trustworthiness because this platform could affect a certain lousy way. Wang et al (2008) emphasised that the continuous propagation of unreliable details would make the public encounter some possible risks.

Literature Review
The use of tie strength as an analytical framework for study among individuals and organisations has been adopted by many researchers (Sohrabi & Akbari, 2016). Communication of e-WOM refers to any positive or negative statements made by customers. The customers would assess the online content of a product or a company that corresponds with the information seeker's characteristics and interests, and they may or may not adopt a good attitude toward the website and its information (Kim et al., 2018 & Merchant & Asch, 2018). Like family and friends, those with strong ties tend to develop close relationships. Individuals with close relationships tend to share interests and experiences and be able to provide material and emotional support to each other (Chu & Kim, 2011). Weak ties often exist between distant relationships and comprise many people with different cultural and social backgrounds (Goldenberg et al., 2001). Brown et al (2007) stated that customers are likelier to use online review websites with better links and stronger relations. Besides,

consumers will likely have more favourable reviews when using certain websites, developing a solid connection to them. The evidence influences attitude towards e-WOM information gathered that affects the users' behaviour indirectly, thus creating a tie-strength between the users and the e-WOM information. In this way, people will behave based on the e-WOM news, which is how the relationship between tie strength and attitude towards e-WOM details is created. The tie strength is developed when there is satisfaction with the information delivered. The effectiveness will occur when a positive outcome is prioritised in providing e-WOM information.

Communities that communicate online often have no connection to features traditionally associated with homophilia (those who are alike in some way) (Kim et al., 2018). People who are more sensitive and trustworthy grow more emotionally (Chu & Kim, 2011). Also, WOM communication between homophiles occurs more quickly than among heterogeneous or dissimilar persons (Chu & Kim, 2011). Thus, people interact most likely with persons with similar characteristics (homophily) since increased trust and emotional connection reduce potential conflicts in the relationship (Katz et al., 2004). In developing opinion, the definition of equal social standards, conformity, compliance, and group behaviour was central (Zhang & Fung, 2020). In e-WOM, consumers assess the credibility of e-WOM by examining its sources. If the news is unreliable, the message could be irrelevant and is treated as fake news. Source credibility implies a communicator's positive characteristics that affect the receiver's acceptance of a message (Kim et al., 2018). Source credibility is one of the factors that readers can use to navigate these e-WOM communications. The receiver of e-WOM communications is more likely to consider them credible in their decision-making process (Ismagilova et al., 2020). The characteristics like expertise, trustworthiness, and homophily can affect the perception of source credibility, which can influence the evaluation of an online review. Attributes of information sources can influence the quality of e-WOM communications to the receiver (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Individuals can give comments or thoughts on an issue if the news is provided by an expert source (Gurevitch et al., 2018). According to the study of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Indian population, more than 96% of the participants agreed to quarantine or isolate themselves if they had a fever and cough, while the remaining chose to ignore the e-WOM messages delivered by their Ministry of Health (Roy et al., 2020). This data proves that the credible source of information by the Indian Ministry of Health had a massive impact on the citizens.

Another characteristic related to source credibility is perceived trustworthiness (Kim et al., 2018). Perceived trustworthiness relates to the degree to which the source communicates accurate information and is also correlated with user expectations of the website (Kim et al., 2018). Consumers genuinely believe that information on well-known websites is more trustworthy than on unknown websites. It tends to make source credibility positively influence the attitude and behaviour of message receivers, and credible sources are more convincing than non-credible sources (Ayeh et al., 2013). In conjunction with the pandemic issue, e-WOM is thoroughly utilised by the government and media to disseminate information to create awareness for individuals. The Malaysian government also played a significant part in tackling this issue, especially when the Ministry of Health set up a dedicated website so that individuals trust the government as a credible source, leading to the effectiveness of e-WOM. During the beginning phase of the Covid-19 outbreak, individuals had moderate knowledge about the infection but claimed adequate awareness about the preventive

aspects. They also expressed that social media and websites (e-WOM) are effective mediums of high source credibility (Roy et al., 2020). Such an attitude is derived from the users' perspective toward the information delivered using e-WOM. In social science, interpersonal contact has gained a great deal of coverage. Attitude is built on trust/belief acquired during life that comes from direct experience (Ayeh et al., 2013). Cheung et al (2008) stated that attitude towards e-WOM is based upon an individual's trust in its source. The element of attitude is used mainly by researchers to predict or explain the diverse behaviour of consumers (Casalo et al., 2011). The effectiveness of e-WOM is crucial to ensure that the consumer will behave positively on the information of e-WOM delivery. E-WOM has undoubtedly been a powerful marketing force (Cheung & Thadani, 2010). It is either to market products or even to market the authenticity of the information being delivered. Yang & Yoo (2004) observed that attitude consisted of two components, i.e., cognitive and affective. The former is an individual's belief and thoughts that shape a person's perspective, while the latter is the feeling or emotional segment that influences behaviour such as panic or admiration (Kim et al., 2018). Yang & Yoo (2004) stressed that only the cognitive attitude is related significantly to the intention to use the information thoroughly. In a nutshell, the users' mood toward the e-WOM tip will determine the effectiveness of the e-WOM itself (Yang & Yoo, 2004).

Based on the type of knowledge one is seeking, online communication provides scope for discussing personal issues and problems susceptible in health care, such as the private parts of the body, without any embarrassment (Wang et al., 2008). Online support networks have been formed to examine patterns of knowledge sharing and relationships with homophile networks, whether via social media (e.g., Facebook) or other online healthcare communities (Berry et al., 2018). Since the development of social media, consumers have started using social networking platforms to share information. E-WOM communication is an essential factor influencing user attitudes, expectations, and beliefs toward an issue (Zhang et al., 2020). Corresponding to the growth of social media, e-WOM is thoroughly utilised by the government to disseminate information to create awareness for individuals. The preparation of posting must be thoroughly checked to avoid misunderstanding among the public. For example, the World Health Organization published much information on its websites, such as press conferences, statistics, and more news on Corona Virus disease. The Malaysian government also played a significant part in tackling this issue through the Malaysian Ministry of Health. The e-WOM channel set up by them (MySejahtera app, Twitter, Facebook, and Telegram) had turned the public to have perceived trustworthiness towards information provided by the government, leading to the effectiveness of e-WOM.

Theoretical Underpinning
The study utilised two interrelated theories to investigate social and relational factors that examine the effectiveness of e-WOM, i.e., Social Network Theory (Granovetter, 1983) and Consumer-Brand Relationship (Fournier, 1998) to analyse online social interactions in the context of consumer review websites. A social network is a set of people, organisations, or other social entities linked to a group of socially meaningful relationships (Erkan & Evans, 2014). Accordingly, a network approach is an appropriate way to gain insight into consumer interactions through e-WOM communication and its effect on consumer decisions. According to Fournier (1998), to gain a better understanding of e-WOM communication, customers create a relationship with a product in terms of build and cultivate relationships with each other. For Kim & Lehto (2013), the customer and the company brand may be called 'partners.'

The relationship between the brand and the customer is a belief that brands are humanised and should serve as friends because individuals need an emotional connection to the brand (Kim & Lehto, 2013). Kim et al. (2008) further assert that conventional networking approaches focus on face-to-face interactions in a limited social boundary. Nevertheless, research based on the essence of online communication suggests that people are connected with social media/websites instead of other people, as if the online content is the crucial actors and social network partners (Kim et al., 2008).
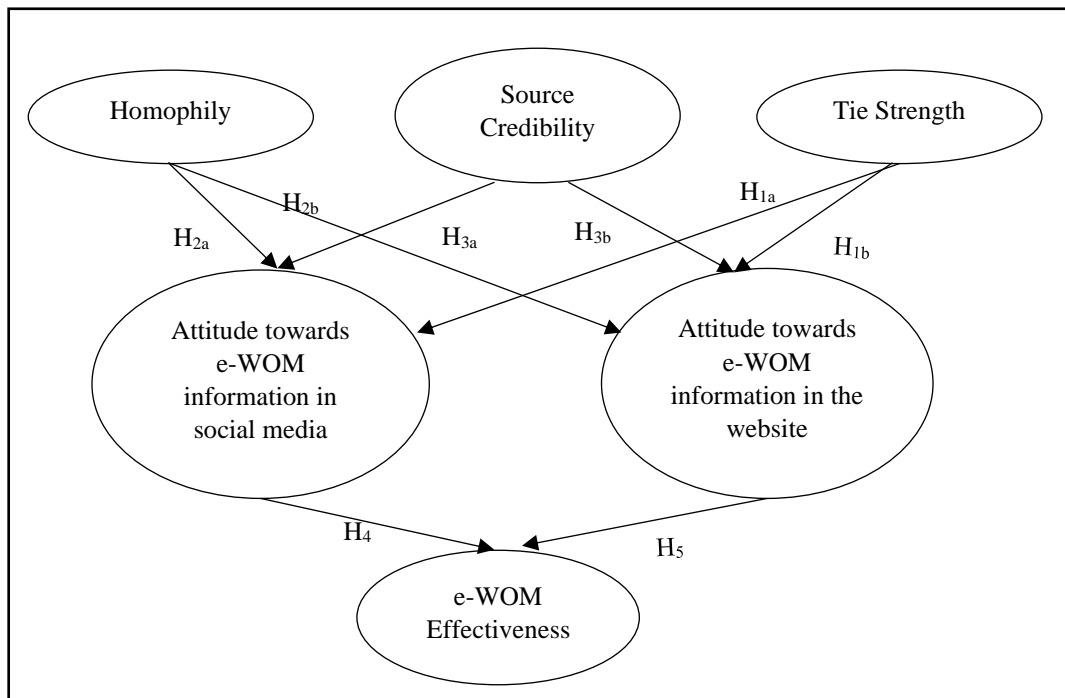

Figure 1: Source: Modified from Kim et al (2018)

Figure 1 suggests a framework that examines three main components of e-WOM and their effect on online consumer review, i.e., tie strength, homophily, and source credibility. Tie strength, homophily, and source credibility were presumed to be related to people's attitudes toward online content. Individuals reflect their behaviour of the information received, whether on social media or directly from the website. The final factor is the e-WOM effectiveness which means the data is well received and understood. Based on the framework, several hypotheses were suggested as follows:

H$_{1a-1b}$	:	Individuals who use e-WOM have high intensity of tie strength, thus leading to a positive attitude towards e-WOM information on social media and the website.
H$_{2a-2b}$	:	Individuals who use e-WOM are considered to have a greatness of homophily, thus shaping a positive attitude towards e-WOM information on social media and the website.
H$_{3a-3b}$	:	Source credibility influences individual attitudes toward e-WOM information on social media and the website.
H$_4$	:	Individual attitudes towards the e-WOM information on social media are positively related to the impact of e-WOM effectiveness.
H$_5$	:	Individual attitudes towards information on the website have a significant relationship with the impact of e-WOM effectiveness.

Methodology

The survey questionnaire utilised a simple random technique for the Malaysian community. The online questionnaire in google form was shared with many social media platforms such as Whatsapp, Facebook, Telegram, and Twitter. The data collection was between May – June 2020, when the nation was still in a state of movement control order because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The online link for the final draft questionnaire was shared among colleagues, public university students, heads of the community, some non-governmental organisations, and government agencies. About 209 individuals participated in the online survey. Initially, a pilot test was conducted on 20 respondents who volunteered to give feedback on the reliability and consistency of item questions that generated 82% Cronbach Alpha. Comments were collected, and some necessary amendments to redundancy and wording were made. The online link for the final draft questionnaire was shared among colleagues, public university students, heads of the community, some non-governmental organisations, and government agencies, with a 92.1% Cronbach Alpha. In return, there were 30.1% male and 69.9% female respondents, totalling 209 respondents. The majority of the respondents were from the age bracket between 20 and 30 years old (84.2%) since most probably those young adults were much more alert and reactive to the online approach. The majority of them were degree holders. Students were the highest (66.5%), followed by 31.1% working in several agencies, and only 2.4% unemployed. Most were single (86.6%), and only 12.9% were married. Widowed scored only 0.5%. Respondents who participated were from several online platforms, such as Whatsapp (9.6%), Facebook (59.8%), Instagram (11.1%), and Twitter (19.5%).

Individual's response towards tie strength of e-WOM

In the study framework, tie strength is defined as "the bond between members of a network" (Mittal et al., 2008). Many studies have adopted measuring tie strength to study individuals towards websites (Sohrabi & Akbari, 2016). Strong and weak ties depend on the number and types of resources, the frequency and intensity of those exchanges, the interactions' feelings, and the relationship's warmth (Sohrabi & Akbari, 2016).

Table 1
Analysis of Tie Strength

No	Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std Dev.	Rank	Kurtosis	
		1	2	3	4	5				Stat	Std. error
1	Strong connection between sender and receiver.	2 (1.0)	5 (2.4)	54 (25.8)	89 (42.6)	59 (28.2)	3.95	0.850	2	.162	.335
2	Information with proof	1 (0.5)	4 (1.9)	20 (9.6)	83 (39.7)	101 (48.3)	4.33	0.768	1	1.616	.335
3	The information is reliable.	3 (1.4)	8 (3.8)	54 (25.8)	86 (41.1)	58 (27.8)	3.90	0.901	3	.233	.335
4	Trust online acquaintances despite their unreliability.	29 (13.9)	37 (17.7)	50 (23.9)	55 (26.3)	38 (18.2)	3.17	1.304	5	-1.050	.335
5	Online social bonds matter.	3 (1.4)	9 (4.3)	58 (27.8)	81 (38.8)	58 (27.8)	3.87	0.919	4	.026	.335

From the survey, Table 1 displayed that the respondents scored high for "strong evidence by the sender," and they agreed (88%, Rank 1) that there was a strong tie between the sender and receiver. This is because people build strong relationships with each other. After all, they tend to have common interests and backgrounds and are willing to provide material and emotional support to one another (Chu & Kim, 2011). The data revealed that respondents somewhat agreed (mean=3.90, Rank 3) that information delivered was from authentic sources. They also approved that social ties between individuals were relevant in the online environment (mean=3.87, Rank 4). However, the data discovered that more than half of respondents were undecided about trusting their acquaintances online for their dubious reputation (55.5%, mean=3.17, Rank 5).

For this reason, Goldenberg et al (2001) mention that weak ties occur due to people having distant relationships and are composed of a comprehensive set of acquaintances with different cultural and social backgrounds. This was supported by Rogers (1995), who proposed that even the more vital information within solid ties, weak ties play a crucial role in spreading the news by word-of-mouth. Besides, the theory of 'the strength of weak ties' offers one of the most significant theoretical clarifications of how micro-level interactions affect macro-level phenomena (Goldenberg et al., 2001). The statement supported by Granovetter (1983) asserted that individuals are consistently affected by others with whom they have irregular connections. These influences are labelled 'weak ties' to recognise them from the more stable, successive, and intimate 'strong tie' associations that describe individuals' networks. Although weaker in absolute impact on the individual level, the significance of weak ties lies in their potential to unlock and expose interpersonal networks to external influences, thus paving the path for the spread of information throughout society (Goldenberg et al., 2001).

Response towards Homophily
Homophily identified in Lazarsfeld and Merton's classic 1954 was forming a relationship between those who are alike (Kim et al., 2018). Communities that communicate online often have some connections to features associated with homophilia, such as demographic and travel backgrounds (Kim et al., 2018).

Table 2
Homophily Response

o	Item	Frequency (%)					ean	td Dev.	ank	Kurtosis s – tat	td. error
	Observe e-WOM information's social compatibility.	0.0)	1.9)	9 23.4)	6 45.9)	0 28.7)	.01	.775		.653	335
	Trusted sources of e-WOM information.	0.0)	1 5.3)	9 18.7)	8 42.1)	1 (34.0)	.05	.859		.329	335
	E-WOM influencers are powerful.	0.0)	1.4)	0 14.4)	6 5.9)	0 38.3)	.21	.736		.225	335
	Individuals trust information from people they know.	0.0)	3.3)	8 18.2)	0 43.1)	4 35.4)	.11	.814		.315	335
	When the sender and receiver agree, they interact.	0.5)	.0)	4 11.5)	05 50.2)	7 36.8)	.22	.720		.335	335

Table 2 disclosed that respondents agreed (87%) for their possible interaction when both sender and receiver had a mutual understanding (Rank 1). Katz et al (2004) identified that people interact most likely with persons with similar characteristics because of increased trust and emotional connection that minimise potential conflicts in the relationship. More sensitive and trustful individuals develop more emotionally attached rates (Chu & Kim, 2011). Thus, WOM communication informational dialogue between homophiles occurs more quickly than among mixed, unrelated persons (Chu & Kim, 2011). Besides, online homophily is driven by common interests, which can be assessed on the site but not individually (Chu & Kim, 2011). For a user's connection to a website, it is proposed that users are associated not with individual users with the content of the website but rather with the contents of it. It is hoped that users can have an attitude towards the social media/website and the details about the user using heavy homophiles with the website. Online content provides information that corresponds with the information seeker's characteristics and interests, and they may adopt a good attitude toward the website and its data (Kim et al., 2018).

Source of credibility towards e-WOM
In Table 3, the study's findings indicated that the respondents (88.1%) trust credible sources more than unreliable ones (Rank 1). In e-WOM, consumers assess the facts by examining the background of those who issued the statement. The message could be irrelevant and regarded as fake news if the update is not from a credible source.

Table 3
Response To Source Credibility

No	Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std Dev.	Rank	Kurtosis	
		1	2	3	4	5				Stat	Std. error
1	Trust well-known websites more than unfamiliar ones.	1 (0.5)	1 (0.5)	26 (12.4)	93 (44.5)	88 (42.1)	4.27	0.732	4	1.002	.335
2	Trust product or brand experts.	1 (0.5)	2 (1.0)	20 (9.6)	94 (45.0)	92 (44.0)	4.31	0.723	2	1.622	.335
3	Source credibility affects attitudes and behaviour.	0 (0.0)	3 (1.4)	23 (11.0)	105 (50.2)	78 (37.3)	4.23	0.699	5	.183	.335
4	Credible sources are more convincing.	1 (0.5)	3 (1.4)	21 (10.0)	85 (40.7)	99 (47.4)	4.33	0.754	1	1.523	.335
5	A credible source will win my trust.	0 (0.0)	3 (1.4)	25 (12.0)	92 (44.0)	89 (42.6)	4.28	0.727	3	.007	.335

Data in Table 3 summarised that consumers genuinely believe that information on a well-known online platform is more trustworthy than those on an unknown source. Ayeh et al (2003); Kim et al (2018) highlight that source credibility positively influences the receivers' attitude and behaviour. The receiver of e-WOM communication is likelier to consider them to be trusted in their decision-making process (Ismagilova et al., 2020). It tends to make source credibility positively influence the attitude and behaviour of message receivers, and credible sources are more persuasive than non-credible sources (Ayeh et al., 2013). Lin & Xu (2017) suggest that characteristics like expertise, trustworthiness, and homophily can affect the perception of source credibility, leading to more positive evaluations of online reviews. Information sources can influence, convince and impact e-WOM communications to the receiver (Ismagilova et al., 2020). In addition, source expertise is connected to source credibility and is considered the main character in reducing user anxiety (Ismagilova et al., 2020).

Individual's attitude towards e-WOM information (social media)
The element of attitude is used mainly by researchers to predict or explain the diverse behaviour of consumers (Casaló et al., 2011).

Table 4

The attitude Towards e-WOM (Social Media)

No	Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std Dev.	Rank	Kurtosis	
		1	2	3	4	5				Stat	Std. error
1	Certain news has influenced my views on e-WOM.	1 (0.5)	12 (5.7)	38 (18.2)	89 (42.6)	69 (33.0)	4.02	0.888	4	.043	.335
2	I welcome pandemic e-WOM information.	0 (0.0)	2 (1.0)	30 (14.4)	101 (48.3)	76 (36.4)	4.20	0.712	3	-.345	.335
3	If the e-WOM information is unreliable, I may post negative comments.	18 (8.6)	24 (11.5)	41 (19.6)	77 (36.8)	49 (23.4)	3.55	1.212	5	-.471	.335
4	I use e-WOM to flatten the curve (stay at home).	0 (0.0)	3 (1.4)	19 (9.1)	98 (46.9)	89 (42.6)	4.31	0.695	1	.389	.335
5	The website's content is the clearest and fastest path during the pandemic.	2 (1.0)	2 (1.0)	30 (14.4)	78 (37.3)	97 (46.4)	4.27	0.813	2	1.365	.335

Table 4 shows that most respondents (89.5%) abide by and respect the government movement control order to stay home during the early pandemic outbreak (Rank 1). They believed (83.7%) that the information from reliable social media channels (Ministry of Health) was the most convincing (Rank 2). Therefore, conforming to the instruction was the best thing that they did (Rank 3). It was found that their attitude was also influenced by the news online (Rank 4). The effectiveness of e-WOM is crucial to ensure that the consumer will behave positively if they convince by the information of e-WOM. E-WOM has undoubtedly been a powerful marketing force (Cheung & Thadani, 2010). The users' attitudes towards e-WOM information decide the effectiveness of the e-WOM itself. However, most respondents somewhat agreed (mean=3.55) to react negatively to any unreliable information (Rank 5). Since there is a lot of social media news, some cannot cope with warnings from the government on official social media accounts. During the MCO, there were some broadcasts of people's bad attitudes toward handling the new norms. On the first day of MCO, public compliance was only 62 percent. On his official Twitter account, Health Director-General

Noor Hisham Abdullah stated that people were advised to avoid public gatherings even when the MCO period is over. In addition, throughout the MCO, fines were issued for those who did not obey the rules, such as ridiculing the government order and hosting a public feast. Yusof (2020) mentioned that the Health Ministry had proposed an increase in fines from RM1,000.00 to RM10,000.00 per person for those who fail to comply with standard operating procedures (SOPs). This action helps the people be more aware of abiding by the government law.

Attitude towards the Website
Table 5
Attitude Towards Website Information

No	Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std Dev.	Rank	Kurtosis	
		1	2	3	4	5				Stat	Std. error
1	So far, I like the website's content.	0 (0.0)	2 (1.0)	34 (16.3)	95 (45.5)	78 (37.3)	4.19	0.735	4	-.532	.335
2	I research pandemic information online.	0 (0.0)	1 (0.5)	31 (14.8)	104 (49.8)	73 (34.9)	4.19	0.695	3	-.559	.335
3	If website information is unreliable, I respond negatively.	6 (2.9)	16 (7.7)	53 (25.4)	76 (36.4)	58 (27.8)	3.78	1.027	5	-.062	.335
4	I stay home and socially distance myself as the website instructs.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	21 (10.0)	95 (45.5)	93 (44.5)	4.34	0.655	1	-.699	.335
5	The website's pandemic information is the most engaging and fastest.	0 (0.0)	1 (0.5)	27 (12.9)	90 (43.1)	91 (43.5)	4.30	0.706	2	-.509	.335

Table 5 revealed that the public (90%) behaved according to what has been informed on the website (Rank 1). This was probably the data generated from the official Ministry of Health website that provides the most updated news on Covid-19 statistics, frequent press releases on specific issues, and government decisions. Other websites that seemed unofficial tend to lack recent reports and are sometimes bombarded with full of fake news. Most respondents agreed (84.7%) that they fully utilised information on the website by referring to any latest update on Covid-19 (mean= 4.19, 3rd rank). They also reacted positively towards the information on the website (rank 4). Respondent's attitude towards the website is based on

the trust of the individual in its source (Zainal et al., 2017). Some websites offer a section where readers can leave their comments/feedback on the news or article. Such social forums also provide scope for discussing personal and sensitive issues in health care without embarrassment (Wang et al., 2008). Sometimes, virtual support groups enable people to realise that many others have the same emotional and physical challenges (Berry et al., 2018). Online support networks have been formed to examine patterns of knowledge sharing and relationships with homophile networks, whether via social media or online healthcare communities (Berry et al., 2018). Technology can provide opportunities to link across a wide range of dimensions depending on the type of information the people are looking for.

e-WOM effectiveness
Table 6
The e-WOM effectiveness

No	Item	Frequency (%)					Mean	Std Dev.	Rank	Kurtosis	
		1	2	3	4	5				Stat	Std. error
1	During a pandemic, I rely on e-WOM information.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	16 (7.7)	90 (43.1)	103 (49.3)	4.42	0.631	1	-.575	.335
2	e-WOM is the best information-delivery channel.	0 (0.0)	3 (1.4)	25 (12.0)	79 (37.8)	102 (48.8)	4.34	0.743	2	.053	.335
3	e-WOM helped me gather reference material.	0 (0.0)	4 (2.4)	28 (13.4)	84 (40.2)	92 (44.0)	4.26	0.778	3	.035	.335
4	After this, I'll utilise e-WOM more.	0 (0.0)	5 (2.4)	36 (17.2)	87 (41.6)	81 (38.8)	4.17	0.794	5	-.352	.335
5	I will recommend e-WOM to friends.	2 (1.0)	6 (2.9)	27 (12.9)	87 (41.6)	87 (41.6)	4.20	0.842	4	1.307	.335

The information garnered in Table 6 suggested that e-WOM has effectively provided information on the condition that the content delivered is authentic (rank 1). Most respondents (86.6%) identified that e-WOM was the best method to provide information (Rank 2) and helped them gather information as much as possible (rank 3). The respondents mostly believed they should recommend the benefit use of e-WOM (rank 4) and thought they would continue to take more advantage of e-WOM (rank 5). The findings implied that e-WOM communication is an essential factor influencing users' attitudes, expectations, and beliefs toward an issue (Zhang et al., 2020). Corresponding to the growth of social media, e-WOM is thoroughly utilised by the government to disseminate information to create awareness

among individuals. The preparation of status posting must be thoroughly checked to avoid misunderstandings among the public. For example, World Health Organization published much information on its websites, such as press conferences, statistics, and more on Covid-19 disease issues (World Health Organization, 2020).

Hypothesis Testing
There were six variables tested for the hypothesis. The strength of the relationship was determined via the Pearson correlation. The correlation in tie strength towards attitude on both e-WOM contents (social media & website) demonstrated a strong positive correlation (P=0.00) (see Table 7). Homophily also registered a strong positive correlation in attitudes toward e-WOM social media and website information at P<0.01. Source credibility also strongly correlates with attitudes toward social media and websites. Hypothesis analysis for both variable attitudes on social media and websites towards e-WOM effectiveness registered a significant association (P<0.01). The data revealed that all hypotheses were accepted.

Table 7
Hypothesis Analysis

			Attitude Towards e-WOM (social media)	Attitude towards the website	EWOM Effectiveness
1	Tie Strength	Pearson Correlation	.575**	.465**	.377**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		N	209	209	209
2	Homophily	Pearson Correlation	.547**	.602**	.488**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		N	.209	209	209
3	Source Credibility	Pearson Correlation	.684**	.682**	.596**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
		N	209	209	209
4	Attitude Towards e-WOM Information	Pearson Correlation			.642**
		Sig. (2-tailed)			.000
		N			209
5	Attitude towards the Website	Pearson Correlation			.731**
		Sig. (2-tailed)			.000
		N			209

The data further discovered that respondents tend to agree and strongly agree with the questions about the relationship between tie strength, homophily, and e-WOM. For source credibility, the communicator's positive characteristics (the content provider) affect the receiver's (the public) acceptance of a message. Users of e-WOM were inclined to believe those with expertise and credibility in specific topics. Based on the survey, respondents were concerned about the source credibility of the e-WOM information to ensure its authenticity and validity. Table 3 revealed that most respondents (88.1%) agreed with most source credibility item questions. Even though respondents tend to have different attitudes towards e-WOM on social media and websites, the statistical analysis revealed that respondents tend to behave well and observe their code of conduct, especially on health subject matter. The

e-WOM was considered adequate when the online content successfully convinced and educated the users.

Conclusion

In light of the findings, it would appear that e-WOM was successful in providing information; nevertheless, this conclusion highly depends on the content's veracity. The vast majority of respondents saw e-WOM as the most effective method for disseminating information, and it was helpful to them in acquiring knowledge to the greatest extent feasible. The vast majority of people who participated in the survey believed that they should encourage others to use e-WOM, and they expected to make even greater use of e-WOM in the future. According to the findings, e-WOM communication is an essential factor that significantly determines how users' attitudes, expectations, and perceptions related to a subject (Zhang et al., 2020). In tandem with the growth of social media, the government has made considerable use of e-WOM to transmit information to the general public to enhance awareness among those individuals. The development of status postings needs to be carefully reviewed to reduce the likelihood of confusion among members of the general public.

Following a more in-depth analysis, it became abundantly evident that the respondents, as a whole, agreed with the topics that addressed the connection between tie strength, homophily, and e-WOM. The audience's receptivity to a particular mode of communication can be affected, at least partly, by the positive qualities of the communicator, also referred to as the content provider. People who utilised e-WOM were likelier to believe those with experience and credibility in the topics they were talking about because e-WOM is a more recent phenomenon. According to the results of the study, the respondents' primary concern was the dependability of the source of the information that was provided by e-WOM to guarantee that it was accurate and legitimate. The vast majority of responders (the overwhelming majority) concurred that the sources could be trusted. The statistical analysis revealed that respondents generally behave well and observe their code of conduct, particularly regarding health issues. This was the case even though respondents hold various beliefs concerning e-WOM on social media and websites. It was determined that the e-WOM was adequate when the content displayed on the website could instruct and convince the users properly.

Theoretical Contribution

This research delivers some theoretical contributions to the available literature on the effectiveness of e-WOM in examining public behaviour during health crises. First, the outcomes of this study offer proof that the online social network (OSN) framework offers a legitimate technique to investigate the trend of e-WOM communication (Kim et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2007). The effectiveness of e-WOM in delivering information on infectious diseases had been slightly documented in previous literature; however, the factor of someone's behaviour resulting from reading online details on contagious diseases has been neglected (Brown et al., 2007; Chu and Kim, 2011). As the traits of e-WOM have been significantly studied, the latest research on the effect of e-WOM in pandemic crises received little interest from researchers. Thus, examining the relationship between consumers and social media/web within the OSN framework presents a more profound intellectual capacity of the e-WOM system. Additionally, this study contributes to the literature by extending

items constructed to assess behaviour while people are confronted with the risk of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Second, the study pays attention to the significance of homophily (the tendency of individuals to associate and bond with similar others) among partners/members via e-WOM communication. The element of homophily in investigating the effectiveness of online information has largely been left out in preceding research. The social effect of e-WOM is primarily based on the trust of online communication that is shared among acquaintances (someone we know). The homophily variable can enrich our knowledge of the behaviour patterns of customers of social media/websites. The third contribution of this study evaluates the source credibility, which has attracted interest within the latest eWOM literature. Although source credibility has been emphasised in searching for online facts, little is understood about the perception of functional resource credibility (Kim et al., 2018). The concept of source credibility received inadequate attention within the context of online information. Even in an online environment, users evaluate such sources' credibility despite the facts of viral media and unverified and unreliable sources that lead to falsifying pandemic stories. Therefore by revealing the source's credibility, the study could overcome this gap within the literature.

Fourth, the research framework explains the relationship between the three variables: attitudes towards e-WOM social media, websites, and their relationship to the effectiveness of e-WOM. Although many researchers have tried to validate the association between evaluation perceptions and buying decisions, this present study broadens our knowledge of the association of attitudes toward e-WOM. Based on the findings, people's attitudes toward e-WOM effectiveness registered significant associations, informing that behavioural changes or some adverse reactions are expected if e-WOM is ineffective and vice versa. These outcomes prove that the accuracy and effectiveness of information delivery shape attitudes.

The consequences of this evaluation suggest that efforts should be made to enhance the belief of tie strength and homophily between the public and social media/websites. Developing appropriate online content with reliable sources could alleviate the tension felt by the public, who is always anxious about the risk of contracting an infectious disease. The government should strive to provide adequate information that satisfies the people. For example, to increase the tie strength and homophily towards pandemic online content, an assessment of the present study could be utilised to understand the level of e-WOM effectiveness.

Strategies such as frequent updates on pandemic issues may encourage the public to build stronger relationships with websites/social media. As a result, this ongoing relationship will increase consumer perceptions of the source's credibility and make them feel confident in e-WOM information. The ability of a website/social media to engage customers with reliable content may be one of the crucial factors in maintaining an effective e-WOM. Therefore, the government needs to develop and promote e-WOM information that attracts new customers and design them to be user-friendly to ensure high readability and increase viewers. For the public to approve and fully trust online content, the government needs to identify ways to enhance the credibility of powerful surveys by managing source credibility. The social networking perspective of this study supports the idea that robust and effective user-social

media/website relationships help both parties benefit from credible reviews (Kim et al., 2018), as the results show that source credibility affects people's attitudes.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

The predominant dilemma is associated with the issue of the capacity to generalise findings from the overall population. The sample is much more open to the public (regardless of organisations, institutions, individuals, or societies) since the online survey is borderless, and everybody from different levels of background (education, social status & technology literacy) could have accessed and responded to the surveys. The results could perhaps not represent the overall opinion of Malaysian people on e-WOM towards Covid-19. Future studies need to obtain a sample by area sampling technique according to different states in the country to gain better insights with rich data. The way the e-WOM content reminds the public to follow the standard operating procedure (SOP) was also not evaluated. The elements are worth investigating in future studies.

The study did not examine some possible moderators of e-WOM outcomes, such as travel behaviour characteristics and selected demographic profiles (e.g., level of education and age). Regarding future studies, researchers could observe socio-demographics affecting attitudes and perceptions concerning e-WOM during a pandemic. People with a higher level of education (greater awareness) could perhaps be cautious with what they read online and vice versa. This is because they can filter and react to online content. Also, this study did not investigate how the website or social media alerted the public on the dangerous status of Covid-19 in their locality. Malaysian Ministry of Health, through its official website, MySejahtera apps, and social media channels (Telegram, Facebook, Twitter), provides a link for the public to check their health status daily and update the positive case status (positively infected) of Covid-19. The way the e-WOM content reminds the people to follow the standard operating procedure (SOP) was also not evaluated. Future studies need to consider some of the elements in the study framework.

Despite limited studies investigating characteristics of e-WOM communications towards people's attitudes during health crises, it is hoped that the current research would at least provide a knowledge foundation that manages people's panic during a state of emergency. Negative consequences could happen should the delivery of e-WOM is not effective as it is supposed to be. An investigation into the quality of online content could improve people's perceptions of social media/websites that might affect their attitudes. The effectiveness of e-WOM depends on the degree of how people behave when they read online content. Tie strength, homophily, and source credibility affect individuals' opinions which, in turn, shape their attitudes. Future research needs to examine the e-WOM effectiveness by integrating other theories and frameworks that would add new knowledge in understanding people's attitudes when confronting health crises.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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