A MODEL OF COMMITMENT IN B-TO-C TRAVEL CONTEXT: A STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Due to its interactive capability, the Web has been considered a promising tool for relationship marketing. However, as competition increases among the online travel businesses, the pressure not just to attract new customers, but to retain existing ones, is intense. In addition, because Internet shoppers can search and compare offerings at little or no cost, e-travel vendors are more challenged in their attempts to build long-term relationships with customers.

With the increasing competitiveness in the online travel business, relationship commitment is crucial to a vendor’s survival. Studying the effect of commitment in online travel buyer-seller relationship is important because commitment may be difficult to develop. The cost of searching or switching between numerous retailers is greatly reduced on the Internet.

The primary goal of this dissertation was to develop a theory-based model of relationship commitment in an online travel domain. Leaning on the foundations of marketing literature and the three theories of relationship commitment (*the investment model*, *organizational commitment theory*, and *commitment-trust theory*), this study develops a conceptual framework that explains how customers develop commitment to a
Travel Web Vendor, and selected relationship outcomes (word-of-mouth) were investigated as well.

The results clearly showed the pivotal role of affective commitment as an antecedent to post-purchase behaviors (WOM communications). Of the two forms of commitment, affective commitment had a stronger positive impact on word-of-mouth. Moreover, the results have shown that satisfaction leads to higher affective commitment, which in turn has a strong influence on positive word-of-mouth communications. This study also highlighted the importance of trust for establishing long-term relationships with a travel retailer.

From a theoretical perspective, this study has stressed the importance of two different dimensions of commitment. Affective commitment and calculative commitment were found to vary in terms of their impact on word-of-mouth communications. The findings of this dissertation should open the door to additional research in this area. The results of this research have shown that the affective commitment is the most effective for developing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships in a B-to-C travel setting. Thus, this study has many implications for practice.
Dedication:

To the two special people who influenced my life more than anyone else and who instilled in me the value of higher education from the very early years.

My late father “Adel M. Nusair”

AND

My mother “Malak N. El-Hmoud”
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The World Wide Web has changed the way business is conducted online and has forced companies to find new marketing strategies. The Web has become a new marketing medium to reach customers (Sinha, 2000). It gave the online businesses the power to attract customers by customizing products and services to their needs; in addition, it facilitated the delivery of products and services more efficiently and effectively. On the other hand, the Web has provided customers with interactivity, variety of products and services, more information, flexibility, and simpler transactions. Thus, the success of retailers has been heavily dependent on the extent to which they can utilize the Web as a marketing medium (Rust & Kannan, 2002). Due to its potential for interactive communication, the Web has been considered a promising tool for relationship marketing (Berry, 1995; Nath, Akmanligil, Hjelm, Sakaguchi, & Schultz, 1998; Aladwani, 2001; Thorbjornsen, Supphellen, & Nysveen, 2002).

As competition intensifies among the online retailers (Choudhury, Hazel, & Konsynski, 1998), products and services become more homogenous with little differentiation among products and services (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998). Research has
shown that costs of maintaining current customers are significantly lower than attracting new ones (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994). Consequently, many companies are emphasizing relationship marketing as a tool to retain customers. With the realization of its importance, over the past decade marketing researchers have developed a large body of literature in the area of relationship marketing. In support of this renewed interest in relationship marketing, a great deal of research has investigated those behaviors that contribute to long-term relationships between buyers and vendors (Jackson, 1985; Berry, 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Bendapudi & Berry, 1997; Gilliland & Bello, 2002).

Due to the intangibility of services, it is a must that service firms need to focus on the development of long-term relationships with their customers (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2001). Several models have been examined in the context of relationship marketing (Anderson & Narus, 1984; Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Ganesan, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Gilliland & Bello, 2002; Fullerton, 2005; Li, Browne, & Chau, 2006). Relationship marketing has been defined by many researchers, for example, Grönroos (1994, p. 304) defined relationship marketing as “identifying and establishing, maintaining, and enhancing, and when necessary terminating, relationships with customers and other stakeholders at a profit, so that the objectives of all parties are met; this is done by a mutual exchange and fulfillment of promise”. However, the most accepted definition was the one by Morgan & Hunt (1994, p. 22). According to them, relationship marketing refers to “all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges”. Thus, relationship marketing emphasizes
the importance of continuous relational exchanges between the seller and the buyer in order to cultivate mutually long-term beneficial relationships (Mukherjee & Nath, 2003).

The Web facilitates building relationships over time. In fact, Web customers tend to do business with only one primary retailer, to the extent that purchasing from a particular retailer’s site becomes part of their routine (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000). With the emergence of e-commerce, the Web offers great potential for building customer relationships (Berry, 1995; Nath, Akmanligil, Hjelm, Sakaguchi, & Schultz, 1998; Aladwani, 2001 Thorbjornsen, Supphellen, & Nysveen, 2002). E-commerce via the Web has become an important retail medium for customers (Eastlick, Lotz, & Warrington, 2006). Interactivity, a potential bridge to maintaining long-term relationships, has introduced a new approach to marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Petre, Mincocha, & Roberts, 2006).

The World Wide Web has become a relationship marketing tool in both the B-to-C and the B-to-B context. However, the focus of this study is the online agency type of travel retailers that offer travel products and services to customers in a Business-to-Customer (B-to-C) setting. The online agency type of travel retailers sells multiple types of travel products of multiple suppliers (Rao & Smith, 2005). Different types of products include air, hotel, car, cruise and packages. Examples of such online agencies are: Expedia.com, Hotels.com, Orbitz.com, Cheaptickets.com, Hotwire.com, and Travelocity.com.

The online travel business has achieved a remarkable growth over the past decade. Travel business on the Internet accounts for 15 percent of overall travel sales (US Census Bureau, 2003). An increasing number of travel businesses are utilizing the World Wide
Web as a marketing media to deliver their products and services. The products and services offered by the online travel retailers range from simple products (i.e. hotel booking, airline booking, and car rental booking) to more complex products (i.e. vacation packages and cruises).

Many studies have indicated that retaining existing customers online is a major challenge (Dholakia & Rego, 1998; Babakus, Beinstock, & Van Scotter, 2004; Boyer & Hult, 2005). Hence, as competition increases among the online travel retailers, the pressure not just to attract new customers, but to retain existing ones is intense. In addition, because Internet shoppers can search and compare offerings at little or no cost (Srinivasan, Anderson, & Ponnavolu, 2002); e-travel vendors are more challenged in their attempts to build long-term relationships with customers. Developing the ability both to attract new customers and to retain existing customers on travel Web sites is a major challenge. Consequently, it is critical that travel retailers develop a strategy to lock customers in a relationship.

A significant body of literature has examined the nature of relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Berry, 1995; Gabarino & Johnson, 1999; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Bansal, Irving, & Taylor, 2004). Many of these studies have built upon commitment as mediator in a relational context (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sanchez & Iniesta, 2004; Fullerton, 2005). Commitment has been viewed as an implicit or explicit pledge of continuity between relationship partners (Dwyer, Schurr, & Ho, 1987). As such, the construct of commitment plays a major role in relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Bendapudi & Berry, 1995; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Gilliland and Bello, 2002; Fullerton, 2003).
Commitment is acknowledged to be an essential component of successful long-term relationships (Dwyer, Schurr, & Ho, 1987; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Relationship commitment, as defined by Morgan & Hunt, is “an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it” (p. 23). In relationship marketing literature, commitment between partners in an exchange is recognized as a key precursor to the attainment of desirable behavioral outcomes. For example, commitment is positively associated with trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), word of mouth (Harrison-Walker, 2001), future intentions (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999), and resistance to change (Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999). In the same vein, the impact that commitment has on profitability was addressed by several authors (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Kordupleski, Rust, & Zahorik, 1993).

In the relationship marketing literature the concept of commitment plays a central role of relationship marketing models (Scanzoni, 1979). Due to the importance of customer commitment, many models have been tested in support of relationship commitment (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Han & Wilson, 1993; Crutchfield, 2001; Tellefsen, 2002; Fullerton, 2004; Li, Browne, & Chau, 2006). For example, in a research study by Garbarino & Johnson (1999) examined the relationships of satisfaction, trust and commitment to future intentions. Their findings indicated that for high relational customers, trust and commitment are the mediators between component attitudes and future intentions. Additionally, Fullerton (2005) has reported that commitment serves as a mediator of the service quality and loyalty relationship. Moreover, the results of
Verhoef (2003) showed that commitment and loyalty programs affect both customer retention and customer share development.

Studying the effect of commitment in travel buyer-seller relationship is important because commitment may be difficult to develop online. The cost of searching or switching between numerous retailers is greatly reduced on the Internet (Brynjolfsson & Smith, 2000). Therefore, it is critical that e-travel vendors develop alternative methods to attract the target customers. As little as a 5% increase in customer retention has been shown to improve profitability by 25% (Haskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997). Therefore, customer commitment for e-travel vendors is a critical factor for the development and maintenance of marketing relationships.

The importance of word-of-mouth communication (WOM) has long been a subject of considerable importance in relationship marketing (Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewiski, 2006). Additionally, the Internet has merged as a source of WOM communication for customers (Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2004). WOM communications has been described as one of the important post purchase behaviors (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Moreover, WOM has been shown to have a significant impact on customer decision making (Engel, Roger, & Robert, 1969, Richins, 1983). WOM which is defined as “volitional post-purchase communications by consumers” (Dick & Basu, 1994, P. 107) is considered a predictor for business growth in low-commitment/high-choice industries (Samson, 2006). In the same vein, a study by Marsden, Samson & Upton’s (2005) found that there is a correlation between WOM and business growth. Thus, due to its importance, marketers need to continue harnessing the power of positive WOM communication.
1.2 Theoretical Foundation of the Study: (Figure 1)

Commitments indicates that there are mutual benefits and that the parties desire/need the relationship to endure and are willing to make an effort in maintaining it in the long-term (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Thus, commitment to a relationship explains a customer’s positive attitude toward a partner’s relationship and the motivation to remain in the relationship (Rusbult, 1983; Allen & Meyer, 1990; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Many studies have examined the key constructs supporting the relationship concept. Examples of such constructs are satisfaction (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990), trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

The theoretical foundation for this study is based on three prominent theories, the investment model (Rusbult, 1983), organizational commitment theory (Allen & Meyer, 1990), and commitment-trust theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The three theories are helpful in explaining why a customer commits to a relationship with a company and how the commitment to behavior is logically connected to the commitment to a relationship. Hence, these three theories investigate the role and the effect of commitment in relationships. The next section will provide a brief description for the three theories.

1.2.1 The Investment Model in Relationships (Rusbult, 1983)

The investment model is a theory concerning the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships (Rusbult, 1983). Commitment is a central construct in the model and is defined as the “intent to persist in a relationship, including long-term orientation toward the involvement as well as feelings of psychological attachment” (Rusbult, Martz, & Angew, 1998, p. 359). This model assumes that commitment to a
relationship is influenced by three factors: *satisfaction, quality of alternatives, and investment size.*

(1) *Satisfaction* refers to the fact that customers are satisfied when the relationship provides high rewards and low costs. Satisfaction is considered to be positively associated with the commitment to a relationship. (2) *Quality of Alternatives* refers to the perceived desirability of alternative Web sites to the relationship with the current Web site. According to this model, people become more committed to a relationship when they perceive the alternatives as unavailable, poor, and unacceptable (Li et al., 2006). A negative relationship exits between higher quality of alternatives and commitment. Finally,

(3) *Investment Size* refers to how much customers have already invested in the current relationship. People normally become more committed to a relationship if they invest numerous resources in it. Investments can be financial, temporal or emotional. Investments in other words can have a “sunk cost” effect, where a person stays in a relationship simply because he/she has already invested significantly in a relationship (Li, Browne, & Whetherbe, 2006). This substantial investment in a relationship helps lock the individual into the current relationship. Thus, investment size is positively associated with commitment. The focus of this research is on the three factors of the investment model: satisfaction, quality of alternatives, and investment size.

1.2.2 *Organizational Commitment Theory* (Allen and Meyer, 1990):

Allen and Meyer (1990) considered commitment as a multidimensional construct. Meyer and Allen (1990, p. 14) defined commitment as “a psychological state that binds
the individual to the organization”. This theory resulted in three-component model of commitment. (1) The Affective Component refers to the emotional attachment (involvement) to the organization. (2) The Calculative (continuous) Component refers to commitment based on the need to stay in the relationship due to high switching costs if they have to exit the current relationships. (3) The Normative Component refers to individuals’ feelings of obligation to remain with the current relationship. The focus of this research will be on the affective and the calculative components only. Given its definition, it is expected that normative commitment to be less relevant in the B-to-C relationship context than other types of relationships such as B-toB relationships (Li, Browne, & Chau, 2006). Therefore, normative commitment is not included in this study.

1.2.3 Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994):

While the investment model explains general interpersonal relationships, however, commitment-trust theory is typically applied to business-to-business relationships and business-to-customer relationships. It is an important theory in relationship marketing research, focusing on the long-term relational exchanges between a seller and buyers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Both commitment and trust are important for the development of long-term relationships. According to Morgan & Hunt (1994), a critical complement of trust in exchange relationships is commitment. They indicated that trust positively affects attitudinal commitment and that parties will seek only trustworthy partners.

Commitment and trust are positioned as key mediating variables between five antecedent variables and five outcomes. Relationship commitment is “an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another partner is so important as to
warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23). Trust has a positive impact and is a major determinant of relationship commitment. Thus, commitment and trust are prominent factors in the formation, development, and maintenance of interpersonal relationships and marketing relationships.

1.2.4. Post-Purchase Behaviors: Word-of-Mouth Communication (WOM)

Previous research suggests that WOM is more effective than information from commercial sources (i.e. TV advertising) because it is perceived as the most unbiased source of information (Richins, 1983; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991). WOM behavior has been identified as one of the important post purchase behaviors (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Word-of-mouth communication is defined by Dick & Basu (1994) as “volitional post-purchase communications by consumers” (p. 107). Consequently, word-of-mouth communication takes place when a customer has strong feelings toward an experience with a supplier which may motivate him/her to tell other people of their experience (Westbrook, 1987).

With the growth of e-commerce, WOM is gaining importance (Liu, Sudharshan, & Hamer, 2000). Customer normally engage in word-of-mouth communication for multiple reasons i.e. anxiety reduction, advice seeking, product involvement, and altruistic motives (Sundram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998). Given the fact that customer commitment has multiple components as indicated in literature (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Pritchard et al., 1999; Sharma and Patterson, 2000; Fullerton, 2003; Bansal et al., 2004) it is important to recognize that both components of customer commitment may not have
the same effect on WOM behavior. Thus, research investigating the influence of WOM about online travel retailers has both theoretical and managerial implications.

Figure 1: Model of Commitment in a B-to-C Travel Context

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Relationship marketing is becoming a strategic theory in which commitment is the principal antecedent (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). The intent of this dissertation is to provide a greater conceptual understanding and empirical validation of relational behaviors in a B-to-C travel setting. To this end, a primary aim of this research is to
develop a theory-based model of relationship commitment in a way that provides sufficient explanatory power while permitting operationalization for testing in an online agency type of travel domain. This model investigates which components of customer commitment (affective commitment and calculative commitment) enhance and/or undermine word-of-mouth communications (WOM).

Given the fact that customer commitment has multiple components as indicated in literature (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Pritchard et al., 1999; Sharma & Patterson, 2000; Fullerton, 2003; Bansal et al., 2004) it is important to recognize that the components of customer commitment may not have the same effect on WOM behavior. While there is ample support for the position that customer commitment facilitates the development of marketing relationships, however, the basic research question examined in this dissertation is the extent to which the specific components of customer commitment enhance and/or potentially detract from WOM behaviors in B-to-C relationship travel setting.

With the increasing competitiveness in the online travel business (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2006), relationship commitment is crucial to a vendor’s survival. The objective of this study is to empirically examine the positive impact the introduction of e-commerce has had on the development of marketing relationships through increased commitment. Thus, the goal for this dissertation was to articulate and test a model of Travel Web site commitment. Leaning on the foundations of marketing literature and the three theories (the investment model, organizational commitment theory, and commitment-trust theory), this study develops a conceptual framework that explains how
consumers develop commitment to a Travel Web Vendor, and selected relationship outcomes (word-of-mouth) are also investigated.

While there are many constructs of interest in the area of customer relationship, customer commitment has emerged as the most important construct of interest in explaining important relational outcomes (Bansal et al., 2004; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This review of the central constructs in relationship marketing will be used to map out an integrated conceptual model of the role that customer commitment plays in relationships marketing in a travel context. This dissertation discusses the following constructs as antecedents to customer commitment: *satisfaction, investment size, quality of alternatives, and trust as antecedents to customer commitment*. An understanding of these constructs is critical to the development of a good theory regarding the role of commitment in relationship marketing. This study is aimed at answering the following key research questions:

- Which commitment component is important to the development and maintenance of marketing relationships?
- Which component has the strongest effect on intentions to stay in a relationship?
- Can commitment both enhance and erode marketing relationships?

Since WOM communications play an important role in shaping consumers’ attitudes and behaviors (Brown & Reingen, 1987), which of the commitment components is positively related to WOM communications?
1.4 Summary

In this chapter the introduction has been discussed. The introduction part focuses on the importance of commitment as a mediator construct in a relationship. This chapter includes the theoretical foundation of the study, the post-purchase behaviors “WOM” as an outcome construct in the model, the purpose of the study, and the organization of the dissertation section.

Next chapter is chapter two “Literature Review”. This chapter discusses the importance of E-commerce in travel, relationship marketing, post-purchase behaviors “WOM communications”, the investment model, organizational commitment theory, commitment-trust theory, model development and research hypotheses, and research constructs and supporting literature.
1.5 Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized in five chapters:

Chapter 1 describes the study’s purpose and explains its importance. It then outlines the scope and discusses the potential contributions to both scholars and practitioners.

Chapter II begins with an overview of e-commerce in travel and marketing relationships. The chapter also presents the three theories of commitment: the investment model, organizational commitment theory, and commitment-trust theory. Research hypotheses were derived from the literature. The chapter ends with a theoretical model based on the discussion of the three theories of commitment.

Chapter III discusses the methodological aspects. It outlines the research design, and the study procedure, including the questionnaire design, the data collection method and the sample characteristics. The chapter also presents the operationalization of the research constructs used. It then discusses the statistical technique used to analyze the data.

Chapter IV discusses the result and analyses part of the dissertation.

Chapter V ends with discussion of the findings, theoretical contributions, managerial implications, limitations, suggestions for future research, and conclusions. The last part of the dissertation will include: references, appendices, tables and figures.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 E-commerce

The World Wide Web is quickly becoming a common tool in the B2C (Business-to-Customer) and B2B (Business-to-Business) contexts since it has introduced a new approach to marketing (Morgan & Hunt; 1994; Mukharjee & Nath, 2003; Eastlick et al., 2006; Petre, Minocha, & Roberts, 2006). The World Wide Web has witnessed extensive growth over the past several years to the point where it is estimated that there are over 1 billion Internet users worldwide (Roman, 2006). The e-commerce is expected to grow at double-digit rates (Zhang, Fang, & Sheng, 2006). A recent report by the Department of Commerce Census Bureau shows that online retail sales in the first quarter of 2004 were $15.5 billion, up 27.2 percent from the first quarter of 2003. As such, the rapid growth of the e-commerce brings many challenges to the online retailers in light of the intense competition (Reedy, Schullo, Zimmerman, & Davakos, 2000).

E-commerce has introduced a new approach to marketing. It has become a strong and significant factor for Business-to-Customer marketers. Currently the e-commerce is growing at an astounding rate. “It is projected that the United States will have up to $7 trillion in online trade by 2006” (Kleindl, 2003, p. 7). Table 1 shows the E-commerce’s
current and projected growth. Given its growth, e-commerce is considered a potential bridge to maintaining relationships by enabling marketers to communicate one-to-one and thus collect transactional and other personal information that can be used to build long-term relationships (Blattberg & Deighton, 1991).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet Usage</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2005</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Web Users (U.S.)</td>
<td>28 million</td>
<td>65 million</td>
<td>183 million</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web Users (Worldwide)</td>
<td>163 million</td>
<td>500 million</td>
<td>I billion</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages of Users Who Buy Goods/Services</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>50%+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business-to-Customer Web Commerce</td>
<td>$2.6 billion</td>
<td>$13 billion</td>
<td>$108 million</td>
<td>$156 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business-to-Business Web Commerce</td>
<td>Less than $43 billion</td>
<td>$109 billion</td>
<td>$1.3 trillion (9% of U.S. sales)</td>
<td>$4.3-8.5 trillion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising Revenue (U.S.)</td>
<td>236.5 billion</td>
<td>$2 billion</td>
<td>$7.9 billion</td>
<td>$18.8 billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: E-Commerce Growth from 1996 to 2005 (*Kleindl, 2003, p. 8*)

2.2 E-commerce in Travel

The internet’s global reach, interactivity, and information-rich context have redefined the travel industry (Beldona, 2005). Online travel commerce has evolved significantly from the initial sales of less complex products like airline tickets, accommodation and car rentals to include more complex products like vacation packages and cruises (Beldona, 2005). Several studies have revealed that online travel rates among the top three products and services purchased online (Heichler 1997; Tweney 1997; Yoffie 1997).
A report by the Travel Industry Association of America has reported that in 2003 more than 64 million Americans used the Internet to look for information about destinations or to check prices and schedules; 42 million of them booked travel via the Internet, an 8% gain over 2002 (Werthner & Ricci, 2004). Moreover, according to Forrester Research, online travel sales in U.S. are expected to grow to $63.6 billion during 2005 and to $111 billion by 2009 (Harteveldt, Leaver, & Meyer, 2004b). These sales happen through different types of online travel retailers. Table 2 contains a list of Web sites along with a description and examples for each type. It is reported that online agencies account for more than half of online travel sales in the major categories of airline tickets, hotel rooms, and car rentals (Rao & Smith, 2005).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retailer</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Online Agency</strong></td>
<td>Sell multiple types of travel products of multiple suppliers. Different product types include air, hotel, car, cruise, and packages. Package is a bundle of two or more components involving air, hotel, car, and cruise. Customer is shown a list of products with different attributes along with price.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.travelocity.com">www.travelocity.com</a>&lt;br&gt;www.expedia.com&lt;br&gt;www.orbitz.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supplier website</strong></td>
<td>Sell own travel products and travel products of partners. Partner may be a supplier of same product type or of a different product type. Customer is shown a list of products with different attributes along with price.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.AA.com">www.AA.com</a>&lt;br&gt;www.Starwood.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distressed Inventory Distributor</strong></td>
<td>Sell distressed inventory from multiple suppliers. Different types of products include air, hotel, car, cruise, and event tickets. Usually, different product types are bundled as a package and priced together. Customer is shown a list of products with different attributes along with price.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.site59.com">www.site59.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reverse Auction Site</strong></td>
<td>Customer enters a request for a product with desirable attributes and a price he is willing to pay. Website searches for a supplier who is willing to fulfill the demand for the product at customer’s price.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.priceline.com">www.priceline.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shopping Bots</strong></td>
<td>Customer enters a request for a product. Shopping bots scour multiple supplier websites and present the aggregated search results. Customer is directed to provider’s website for booking.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sidestep.com">www.sidestep.com</a>&lt;br&gt;www.mobissimo.com&lt;br&gt;www.kayak.com&lt;br&gt;www.qixo.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Search Engine</strong></td>
<td>Customers enter keywords related to their product search. Search engines provide a list of hyperlinks to travel providers that include agencies, suppliers, distressed inventory sellers, and reverse auction sites.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.google.com">www.google.com</a>&lt;br&gt;www.overture.com&lt;br&gt;www.travelzoo.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Auction</strong></td>
<td>Portals provide booking capabilities in their respective Travel sections. Booking requests are fulfilled through agreements with travel agencies. Yahoo and AOL use Travelocity booking capabilities.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.yahoo.com">www.yahoo.com</a>&lt;br&gt;www.aol.com</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Different Types of Online Travel Retailers *(Rao & Smith, 2005, p.73)*
The e-commerce has become a mechanism to establish relationship marketing successfully (Berry, 1995). Many studies have suggested that customer relationships with online businesses can influence the development of brand trust, brand commitment and customer loyalty to Web vendors (Hoffman, Novak, & Peralta, 1998; Dholakia, Zhao, Dholakia, & Fortin, 2000; Geissler, 2001). Consequently, continuous customer relationship is expected (McWilliam, 2000; Sharma & Patterson, 2000; Fullerton, 2003).

2.3 Relationship Marketing

Arndt was the first to introduce the term of relationship marketing in 1979 (Arndt, 1983). Arndt conceptualized marketing as an exchange in which the voluntary exchange between partners was perceived as the core idea underlying marketing. However, according to Mulki & Stock (2003), Leonard Berry was the first to introduce the term “relationship marketing” in 1983. The shift toward relationship marketing has led to major changes in marketing theory and practice. Consequently, many studies have investigated the concept of relationship marketing (Jackson, 1985; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Mulki & Stock, 2003; Gilliland & Bello, 2002). According to Berry (1995), researchers before the introduction of “relationship marketing” concept have previously concentrated far more on how to attract buyers rather than on how to retain them. Thus, relationship marketing attempts to move the relationship between buyers and sellers from discrete **transactional exchange** (a relationship where price and product factors alone are the most important elements to customers to make an exchange with a retailer), as opposed to **relational exchange** (a relationship characterized by long-term partnership between buyers and sellers involving multiple transactions (Fontenot & Wilson, 1997).
The shift to long-term relational exchanges between partners was described by Webster (1992, p.1) as a “fundamental reshaping of the field” and by Parvatiyar, Sheth & Washington (1992), as a “genuine paradigm shift”. Although it has been defined by many authors, Morgan & Hunt (1994, p.22) presented one of the most widely accepted definitions for relationship marketing. They defined relationship marketing as “all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges”. Other authors have provided different definitions for relationship marketing as shown in table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Marketing Definition</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“marketing oriented toward strong, lasting relationships with individual accounts”.</td>
<td>(Jackson, 1985, p. 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“the formation of long-term buyer-seller relationships through the creation of structural and social bonds between companies”.</td>
<td>(Turnbull &amp; Wilson, 1989, p. 234).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“the goal of relationship selling us to earn the position of preferred supplier by developing trust in a key accounts over a period of time”.</td>
<td>(Doyle &amp; Roth, 1992, p. 59).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relationships”.</td>
<td>(Berry, 1993, p. 25).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“an asymmetrical and personalized marketing process that takes place in long-run, results in some bilateral benefits and rests on an in-depth understanding of customer needs”.</td>
<td>(Perrien &amp; Richard, 1995, p. 38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Relationship Marketing Definitions

Relationship marketing is usually described as the establishment, development and maintenance of successful relational exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). From
marketing perspective, there are many advantages in adopting relationship marketing. For example, relationship marketing can help to: (1) reduce price sensitivity (Copulsky & Michael, 1990); (2) create barriers to switching to other retailers (Day & Wensley, 1983); and (3) develop long-term relationships with customers in ways that cannot easily be duplicated by competitors. Relationship marketing, which focuses on ways to build, develop, and maintain successful relational exchanges (Grönroos, 1994; Morgan, & Hunt, 1994) is an important way to sustain committed relationship between a customer and an e-vendor. Therefore, relationships developed through relationship marketing can become an important source of competitive advantage for any business.

Over the past decade, marketing scholars have developed a large body of literature in the field of relational marketing (Jackson, 1985; Berry, 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). The interest in customer relationship management started in business-to-business relationships (Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and extended into business-to-customer relationships (Sheth & Pravatiyar, 1995; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). In addition, marketing research has developed a significant body of literature on the antecedents and consequences of buyer-seller relationships (Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995). For example, according to Morgan & Hunt, trust is the basic mechanism used to develop and maintain relationship and fosters a long-term orientation in marketing relationships. Additionally, Ha (2004) indicates that long-term relationships with customers improves brand perceptions, develops positive emotions, and maintains strong relationships.
During the past decade, the online business has witnessed tremendous growth, and the Internet has become a new marketing medium (Alexander & Colgate, 1998). In the U.S., it is expected that the e-commerce would boost the online sales from $172 billion in 2005 to $329 billion in 2010 (Forrester Research, 2005). The business-to-customer e-commerce is a growing market (Petre et al., 2006). The development of e-commerce on the Internet has become a tool to promote the practice of relationship marketing more practically and successfully (Berry, 1995). In such settings, businesses reside in highly competitive environment with little differentiation among the products and services offered (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998). In addition, certain characteristics of the Internet have made it difficult for firms to retain their customers, because they lead to reductions in customers’ search costs (Malone, Yates, & Benjamin, 1987), increased competition (Choudhury, Harzel, & Konsynski, 1998), and low differentiation (Dholakia & Rego, 1998). The online customers can search and compare offerings at little or no cost, the Internet is nearly a perfect market (Srinivasan et al., 2002), which means that suppliers are more challenged in their attempts to build long-term relationships with customers.

There are many constructs of importance in the area of e-relationship marketing. The service quality construct in the relationship marketing paradigm is of paramount importance. As such, during the past decade substantial research has been devoted to service quality and the measurement of service quality (See Table 4). In addition, due to the growing importance of the online commerce, an increasing number of research studies have focused on online satisfaction (Szymanski & Hise, 2000; Bhattacherjee, 2001; Montoya-Weiss, Voss, & Grewal, 2003; Li et al., 2006). Customer satisfaction has
been considered one of the most important constructs (McQuitty, Finn, & Wiley, 2000),
and one of the main goals in marketing (Erevelles & Leavitt, 1992). Bansal, McDougall,
Dikolli, & Sedatole (2004) explored the antecedents of e-satisfaction and two new
behavioral outcomes related to an online setting; customers’ stated purchasing behavior
(i.e. conversion) and actual browsing behavior (stickiness). Previous research has also
revealed that online service quality is a crucial factor that can significantly contribute to
customer satisfaction (Voss, 2000; Loiacono, Watson, & Goodhue, 2002; Zeithaml,
Parasuraman, & Malhotra, 2002).

A study by Yang, Peterson, & Huang (2001) found that Web site quality
dimensions of customer service, product cost/availability, and online information systems
were positively related to customer satisfaction. Moreover, Kim & Stoel (2004) reported
three dimensions of service quality as predictors of customer satisfaction. These
dimensions are: informational fit-to-task, transaction capability, and response time. Shim,
Shin, & Nottingham (2002) identified ease of contact, customer service, ease of access,
and information as antecedents of customer satisfaction. Another study by Reibstein
(2002) has shown that ease of ordering, product selection, product information, product
prices, navigation, on-time delivery, product presentation, customer service, privacy
policies, and shipping and handling are important service quality dimensions that are
associated with customer satisfaction.
Table 4: Key Dimensions of Online Service Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Key Dimensions of Online Service Quality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barnes &amp; Vidgen (2001)</td>
<td>Content quality, usability (ease of use, navigation); reliability; personalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cox &amp; Dale (2001)</td>
<td>Accessibility; communication; credibility; understanding; appearance; availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeong &amp; Lambert (2001)</td>
<td>Ease of use; usefulness, information content; security; responsiveness; personalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoo &amp; Donthu (2001)</td>
<td>Ease of use; aesthetic design; processing speed; security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeithaml, Parasuraman, &amp; Malhotra (2001)</td>
<td>Access; ease of navigation; efficiency; flexibility; reliability; personalization; security; responsiveness; trust; site aesthetics; price knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aladwani &amp; Palvia (2002)</td>
<td>Content quality; appearance; trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loicacono et al. (2002)</td>
<td>Information-fit-to-disk; interactivity; trust; response time; ease of understanding; online completeness; emotional appeal; consistent image; intuitive operations; visual appeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Riel, Lemmink, Streukens, &amp; Liljander (2004)</td>
<td>Accessibility; navigation; design; responsiveness; personalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeithaml, Parasuraman, &amp; Malhotra (2005)</td>
<td>Efficiency; fulfillment; system availability; privacy; responsiveness; contact; personalization; information content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trust is critical to the study of the online business (Hoffman, Novak, & Peralta, 1999; Li et al., 2006) because it has an important effect on consumer behavior (Schurr & Ozanne, 1985). Customer trust plays an important role in determining the likelihood of using the Internet for shopping. In the relationship marketing literature trust is considered a major determinant for establishing a relationship between buyers and sellers (Morgan &
Hunt, 1994; Dweyer et al., 1987; Berry, 1995). In an effort to develop a conceptual framework for classifying trust in e-commerce environments, Bramall, Schoefer, & McKechnie (2004) have presented a testable model describing the relationship between the determinants and consequences of consumer trust in e-retailing.

While there are many constructs of relationship marketing, commitment is one key mediating variable in relational exchanges (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). A central tenet of relationship marketing is the creation and retention of customers who are committed to a provider and who believe that this relationship is mutually beneficial for both parties (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). Relationship quality, as reflected by a combination of commitment, trust, relationship satisfaction, offers the best assessment of relationship solidity and provides the most insight into exchange performance (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schroder, & Iacobucci, 2001). The concept of commitment contributing to relationship marketing has been discussed quite extensively in the literature (Dwyer et al., 1987; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Wetzels et al., 1998; Fullerton, 2005). Frequently reported relationship outcomes are relationship satisfaction, trust, relationship commitment and behavioral loyalty (Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer, & Kumar, 1996). Commitment is a strong indication of relationship longevity and strength which, in turn, are well published predictors of profitability gains. The impact that commitment have on profitability is investigated by several researchers including Reichheld & Sasser (1990), Anderson & Weitz (1992), and Rust & Zahorik (1993).
2.4 Post-Purchase Behaviors: Word-of-Mouth Communication (WOM)

WOM literature dates back several decades, and with the growth of e-commerce, WOM is also gaining importance (Liu et al., 2000). The WOM construct is referred to in the marketing literature as key relationship marketing outcome (Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002). WOM behavior has been also identified as one of the important post-purchase behaviors (Harrison-Walker, 2001). Mangold & Miller (1999) emphasized that interpersonal communication has a significant impact on customers’ post-purchase behavior. Word-of-mouth communication is defined by Dick & Basu (1994) as “volitional post-purchase communications by consumers” (p. 107). According to Anderson (1998, p. 6) WOM is all informal communications between a customer and others relating the evaluations of goods and services, includes “relating pleasant, vivid, or novel experiences; recommendations to others; and even conspicuous display”. WOM has been also defined as “informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage or characteristics of a particular goods and services and/or their sellers” (Westbrook, 1987, p. 261). Thus, WOM communications take place when a customer has strong feelings toward an experience with a service provider which may motivate them to tell others of their experience, in addition to patronizing the company again (Westbrook, 1987).

According to Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955) WOM is seven times more effective than newspaper and magazine advertising, four times more effective than personal selling, and twice effective as radio advertising in influencing customers to switch brands. Mangold’s (1987) concluded that WOM has a more emphatic influence on the purchasing decision than other sources of influence; an indication that personal communications are viewed as
more trustworthy (Murray, 1991). In the same vein, Word of mouth has been found to be
influential in consumer’s decision making for a variety of products and services (Arndt, 1967). Favorable WOM may include “relating pleasant, vivid, or novel experiences; recommendations to others; and even conspicuous display” (Anderson, 1998, p. 6). Customers often engage in WOM for services in particular to gain information that will reduce their risk, help them make comparisons among service alternatives (Bristor, 1990). Hence, WOM is particularly valuable for services, which are high in experience and credence qualities (Anderson, 1998).

Arndt (1967) was one of the earliest researchers into the influence of WOM on customer behavior. He characterized WOM as oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product or service. In services, due to the intangibility of services, it is often assumed that customers have a tendency to rely on inter-personal sources of information (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Gremler, Gwinner, & Brown, 2001). Personal sources are considered more trustworthy (Murray, 1991). Thus, it can be assumed that WOM has an impact on pre-purchasing variables that are antecedents of the receiver’s purchasing decision. Indeed WOM has been shown to influences the receiver’s awareness, attitudes, product evaluations, intensions, and expectations (Butler, 1998).

Generally, the reasons why an individual engages in WOM communication have been extensively reported in literature (Arndt, 1967; Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Ennew, Banerjee, & Li, 2000). Previous research has found that customers engage in WOM communication for altruistic motives, anxiety reduction, advice seeking, product involvement and self-enhancement reasons (Sundram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998). Because
customers generally cannot process all of the information that is available to them for purchase decisions, they often engage in simple guides for simplifying their information-seeking and decision-making processes. WOM communication helps to reduce the amount of information that must be processed in order to make a decision (Dunhan, Johnson, Wilcox, & Harrell, 1997).

According to Buttle (1998) WOM has 5 characteristics: valence, focus, timing, solicitation and intervention.

1. *Valence:* WOM occurs when good news testimonials an endorsements desired by the firm are uttered.

2. *Focus:* management focus on WOM between consumers.

3. *Timing:* WOM can operate as input WOM (WOM as source of pre-purchase information). In addition WOM can operate as output WOM (when customers utter WOM after the purchase or consumption experience).

4. *Solicitation:* WOM may be offered with/without solicitation; it may or may not be sought.

5. *Intervention:* Managing WOM activity may happen at an individual or organizational level.

2.5 Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundation for this dissertation is based on relationship marketing theory in addition to three other prominent theories, the investment model (Rusbult, 1983), organizational commitment theory (Allen & Meyer, 1990), and commitment-trust theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The three theories have been selected to explain why a customer
commits to a relationship with a vendor and how the commitment to behavior is logically connected to the commitment to a relationship. Table 3 shows a summary of research variables and supporting literature. The next section will provide a detailed illustration for the three theories.

2.5.1 The Investment Model (Rusbult, 1983)

The focus of the investment model is the building and maintenance of relationships (Rusbult, 1983). It represents an individual’s previous experience and long-term involvement with a relationship. Customer commitment to a relationship is considered a central construct in the model and is defined as “intent to persist in a relationship, including long-term orientation toward the involvement as well as feelings of psychological attachment” (Rusbult, 1983, p. 359).

There are three antecedent factors of commitment in the investment model. The first antecedent is satisfaction. Satisfaction is conceptualized as the extent to which a relationship is perceived as gratifying. Customers are normally satisfied with a relationship when it offers high rewards and low costs (Rusbult, 1983). Rewards are attributes of a relationship that an individual likes, such as social support. Costs are characteristics of the relationship that an individual dislikes, such as financial burdens. For example, in a romantic relationship, research has demonstrated that the strength of commitment to the relationship is associated with an individual’s feelings of satisfaction (Bui, Peplau, & Hill, 1996; Rusbult, 1980). For the online travel business, embedding playfulness features are of critical importance to attract and retain customers in the long run (Chen, 2001).
According to the investment model, the second antecedent of commitment is *quality of alternatives*, defined as “the perceived desirability of the best available alternative to a relationship” (Rusbult, 1983, p. 359). Quality of alternatives is considered a second important predictor of customer commitment. Consequently, alternatives refer to an individual’s subjective assessment of the rewards and costs that could be attained through another partner outside the current relationship. An example of quality of alternatives in an e-travel setting is when an alternative travel site provides same technologies and services that are provided by a current travel Web site. The greater the quality of alternatives is, the greater the tendencies toward active reactions to dissatisfaction and the lesser the tendencies toward commitment (Li, Bowne, & Chau, 2006). Customers may decide to terminate the current relationship and try a new supplier if they think that the alternative is more attractive in terms of the quality of services offered. The investment model proposes a negative relationship to exist between higher quality alternatives and commitment.

The third factor in the investment model is *investment size*, which is defined as “the magnitude and importance of the resources that are attached to a relationship” (Rusbult, 1983, p.359). The greater investment size is associated with stronger tendencies toward commitment and reduced likelihood of exiting a current relationship (Rusbult, 1983). Additionally, a great deal of investment helps lock an individual into the current relationship (Li, Browne, & Whetherbe, 2006). As a result, increased investment in relationships should perceptually increase the cost of switching to alternative exchange partners (Kahneman & Tversky 1979) and positively associated with affective commitment (Rusbult, 1983). Thus, commitment is also affected by investments of
resources such as time, effort or money that an individual has contributed to the relationship and would lose if the relationship were to end. In summary, according to the investment model, customers who are highly satisfied, invested substantially in a relationship, and experienced lack of an appealing alternative will be highly committed to their current relationships.

2.5.2 Organizational Commitment Theory (Allen & Meyer, 1990)

Commitment theory was originally presented by Becker in 1960. According to him, commitment is viewed as an incline to “engage in consistent lines of activity” (Becker, 1960, p. 33) based on the individual’s recognition of the costs associated with terminating the relationship (Becker, 1960). Kiesler (1971) also defined commitment as “a gradual relation between the individual and their behavioral activity”. Thus, in any given situation, the more the individual acts, the more he/she is involved with the relationship. Commitment develops with time and individuals are constrained to protect the consistency of their decisions over time.

Organizational commitment is the most developed of the various commitment constructs (McElroy & Morrow, 1993). The most prominent approach to organizational commitment in the literature is one in which commitment is considered an affective emotional attachment to the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Buchanan (1974, p. 533) conceptualized commitment as a “partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of the organization, to one’s role in relation to the goals and values, and for the organization for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental worth”. Weiner (1982, p. 471) referred to commitment as the “totality of internalized normative pressures to act in
a way which meets organizational goals and interests”. Thus, it appears that there is a universal consensus regarding the concept of commitment.

Meyer, Allen, & Smith (1987) developed a three-component model of commitment which integrates these various conceptualizations. Allen & Meyer (1990, p. 14) defined commitment as “a psychological state that binds the individual to the organization”. According to them, commitment is conceptualized in terms of three dimensions: affective, continuance, and normative.

- **Affective Commitment** is a desire to belong to the organization.
- **Calculative Commitment** is based on a belief that leaving the organization will be costly.
- **Normative Commitment** is the extent to which a person is obligated to stay with the organization.

2.5.3 Commitment –Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)

Morgan & Hunt (1994) stated that both commitment and trust are essential for successful relationship marketing. Commitment and trust are key because they encourage marketers to: (1) work at maintaining relationship investments by cooperating with exchange partners, (2) resist attractive short-term alternatives in favor of the expected long-term benefits, and (3) feel secure in taking risks with relationship partners without the concern that their partners will act opportunistically.

According to Morgan & Hunt (1994), relationship commitment and trust are key mediating variables between five antecedents, namely: relationship termination costs, relationship benefits, shared values, communication, and opportunistic behavior, and five
outcomes, namely: acquiescence, propensity to leave, cooperation, financial conflict, and uncertainty. In addition, Morgan & Hunt (1994) hypothesized that exchange partners will be more committed to their relationships when they possess shared values. They defined shared values as “the extent to which partners have beliefs in common about what behaviors, goals, and policies are important or unimportant appropriate or inappropriate and right or wrong” (p. 25).

Morgan & Hunt (1994) believe that when companies focus towards building relationships with customers by embracing high standards and allying oneself with exchange partners having similar values, relationship commitment and trust develop. In their study of commitment-trust relationships, Morgan & Hunt (1994) found that shared values were the direct precursor of both relationship commitment and trust influencing them both directly. According to relationship marketing theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), trust is integral to the success of any business relationship (Berry, 1995). In fact, most marketing researchers consider trust as an antecedent to positive relational behavior (Gabriano & Johnson, 1999; Ha, 2004; Leisen & Hyman, 2004).

2.6 Model Development and Research Hypotheses

Given the importance of commitment in the development of relationships, examining the factors that are antecedents to commitment and the outcome of commitment is of vital importance. A model proposed to understand why a customer commits to a travel Web site in a B-to-C setting is shown in Figure 2. The dependent variable in the model is word-of-mouth (WOM) behavior. This section will discuss the nature of size of investment, quality of alternatives, satisfaction, and trust constructs as
antecedents to customer commitment, in addition, the WOM as an outcome to commitment will be discussed as well.

2.6.1 Commitment

Customer commitment is a central construct in the development and maintenance of marketing relationships because it is a key psychological force that links the customer to the organization (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Bansal et al., 2004). In previous studies, commitment has been recognized as an essential ingredient for successful long-term relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Many studies have indicated that customer commitment is an essential mediator of the relationship between the customer’s evaluations of a firm’s performance and the customer’s intention to patronize the firm in the future (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Pritchard et al., 1999; Gruen, Summers, & Acito, 2000; Bansal et al., 2004). This applies whether the focal relationship is a business-to-business relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) or a business-to-customer relationship (Fullerton, 2003). In addition, commitment is a broad construct that extends to a variety of other types of relationships; the employee-employer relationship (Porters, Steers, & Mowday, 1974; Meyer & Allen, 1984; Allen & Meyer, 1990), relationship between organizations (Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Kim & Frazier, 1997), customer-retailer relationship (Bettencourt, 1997; Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekaran, 1998), manufacturer-distributor relationship (Geyskens et al., 1996), and romantic relationships (Rusbult, 1980).

Commitment has been studied in a variety of contexts. Marketing scholars have defined commitment in a variety of ways. Some defined commitment as a desire to
maintain a relationship (Moorman, Deshpande, & Zaltman, 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), a pledge of continuity between parties (Dwyer et al., 1987), the sacrifice or potential for sacrifice if a relationship ends (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). To others, commitment is an enduring attachment to a vendor (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In addition to marketing, it has been studied in psychology (Becker, 1960; Salanik, 1977) and economics (Cook & Emerson, 1978; Williamson, 1985). As such, these studies have given rise to a variety of definitions of commitment and its consideration as a multi-dimensional construct made up of several components. Iniesta (2000, p. 179) integrated all the various aspects of the commitment in one definition: “Commitment is a psychological state generated by an individual’s perceptions, beliefs and emotions which provoke the willingness or intention of developing and maintaining a stable and durable relationship, because the individual wants it or feels that he/she should make it, and which manifests itself in a behavior which bears certain obligation”.

Commitment can provide benefits in the form of reliable, long-term exchange as well as liabilities such as increased vulnerability to opportunism (Gundlach et al., 1995). Verhoef (2003) emphasized the significance of commitment in a customer relationship, as it affects both relationship retention and relationship development. However, providing commitment is reciprocal, the result can be stable long-term relationships through enhanced confidence (Williamson, 1985).

Commitment to the purchasing relationship entails a “desire to develop a stable relationship, a willingness to make short-term sacrifices to maintain the relationship, and a confidence in the stability of the relationship” (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). The essence of commitment in inter-organizational, intra-organizational (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986),
and inter-personal relationships is stability and sacrifice (Kelly, 1983). As such, commitment to the relationship implies the adoption of long-term orientation and a willingness to make short-term sacrifices to realize long-term benefits from the relationship (Dwyer et al., 1987).

Marketing scholars have recognized that commitment has multiple components. However, two components of commitment have dominated the literature (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Pritchard et al., 1999; Fullerton, 2003; Bansal et al., 2004). There are two distinct types of commitment – one that is more emotional in nature and is based on a sense of liking to the partner. This type of commitment is called Affective Commitment. The other view indicates that commitment is more economic in its structure and is rooted in switching costs, sacrifice, and lack of attractive alternatives. This type of commitment is called Calculative Commitment. Affective commitment is non-instrumental and based on the enjoyment of a satisfying relationship (Samuelson & Sandvik, 1997). In contrast, calculative commitment is instrumental and based on getting the job done (Meyer & Allen, 1984). Calculative commitment forces customers to stick to a current relationship due to the high switching costs associated with terminating the relationship (De Ruyter, Wetzes, Bloemer, 1998).

2.6.1.1 Affective Commitment

Affective Commitment is an extensively studied construct in relationship marketing (Wetzels et al., 1998; Gilliland and Bello, 2002; Fullerton, 2003; Li, Browne, & Chau, 2006). Affective Commitment is rooted in shared values, identification, and emotional attachment (Fullerton, 2003; Bansal et al., 2004). It refers to the affective
attachment an individual feels toward the relationship, characterized by identification and involvement with the relationship as well as enjoyment in being part of the relationship (O’Reily & Chatman, 1986; Allen & Meyer, 1990). Some researchers reported that the affective component is the psychological attachment, based on loyalty and affiliation, of one exchange partner to the other (Bhattacharya, Rao, & Glynn 1995). In other words, customers trust and like doing business with a partner when they are affectively committed to that partner.

Affective Commitment is an indication that an individual is staying in a relationship because he/she has a favorable attitude toward the brand. Consequently, affective commitment is reflected by emotionally committed to the vendor (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Sharma & Patterson, 2000) and believing that the vendor is the best alternative (Wong & Sohal, 2002). Of the two forms of commitment, affective commitment is the most effective for developing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between partners (Kumar, Stern, & Steenkamp, 1995).

Dick & Basu (1994) suggested that a potential consequence of affective commitment may include WOM communication. Mayer & Schoorman (1992) found that whereas an individual who is high in affective commitment is motivated to actively engage in behaviors that would help the company achieve its goals, an individual who is high in calculative commitment is motivated to remain passively with an organization. As explained by Mowday, Porter, & Steers (1982), those who value and want to maintain involvement with an organization should be willing to exert considerable effort on its behalf. Harrison-Walker (2001) findings supported the hypothesis that affective
commitment is positively related with WOM communications. Thus, it is apparent that affective commitment is positively related to WOM (See Figure 3).

H1: Affective Commitment is positively related to Word-of-Mouth communications.

2.6.1.2 Calculative Commitment

According to Geyskens et al. (1996), the calculative dimension of commitment measures the degree to which partners experience the need to maintain a relationship given the significant anticipated termination or switching costs associated with leaving the relationship. In a similar vein, De Ruyter, Moorman, & Lemmink (2001) pointed out that because calculative commitment is based on cost-benefit considerations, it has been shown that a positive relationship exists between perceived switching costs and risks on one hand and the calculative dimension of commitment on the other. Additionally, Gilliland & Bello (2002) suggested that the calculative dimension of commitment measures to what extent a customer’s attachment to a supplier is based on structural ties, which is focused on getting the job done. In essence, Calculative Commitment is the intent to continue the relationship, given high switching costs and scarcity of alternatives (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). Such a commitment builds from cost-based calculations and results in a need to stay in the long-term relationship when no other alternatives exist or the costs of switching to other alternatives are too high (Meyer et al., 1993).

Calculative Commitment, which is rooted in scarcity of alternatives and switching costs, has been studied extensively in relationship marketing (Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Fullerton, 2003; Bansal et al., 2004). When customers experience calculative commitment they are bound to the relational partner
because it is difficult to terminate the relationship or they perceive few alternatives outside the existing relationship. Customers are willing to switch between retailers who offer them the best alternative at a particular time with comparable offers (Seiders & Tigert, 1997). As explained by Mowday, Porter, & Steers (1982), those who feel compelled to remain with an organization to avoid financial or other costs may do little more than the minimum required. Likewise, the findings of Fullerton (2005) suggested that calculative commitment has a negative impact on word-of-mouth communication. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed (See Figure 3):

\[ H2: \text{Calculative Commitment is negatively related to Word-of-Mouth communications.} \]

Research has suggested that affective commitment is the most effective for developing relationships between partners (Kumar et al., 1994). Affective commitment has strong negative influences on: (1) development of alternatives for a relationship; and (2) opportunistic behavior. Calculative commitment in contrast has positive influences on development of alternatives, and (2) opportunism. Moreover, affective commitment and calculative commitment are not orthogonal constructs and individuals may feel both psychological states at any point in time (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Calculative commitment has been shown to undermine the positive affects of affective commitment in marketing relationships (Fullerton, 2005). Moreover, Bagozzi (1975a) and Morgan & Hunt (1994) suggested that the affective commitment is a precursor of the calculative commitment. Thus, the calculative evaluations have an effect on the affective evaluations. As such, this research assumes the following hypothesis (See Figure 3):
**H3:** There is no relationship between Calculative Commitment and Affective Commitment.

2.6.2 The Investment Model of Relationship Commitment:

Commitment is a key component of Rusbul'ts (1980) investment model of relational commitment. The investment model was conceived based on Thibaut & Kelley's (1959) principles of interdependence theory and attempts to predict the extent to which an individual is committed and satisfied in a relationship based on rewards, costs, investments, and alternatives (Rusbul't, 1980). According to the model, commitment is a central construct and is defined as the "intent to persist in a relationship, including long-term orientation toward the involvement as well as feelings of psychological attachment"
The model emphasizes that individuals should be more satisfied with relationships they perceive when having more rewards than costs. Moreover, individuals' commitment in relationships is determined by their perceptions of available alternatives outside the current relationship, satisfaction and investment size. In general, commitment should increase as the value of the relationship increases (Rusbult, 1980).

2.6.2.1 Quality of Alternatives

Quality of alternatives refers to the perceived desirability of the best available alternative Web site that provides similar technologies and services as compared to the Web site currently used by a customer (Li, Browne, & Chau, 2006). Rusbult (1983) indicated that the presence of an attractive alternative will threaten a relationship. Greater alternative quality is associated with greater tendencies toward active reactions to dissatisfaction and lesser tendencies toward commitment (Rusbult, 1980). If a customer’s needs are better served by another supplier than by the current one, the customer may try the alternative relationship and therefore, his/her relationship with the current vendor may come to an end. Good quality alternatives appear to be associated with lesser tendencies toward commitment (McLaughlin & Butler, 1974; Pfeffer & Lawler, 1980). Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested (See Figure 4):

\[ H4: \text{Quality of Alternatives is negatively associated with Affective Commitment.} \]

If customers are unaware of attractive alternative suppliers, then they may stay in a relationship even when it is perceived as less than satisfactory. For example customer’s lack of alternatives in a travel setting may force the customer to increase the investment
with the current e-travel vendor and to maintain the current relationship. Such increased investment will help the development of calculative commitment (Salancik, 1977). On the contrary, if a customer is aware of many appealing alternative Web sites, he/she may be biased by the relative advantages of these alternatives and therefore devalue the previous inputs into the current Web site (Li, Browne & Chau, 2006). Thus, the following relationship is proposed (See Figure 4):

**H5: Quality of Alternatives is negatively associated with Calculative Commitment.**

### 2.6.2.2 Investment Size

Investment Size refers to two related qualities: the resources an individual has invested in a relationship; and the original extraneous resources that have become inadvertently linked to a relationship. Investment size may act as a psychological inducement to maintain a relationship (Li et al., 2006). Individuals who are highly invested in a relationship have much to lose should the relationship with the vendor end (Farrell & Rusbult, 1992). The greater investment size is associated with stronger tendencies toward commitment and reduced probability of exiting a current relationship (Rusbult, 1983). As a result, increased investment in relationships should perceptually increase the cost of switching to alternative exchange relationships (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) and positively associated with affective commitment (Rusbult, 1983). Thus, a customer who has invested a great deal of time, effort, and money in a specific travel Web site may become psychologically attached to it. Additionally, customers often feel locked into a costly course of action because of their investment in it and the losses expected if it is terminated. According to Becker (1960) and Salancik (1977), investment
size helps to develop calculative commitments. As such, whether commitment is based on attraction between customer and the travel Web site or commitment is based on weighing of the benefits (calculative), this research proposes the following two hypotheses (See Figure 4):

\[ H6: \text{Investment Size is positively associated with Affective Commitment.} \]

\[ H7: \text{Investment Size is positively associated with Calculative Commitment.} \]

### 2.6.2.3 Satisfaction

The importance of customer satisfaction for maintaining long-term relationships has been recognized in the literature (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002; Burnham, Frels, & Mahajan, 2003). Customer satisfaction is defined as “an overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience with a good or service over time” (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994, p.54). Consequently, satisfaction is a long-term judgment based on past interactions with an online travel web site over long periods of time. Wetzels, De Ruyter, and Birgelen (1998) have indicated that satisfaction is related to commitment.

Satisfaction is an important predictor of the intention to use an information system continuously (Bhattacherjee, 2001). If customers perceive fair prices, quality products, and easy access, customers are more likely to be satisfaction with an e-business (Oliver, 1999). In general, satisfied customers tend to feel more commitment to vendors (Jones & Sasser, 1995). Many studies have indicated that customer satisfaction is positively associated with both calculative and affective commitment (Kelley & Davis, 1994; Samuelsen & Sadvik, 1997; Johnson, Gustafson, Andreassen, Levik, & Cha, 2001). A
study by Wetzels, De Ruyter, & Birgelen (1998) has shown that committed customers at the affective level have a much stronger intention to stay in a relationship with a relationship partner than committed customers at the calculative level. At the same time, satisfaction is expected to relate positively to WOM (Mangold & Miller, 1999). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed (See Figure 4):

**H8:** Satisfaction is positively associated with Affective Commitment.

**H9:** Satisfaction is negatively associated with Calculative Commitment.

Figure 4: Quality of Alternatives, Investment Size, and Satisfaction as Antecedents to Affective & Calculative Commitment
2.6.3 Trust

Trust has become one of the key variables in discussions of marketing relationship management (Macintosh & Lockshin, 1997). Trust is developed through shared values, communication and opportunistic behavior (MacMillan, Money, & Dowining, 2005). Moorman et al (1993) reported that trust exists when one party has confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability, trustworthiness, and integrity. Furthermore, Gwinner, Grenler, & Bitner (1998) also found that customers in long-term relationships with service firms experienced three primary benefits. Among the three, confidence (which is similar to trust) was found to be the most important across several attributes of services. Confidence benefits include a sense of reduced anxiety, faith in the provider, reduced perceptions of anxiety and risk, and knowing what to expect. Trust leads to greater commitment to the relationship and increased cooperation between partners (Hultink & Atuahene-Gima, 2000). However, to achieve its full potential, online travel retailers must deliver high level of privacy, integrity, reliability, and trust where individuals express the desire to maintain the relationship with the current supplier.

Morgan & Hunt (1994) defined trust as one party’s confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity. Trust is also defined by Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman (2001) “a feeling of security held by the consumer that the [store] will meet his/her consumption expectations” (p. 1242). In addition, trust has also been defined as the willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence (Moorman et al., 1993). Lewicki and Bunker (1995) proposed a three-stage development model of trust. To them, different types of trust include:
1. Calculus-based trust (CBT): “trust us an ongoing, market-oriented, economic calculation whose value is derived by comparing the outcomes resulting from creating and sustaining the relationship to the costs of maintaining or serving it” (p. 145). If a relationship is based on CBT, parties trust each other because they can control the costs and benefits of the other’s actions.

2. Knowledge-based trust (KBT): reliance on information and predictability. It occurs when the parties are familiar with each other to the extent that one knows how the other will act in a specific situation (Kelly & Schenitzki, 1970).

3. Identification based trust (IBT): It occurs when the parties understand each others’ intentions and goals.

There are several dimensions of trust: integrity (in terms of honesty and truthfulness), competence (in terms of technical and interpersonal knowledge and skills), consistency (in terms of reliability, predictability, and good judgment in handling situations), loyalty (in terms of willingness to protect and save face for a person), and openness (willingness to share idea and information freely). Therefore, it can be concluded that trust is central to all relational exchanges with an internet marketing relationship.

Trust and commitment are commonly conceptualized as being key construct for successful long-term marketing relationships (Lewin & Johnston, 1997). Moorman, Deshpande, & Zaltman (1993, p. 82) define trust as “a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence”. While commitment has been defined by Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande (1992, p. 316) as “an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship”. Commitment and trust are also the keys for relationship marketing.
(Geyskens et al., 1996). Thus, when both commitment and trust are simultaneously present, they lead directly to cooperative behaviors of relationship marketing success.

2.6.3.1 Commitment and Trust

Commitment and trust are frequently conceptualized as being key constructs in current relationship marketing theory (Lewin & Johnston, 1997). When commitment and trust are present, they produce outcomes which are more efficient, productive, and effective. Thus, commitment and trust lead directly to cooperative behaviors of relationship marketing success. Anderson & Narus (1990) viewed commitment and trust as determinants of the amounts of cooperation exhibited in a relationship and observed that a partner committed to the relationship will cooperate with another member because of a desire to make the relationship work.

Repeat purchases from the same vendor help customers assess the firm’s credibility and benevolence (Donney & Cannon, 1997). Consumer’s privacy concerns regarding their personal information may become a threat to the relationship and, ultimately affect whether customers will purchase online. Moreover, various studies in the relationship marketing area have shown that trust to be crucial in influencing affective commitment (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Consistent with these studies, this research hypothesizes that the higher a customer’s trust in a travel Web site, the higher the motivation to continue a relationship for affective reasons (See Figure 5):

\[ H10: \text{Trust is positively associated with Affective Commitment.} \]
Calculative commitment is the extent to which partners perceive the need to maintain a relationship given the significant anticipated termination or switching costs associated with leaving the relationship. Geyskens et al., (1996) indicated that calculative commitment was found to be negatively influenced by trust. According to them trust exists to the extent that the channel member believes its partner to be benevolent and honest. On the contrary, Wetzels, De Ruyter, and Birgelen (1998) found a significant positive relationship between trust and calculative commitment. Therefore, this research posits the following hypothesis (See Figure 5).

\textit{H11: There is no relationship between Trust and Calculative Commitment.}

Trust is viewed as an essential construct for successful relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Berry, 1995). Law & Leung (2002) reported that the security of the payment online had a great effect on the overall quality of a travel Web site. Likewise, Ranganathan & Ganapathy (2002) found that security and information privacy had greater effects on the purchase intensions of customers. Moreover, a positive association between satisfaction and trust has been found in the marketing literature (Li et al., 2006). This research proposes the following hypothesis (See Figure 5):

\textit{H12: Satisfaction is positively associated with Trust.}

Word-of-mouth has been defined as informal communication about the characteristics of a product which occurs between customers (Westbrook, 1987). Hart & Johnson (1999) argued that firms must establish “total trust” to ensure true customer loyalty. In addition, Ranaweera & Prabhu (2003) have reported that the higher the level
of trust, the higher the level of positive WOM. Thus, the following hypothesis is assumed (See Figure 5):

*H13: Trust is positively associated with Word-of-Mouth communications.*

Figure 5: Trust Relationship with Affective Commitment, Calculative Commitment, Satisfaction & Word-of-Mouth Communication
Figure 2: Model of Commitment in a B-to-C Travel Context (Hypotheses Testing)
2.7 Summary of Hypotheses

H1: Affective Commitment is positively related to word-of-mouth communications.

H2: Calculative Commitment is negatively associated with word-of-mouth Communications.

H3: There is no relationship between Calculative Commitment and Affective Commitment.

H4: Quality of alternatives is negatively associated with Affective Commitment.

H5: Quality of alternatives is negatively associated with Calculative Commitment.

H6: Investment Size is positively associated with Affective Commitment.

H7: Investment Size is positively associated with Calculative Commitment.

H8: Satisfaction is positively associated with Affective Commitment.

H9: Satisfaction is negatively associated with Calculative Commitment.

H10: Trust is positively associated with Affective Commitment.

H11: There is no relationship between Trust and Calculative Commitment.

H12: Satisfaction is positively associated with Trust.

H13: Trust is positively associated with word-of-mouth communications.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Supporting Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affective Commitment</strong></td>
<td>Refers to a situation in which a customer demonstrates an affective and emotional attachment to the relationship with an e-vendor.</td>
<td>O’Reily &amp; Chatman, 1986; Allen &amp; Meyer, 1990; Fournier, 1998; Gilliland &amp; Bello, 2002; McAlexander et al., 2002; Fullerton, 2003.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Calculative commitment</strong></td>
<td>Refers to a situation in which a customer recognizes the rewards and benefits associated with continuing to use a web site and maintaining a relationship with an e-vendor.</td>
<td>Allen &amp; Meyer, 1990; Anderson &amp; Weitz, 1992; De Ruyter, Moorman, &amp; Lemmink 2001; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Fullerton, 2003; Bansal et al., 2004.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of Alternatives</strong></td>
<td>Refers to the perceived desirability of alternative Web sites to the present relationship with the current Web site</td>
<td>Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult, Martz, &amp; Angew, 1998; Li, Browne, &amp; Chau, 2006.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Investment size</strong></td>
<td>Refers to how much customers have already invested in the relationship. Investments can be financial, temporal or emotional</td>
<td>Rusbult, 1983; Chen &amp; Hitt, 2002; Li, Browne, &amp; Chau, 2006.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>Refers to refers to the fact that customers are satisfied when the relationship provides high rewards and low costs.</td>
<td>Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult, Martz, &amp; Angew, 1998.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust</strong></td>
<td>Refers to the basic mechanism used to build a relationship and fostering a long-term orientation in marketing relationships</td>
<td>Morgan &amp; Hunt, 1994; Donney &amp; Cannon, 1997; MacMillan et al., 2005.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Research Variables and Supporting Literature
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The methodology part focuses on the methods used to investigate which components of customer commitment (affective commitment and calculative commitment) enhance and/or undermine word-of-mouth communications (WOM) in an online travel context. This chapter includes a discussion of the instrumentation, the target population, data collection procedures, and the methods of data analysis. The instrument design section includes the scales utilized to measure seven latent variables. Data collection procedures include all sequential steps of data collection. The data analysis section includes the justification for the use of Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling, and plans to assess construct validity for all measures addressed in this study.

The purpose of this research design was to test 13 research hypotheses. There were seven latent variables in this study: quality of alternatives, size of investment, satisfaction, trust, affective commitment, calculative commitment, and word-of-mouth.
In this study:

*Quality of Alternatives* refers to the perceived desirability of alternative Web sites to the present relationship with the current Web site.

*Investment size* refers to how much customers have already invested in the relationship. Investments can be financial, temporal or emotional.

*Satisfaction* refers to the fact that customers are satisfied when the relationship provides high rewards and low costs.

*Trust* refers to the basic mechanism used to build a relationship and fostering a long-term orientation in marketing relationships.

*Affective commitment* refers to a situation in which a customer demonstrates an affective and emotional attachment to the relationship with an e-vendor.

*Calculative commitment* refers to a situation in which a customer recognizes the rewards and benefits associated with continuing to use a web site and maintaining a relationship with an e-vendor.

*Word-of-mouth* refers to volitional post-purchase communications by consumers.

### 3.2 Instrumentation

The latent variables in behavioral science cannot be observed directly; thus the researcher has to use scales to measure the theoretical constructs. The theoretical phenomena that scales intend to measure are called latent variables, while the measured behavior scores are called observed or manifest variables (Byrne, 2001). This study requires the measurement of seven latent variables: *quality of alternatives, investment*
size, satisfaction, trust, affective commitment, calculative commitment, and word-of-mouth. All the measures in this study were adapted from existing scales (See Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective Commitment (AFCM)</th>
<th>Adapted from Allen &amp; Meyer (1990)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFCM01</td>
<td>1. It is easy to become attached to this travel Web site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFCM02</td>
<td>2. This travel site has a great deal of attraction for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFCM03</td>
<td>3. This travel site has a great deal of personal meaning for me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calculative Commitment (CALCM)</th>
<th>Adapted from Allen &amp; Meyer (1990)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CALCM01</td>
<td>1. I am afraid something will be lost if I stop using this travel web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALCM02</td>
<td>2. To stop using this travel web site would require considerable personal sacrifice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALCM03</td>
<td>3. Some aspects of my life would be affected if I stop using this travel Web site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALCM04</td>
<td>4. One of the few serious consequences of stop dealing with this travel web site would be the scarcity of available alternatives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WOM01</td>
<td>1. I tell people positive things about this Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOM02</td>
<td>2. I have only good things to say about this travel web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOM03</td>
<td>3. I am proud to tell others that I use this travel web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOM04</td>
<td>4. I recommend this web site to my friends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Alternatives (ALTER)</th>
<th>Adapted from Rusbullt, Martz, &amp; Agnew (1998)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALTER01</td>
<td>1. An alternative travel Web site is appealing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALTER02</td>
<td>2. To my knowledge, another travel Web site is close to ideal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALTER03</td>
<td>3. An alternative travel Web site is attractive to me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued

Table 6: Constructs and Scale Measures
The survey instrument contained three sections. The first section included *general questions*. The second section included *survey questions* related to the seven latent variables: quality of alternatives, investment size, satisfaction, trust, affective commitment, calculative commitment, and word-of-mouth in section two. All items in section two were measured on a 7-point Likert Scale that ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. Finally, the third section contained *demographic information questions*. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investment Size (INVES)</th>
<th>Adapted from Rusbult, Martz, &amp; Agnew (1998)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INVES01</td>
<td>1. I have put much time into using this travel Web Site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVES02</td>
<td>2. Many aspects of my life have become linked to this Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVES03</td>
<td>3. I have invested a lot in learning how to use this Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVES04</td>
<td>4. The time I have spent on this travel Web site is significant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction (SAT)</th>
<th>Adapted from Rusbult, Martz, &amp; Agnew (1998)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAT01</td>
<td>1. I feel satisfied with this travel Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT02</td>
<td>2. My experience with this travel Web site is very pleasing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT03</td>
<td>3. This travel Web site makes me happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT04</td>
<td>4. This travel Web site does a satisfactory job of fulfilling my needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust (TRUST)</th>
<th>Adapted from Morgan &amp; Hunt (1994) &amp; Yilmaz &amp; Hunt (2001)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRUST01</td>
<td>1. This travel site is perfectly honest and truthful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUST02</td>
<td>2. This travel site can be trusted completely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUST03</td>
<td>3. This travel site can be counted on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUST04</td>
<td>4. This travel site has high integrity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 General Questions

The first section of the questionnaire consisted of 11 general questions. The purpose of the general questions was to identify the respondents’ experiences in purchasing online travel products/services. Seven of the questions were multiple choice questions; two were yes/no answers; and two were open-ended questions.

3.4 Socio-Demographic Questions

The fourth section of the questionnaire included seven socio-demographic questions. The purpose of the demographic questions was to identify the respondents’ demographic characteristics. The parameters included gender, student’s status (full-time/part-time), employment status, age, education, ethnicity, and monthly household income.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 First Pre-Test

The questionnaire was pre-tested using a sample of respondents similar in nature to the final sample. The goal was to ensure readability and logical arrangement of questions. The subjects for the first pre-test included 20 undergraduate students from a large Mid-Western University who had purchased travel products/services on the Internet in the past one year. Upon completion, participants were asked for their feedback regarding the questionnaire. Each participant was asked the same four questions: 1) what did you think about the length of the questionnaire? 2) was the wording of the questions clear and easy to understand? 3) did you have any problems filling out the questionnaire?
If so, what were they? and 4) do you have any suggestions about ways to improve the questionnaire?. As the comments of the pre-test were received, they were thoroughly reviewed, and the questionnaire was revised accordingly.

Reliability and validity tests were then applied to each of the 7 proposed constructs. Scale reliability was computed in order to purify scales prior to final testing. Finally, responses were factor analyzed for construct validity. This analysis confirmed that the factor structures are adequate and that the scales exhibit high reliability and validity.

3.5.2 Second Pre-Test

A total of 70 undergraduate students took part in the second pre-test. Reliability and validity tests were then applied to each of the proposed constructs prior to final test. At the end of the questionnaire students were asked to provide any comments that would improve the questionnaire. The decision to eliminate any item was based on Cronbach’s Alpha (> 0.7) as suggested by Hair et al. (1998). Then, responses were factor analyzed for construct validity. This analysis confirmed that the factor structures are adequate and that the scales exhibit high reliability and validity. The questionnaire was ready for the main study after more improvements were made.

3.6 Target Population

The target population includes a set of people or events to which researchers wish to generalize the results of their study (Romano, 2004). In this study, the target population included undergraduate students who had purchased travel products/services
online over the past year. The accessible population is a set of the target population that is accessible to a researcher because of geographic, temporal, or cultural characteristics (Romano, 2004). In this research the accessible population was limited to undergraduate students in the Department of Consumer Sciences who were enrolled in the following courses: HM 560, HM 561, HM 350, and HM 330. All these students were reached in classroom. To ensure appropriate motivation to complete the questionnaire, some instructors have agreed to give extra credit as a reward for completing the questionnaire.

The student sample is a typical segment of Internet users and has been widely used in previous studies (Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000; Gallagher, Foster, & Parsons 2001; Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003). Ferber (1977) suggests that a student sample is not ideal since it does not fully represent the entire population. However, younger people are appropriate for the online context. Given that university students are typically young and often have significant experience with the web, use of a student sample where the Web is concerned may be superior to a sample of the general population in terms of the predictive validity of any results that are obtained. The importance of the student population for the Internet environment was demonstrated by Gallagher, Foster, & Parsons (2001) and Gallagher, Parsons, & Foster (2001). Another advantage of collecting data from university students is that they typically have considerable experience with e-commerce web sites. Students are very active users of Internet applications and participants in e-commerce activities. In fact, consumers around age 20 have been found to be savvy about online shopping (Forrester Research, 2005). Lastly, Lynch (1999) has emphasized that student samples can be useful to understand relationships and that the impact on external validity is no different to using a similar homogeneous group from the
general population. Some criteria were used to enhance internal validity of the sample. The eligibility criteria of the sample were:

1. Students who had at least one e-mail account and at least one credit or debit card because those were requirements for purchasing on the Internet
2. Students who had purchased travel products at least once at a consumer travel site in the past year.

3.7 Sample Size

According to Grossnickle & Raskin (2001), the larger the sample size, the smaller the sampling error; and the more likely the sample is representative of the target population. Structural equation modeling procedure requires a large sample size because the estimation procedure and the estimation for the model fit are based on the assumption of a large sample size (Hair et al., 1998). Kline (1998) argued that “sample sizes that exceed 200 cases could be considered large” (p. 12). Hoelter (1983) asserted that a sample size of 200 was a critical sample size. Kelloway (1998) suggested that a sample size of at least 200 observations would be an appropriate minimum for structural equation modeling. Hair et al. (1998) also recommended that a size ranging from 100 to 200 is an appropriate size for model estimation. On the other hand, the minimum sample size is at least five times as many as the observed variables for factor analysis (Hair et al., 1998). There are a total of 26 observed variables for the study. Therefore, the minimum sample size for the study is 130 to meet the requirement. However, the researcher has decided to include a usable sample size of 260.
3.8 Measurement Scales

The scales employed in this research were adapted from existing scales to suit the context of the study. All the research constructs were measured using multiple-item seven-point Likert scales adapted from previous studies, with “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree” anchoring the scales. Minor modifications were made to fit the specific context of Travel Web Sites in the present study.

3.8.1 Affective Commitment

Affective commitment refers to a situation in which a customer demonstrates an affective and emotional attachment to the relationship with an e-vendor. It was measured on a three item scale measure adapted from Allen & Meyer (1990). (See Table 7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFCOM01</td>
<td>1. It is easy to become attached to this travel Web site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFCOM02</td>
<td>2. This travel site has a great deal of attraction for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFCOM03</td>
<td>3. This travel site has a great deal of personal meaning for me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Affective Commitment Items

3.8.2 Calculative Commitment

Calculative commitment refers to a situation in which a customer recognizes the rewards and benefits associated with continuing to use a web site and maintaining a relationship with an e-vendor. It was measured on a four item scale measure adapted from Allen & Meyer (1990). (See Table 8)
Table 8: Calculative Commitment Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CALCOM01</td>
<td>1. I am afraid something will be lost if I stop using this travel web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALCOM02</td>
<td>2. To stop using this travel web site would require considerable personal sacrifice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALCOM03</td>
<td>3. Some aspects of my life would be affected if I stop using this travel Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALCOM04</td>
<td>4. One of the few serious consequences of stop dealing with this travel Web site would be the scarcity of available alternatives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.8.3 Word-of-Mouth

WOM defined by Dick & Basu (1994, p. 107), is the “volitional post-purchase communications by consumers” addressing attitudes toward a product and/or provider. It was assessed using a four item index modified from Baloglu’s (2002) & Harrison-Walker (2001). (See Table 9)

Table 9: Word-of-Mouth Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WOM01</td>
<td>1. I tell people positive things about this Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOM02</td>
<td>2. I have only good things to say about this travel web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOM03</td>
<td>3. I am proud to tell others that I use this travel web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOM04</td>
<td>4. I recommend this web site to my friends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.8.4 *Quality of Alternatives*

Quality of alternatives refers to the perceived desirability of alternative Web sites to the present relationship with the current Web site. It was measured using a three item scale measure adapted from Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew (1998) study (See Table 10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALTER01</td>
<td>1. An alternative Web site is appealing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALTER02</td>
<td>2. To my knowledge, another travel Web site is close to ideal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALTER03</td>
<td>3. An alternative travel Web site is attractive to me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Quality of Alternatives Items

3.8.5 *Investment Size*

Investment size refers to how much customers have already invested in the relationship. Investments can be financial, temporal or emotional. It was measured using a four item scale measure adapted from Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew (1998) study. (See Table 11)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INVES01</td>
<td>1. I have put much time into using this Web Site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVES02</td>
<td>2. Many aspects of my life have become linked to this Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVES03</td>
<td>3. I have invested a lot in learning how to use this Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVES04</td>
<td>4. The time I have spent on this Web site is significant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Investment Size Items
3.8.6 Satisfaction

Satisfaction refers to the fact that customers are satisfied when the relationship provides high rewards and low costs. It is a widely discussed construct, and several scales can be found in the extant literature (Ruekert & Churchill, 1984; Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Ganesan, 1994). However, this study used a four item scale adapted from Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew (1998) study as shown in Table 12:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAT01</td>
<td>1. I feel satisfied with this Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT02</td>
<td>2. My experience with this Web site is very pleasing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT03</td>
<td>3. This Travel site makes me happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT04</td>
<td>4. This Web site does a satisfactory job of fulfilling my needs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Customer Satisfaction Items

3.8.7 Trust

Trust refers to the basic mechanism used to build a relationship and fostering a long-term orientation in marketing relationships. Trust was measured using a four item scale measure adapted from Morgan & Hunt (1994) and Yilmaz & Hunt (2001). (See Table 13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRUST01</td>
<td>1. This travel site is perfectly honest and truthful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUST02</td>
<td>2. This travel site can be Trusted completely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUST03</td>
<td>3. This travel site can be counted on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUST04</td>
<td>4. This travel site has high integrity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Trust Items
3.9 Methods of Data Analysis

As suggested (Anderson & Gerbing, 1998; Hair et al., 1998; Hoffman, & Yung, 2000), the analysis was conducted using a two phase approach. First, a confirmatory factor analysis was used to measure the adequacy of the measurement model. Unidimensionality of the constructs, reliability using construct reliability and item reliability were tested. Having ensured that the scale is unidimensional and reliable, the next step was to check construct validity using convergent and discriminant validity. Then the measurement model was evaluated and finalized. In the second phase the structural model was evaluated. The overall model fit in both measurement and structural models was evaluated using conventional fit indices including Chi-Square/df ratio, CFI, NFI, PNFI, RFI, IFI and RMSEA (Bone, Sharma, & Shimp, 1989; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993; Hair et al., 1998, Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). The data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS 15 and Lisrel 8.8.

3.9.1 The Measurement Model (Confirmatory Factor Analysis)

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to evaluate the measurement model. Seven constructs and their corresponding items were initially specified and the Maximum Likelihood (ML) method of estimation was used. ML is a procedure which iteratively improves parameter estimates to minimize a specified fit function (Hair et al., 1998; Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). ML is considered the most common estimation procedure that provides valid results. Constructs were allowed to inter-correlate freely to check for any violation for the multivariate normality assumption.
ML estimation was used to fit the CFA base model, which included all the seven constructs and their corresponding observed variables. Several measures of goodness-of-fit indices were used as suggested by previous studies (Bone, Sharma & Shimp, 1989; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993; Hair et al., 1998; Schumacker & Lomax, 2004): Normed Fit Index (NFI), Relative Fit Index (RFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA); and 90% Confidence Interval for RMSEA. After achieving adequate overall fit indices, the measurement model was further evaluated for its unidimensionality, reliability, and validity (convergent and discriminant) following the guidelines from previous literature (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Gerbing & Anderson, 1982; Byrne, 1994, Hair et al., 1998; Chau & Lai, 2003).

Unidimensionality is an assumption underlying the calculation of reliability and is demonstrated when the indicators of a construct have acceptable fit on a single-factor (one-dimensional) model (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988; Hair et al., 1998). To evaluate unidimensionality, (1) a principal component factor analysis was performed on all observed variables, (2) the item loadings obtained from CFA were evaluated as suggested by previous research (Churchill, 1979; Gerbing & Anderson, 1988).

A research measurement is considered reliable if it yields the same result every time it is repeatedly applied to the same object (Babbie, 1998). Hair et al. (1998) define reliability as the extent to which a variable or set of variables is consistent in what it is intended to measure. Reliability was measured by item reliability and composite reliability (Fornell & Larcker; Hair et al., 1998), which is similar to Cronbach’s alpha but considers the actual factor loadings instead of assessing that each item is equally
weighted. According to Chin (1998a) a standardized loading for each item should be greater than 0.7 to demonstrate reliability, however, a value of 0.5 is considered acceptable. Additionally, a construct reliability value of at least 0.7 is required for a construct to be reliable.

Reliability does not ensure validity. Validity is concerned with the relationship between the concept and the indicator. One does not assess validity of the indicator but rather the application of the indicator (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). Hair et al. (1998) defines validity as the extent to which a measure or set of measures correctly represents the concept of the study “measure what they are supposed to measure”. Validity was assessed in terms of convergent validity and in terms of discriminant validity.

Convergent validity reflects the extent to which conceptually similar measures are substantially correlated. Convergent validity was assessed by examining factor loading and average variance extracted. Convergent validity requires a factor loading greater than 0.70 and an average variance extracted of at least 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981, Hair et al., 1998). On the other hand, discriminant validity reflects the extent to which the measures of different constructs are distinctly different from each other. Discriminant validity was assessed using the average variance extracted as suggested by Fornell & Larcker (1981). To ensure the discriminant validity the average variance extracted for each construct (that is the average variance shared among the construct’s items) should be greater than the squared correlations (that is the shared variance) between the construct and all other constructs in the model. Once the measures provided evidence of un-dimensionality of the constructs, reliability, and validity (convergent and discriminant), the structural model can be evaluated.
3.9.2 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

SEM is a widely used technique in academic research (Hair et al., 1998; Schmacker and Lomax, 2004). SEM has two basic advantages: (1) it allows for the estimation of a series, but independent, multiple regression equations simultaneously, and (2) it has the ability to incorporate latent variables into the analysis and accounts for measurement errors in the estimation process (Hair et al., 1998).

Structural equation modeling is a statistical methodology with a confirmatory approach to analyze multivariate data. The general SEM model is composed of two sub-models: a measure model and a structural model. The measurement model identifies relations between the observed and latent variables. By means of confirmatory factor analysis, the measurement model provides the link between scores on an instrument and the constructs that they are designed to measure. The structural model identifies casual relations among the latent variables. It specifies that particular latent variables directly or indirectly influence certain other latent variables in the model (Byrne, 2001).
3.10 Summary

In this chapter the methodology section has been discussed. The methodology part focuses on the methods used to investigate which components of customer commitment (affective commitment and calculative commitment) enhance and/or undermine word-of-mouth communications (WOM) in an online travel context. This chapter included a discussion of the instrumentation, the target population, data collection procedures, and the methods of data analysis. The scales utilized to measure the seven latent variables have been determined. There were seven latent variables in this study: quality of alternatives, size of investment, satisfaction, trust, affective commitment, calculative commitment, and word-of-mouth. The justification for the use of Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling, and plans to assess construct validity for all measures has been addressed as well. The purpose of this research design was to test 13 research hypotheses.

The next chapter is chapter four “RESULTS”. This chapter reports the analysis of questionnaire response data. It is composed of four sections relating to the analysis and presentation of findings: (a) Sample size and demographics, (b) Unidimensionality, reliability, and validity, (c) Results of the measurement model and the structural equation model, and (d) Summary.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 The Pilot Study

Prior to the main study, the survey was pre-tested twice. The first pre-test included a sample of 20 undergraduate students in the Department of Consumer Sciences at a large Mid-Western University. This sample was similar in characteristic to the final sample that was used for testing the structural model. Upon completion, the respondents were asked for their feedback regarding the questionnaire. This helped to establish face validity of measures and ensured readability, appropriateness, and logical arrangements of questions in the questionnaire. The comments of the first pre-test were thoroughly reviewed, and the questionnaire was revised accordingly.

After implementing the suggestions from the first pre-test, the questionnaire was pre-tested for a second time on 70 undergraduate students. At the end of the questionnaire students were asked to provide any comments that would improve the questionnaire. All constructs had reliability coefficients greater than the suggested level of 0.70 (Hair et al., 1998) (See Table 14). The questionnaire was ready for the main study after more improvements were made to it.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability</th>
<th>Number of Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-Mouth (WOM)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust (TRUST)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Commitment (AFCOM)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculative Commitment (CALCOM)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment Size (INVES)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction (SAT)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Quality (ALTER)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Construct Reliabilities from the Pre-test

4.2 The Main Study

4.2.1 Procedure for Data Collection

The questionnaire was finalized based on the feedback obtained from the second pre-test. In this study the population was limited to undergraduate students in the Department of Consumer Sciences who were enrolled in the following courses: HM 230, HM 560, HM 561, and HM 350. The researcher reached students in classroom during the class session and participation in the study was voluntary. If the subject agreed to participate in the study, then he/she was asked to fill a questionnaire. To ensure appropriate motivation to complete the questionnaire, some instructors have agreed to give extra credit as a reward for completing the questionnaire. The researcher’s presence in the classroom during data collection has many advantages: the researcher is able to
explain the study better, answer any questions the respondents may have immediately, and ensure the missing data is minimized.

The first and the second question in the questionnaire were for screening purposes, to make sure that only those subjects who 1) had purchased travel products at a customer travel Web site in the past year for travel purposes, 2) have at least one e-mail account and at least one credit or debit card. If the subject did not purchase travel products in the past year and/or did not have at least one e-mail account in addition to at least one credit or debit card, then he/she was removed from the analysis.

4.2.2 Measures

All the research constructs were measured using multiple-item seven-point Likert scales. All scales were adapted from previous studies, with “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” anchoring the scale. Minor modifications were made to fit the context of a travel Web site. Specifically, word- of-mouth (WOM) was assessed using a four-item index modified from Baloglu’s (2002) & Harrison-Walker (2001). Trust was measured using a four-item scale measure adapted from Morgan & Hunt (1994) & Yilmaz & Hunt (2001). Affective commitment was measured on a three-item scale measure adapted from Allen & Meyer (1990). Calculative commitment was measured on a four-item scale measure adapted from Allen & Meyer (1990). Investment size was measured using a four-item scale measure adapted from Rusbult, Martz, & Angew (1998). Satisfaction was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Rusbult, Martz, & Angew (1998). Finally, quality of alternatives was measured using a three-item scale measure adapted from Rusbult, Martz, & Angew (1998).
4.2.3 Sample Characteristics

A total of 260 questionnaires were collected. The incomplete and the unreliable questionnaires were removed from the analyses. The listwise deletion method was used to treat missing data. Listwise deletion, which simply excludes an entire case from the data analysis when at least one variable is missing, is often the default option for analysis in many statistical software packages (Little & Rubin, 1987). The listwise method of cases deletion is appropriate for this study since only some of the data were missing (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). After removing the unreliable questionnaires and the cases with missing data, only 234 were used for data analysis purposes. The majority of respondents (50.9 %) were within the age group of 21 to 22 and 97 % were full-time undergraduate students. 74.4 % of the sample was made up of females and 84.2 % were Caucasian. Additionally, 42.3 % of respondents reported a monthly household income of under $1,000, 33.3 % between $1,000 and $1,999, and 9.8 % $2,000 and $2,999. Table X shows the demographics of all the respondents. (See Table 15)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Male</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Female</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>74.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Under 19 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 19-20 years</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 21-22 years</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 23-24 years</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 25-26 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 27 or older</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1st year in college</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 2nd year in college</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 3rd year in college</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 4th year in college</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 5th year in college</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- more than 5 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly Household income:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Under $1,000</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $1,000-$1,999</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $2,000-$2,999</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $3,000-$3,999</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $4,000-$4,999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $5,000-$5,999</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $6,000-$6,999</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $7,000 or more</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: Sample Characteristics

As shown in Table 16, respondents’ favorite Web sites were Orbitz.com, Trevelocity.com, Expedia.com, Hotwire.com, Cheaptickets.com, and Hotels.com in order of preference. In terms of the travel website usage; 12% used a travel website at least
once a month, 21.8% once every 3 months, 27.8% every 6 months, and 44.9% once a year. As for the airline purchase behavior; only a small percent (2.6%) of the sample never bought an airline ticket online, while 49.1% reported a purchase of an airline ticket once a year. In terms of hotel room purchase; our sample has revealed that 29.9% never used a travel website to purchase a hotel room, 40.6% reported that they use a website once a year to purchase a hotel room. Furthermore, the majority of the sample (77.8%) has indicated that they never used a travel website to rent a car. Finally, in terms of online spending for travel products and services over the past year; 20.9% of the respondents spent $1,000 or more, 13.2% spent between $799 and $999, and only 3.8% spent under $100.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Favorite Web site</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- None</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Orbitz</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Travelocity</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Expedia</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hotwire</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cheap Tickets</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hotels.com</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency of Online Navigation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Travel):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Once a year</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Once every 6 months</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Once every 3 months</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Once a month</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Money Spent on Travel</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Yearly):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Under $100</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $101-$200</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $201-$300</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $301-$400</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $401-$500</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $501-$699</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $700-$999</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- $1,000 or more</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: Sample Characteristics in Terms of Travel Site Preference & Spending

### 4.2.4 Results and Analysis

As suggested by Anderson & Gerbing (1998) and Novak, Hoffman, & Yung (2000) structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized model. SEM techniques are distinguished by two characteristics: (1) estimation of multiple and
interrelated dependence relationships, and (2) the ability to present unobserved concepts in these relationships and account for measurement error in the estimation process (Hair et al., 1998). SEM allows for testing both the measurement model and the structural modeling simultaneously (Anderson & Gerbing, 1998; Novak, Hoffman, & Yung, 2000; Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). In the measurement model, the researcher specifies a certain number of constructs, which constructs are correlated, and which observed variables measure each construct (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). In other words, the measurement model specifies the relationship between the observed variables and their posited underlying latent variables to test which observed variables appear to best measure each latent variable. The measurement model should demonstrate a satisfactory level of reliability and validity before testing for significant relationships in the structural model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). On the other hand, the structural model specifies the casual relationship among the latent variables as guided by theory to test for the significance, strength and directionality of the paths. Thus, the structural model allows for certain relationships among the latent variables depicted by the direction of the arrow (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004).

A correlation matrix, mean, and standard deviation were input in the Lisrel 8.8 program in order to obtain the Maximum Likelihood estimation. Then the program created the covariance matrix that was used for analysis. Hair et al. (1998) recommended that a size ranging from 100 to 200 is an appropriate size for model estimation. Given the total usable sample size of 234, the sample was considered to be of acceptable size because it was more than the minimum required sample size.
4.2.5 The Measurement Model (CFA)

The measurement model was estimated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The model was then purified by eliminating measured variables and latent factors that do not fit well by an initial CFA model. In this research CFA was used to test the validity, unidimensionality, and reliability of the measured variables used in the measurement model. Additionally, to measure the construct validity of the instrument, convergent and discriminant validity were measured.

In CFA, seven latent variables (word-of-mouth, trust, affective commitment, calculative commitment, investment size, satisfaction, and alternative quality) and their corresponding measured variables were specified and the Maximum Likelihood method was used for estimation since the multivariate normality assumption was not severely violated.

Two procedures were used to evaluate the multivariate normality assumption. Firstly, as proposed by McDonald & Ho (2002) the multivariate normality assumption was evaluated at the univariate level. The marginal distribution of each variable was checked and accordingly outliers, a likely source of skewed data, were removed from the analysis. Secondly, as suggested by Khattree & Naik (1995), Mahalanobis squared distances were plotted against chi-square quantiles as presented in Figure 6. A visual inspection of Figure 6 indicated that the chi-square plot was closely passing through the 45 degree reference line. This inspection implied that the assumption of multivariate normality of the dependent variables was not seriously violated.
Since the multivariate normality assumption was not severely violated, the maximum likelihood method of estimation was used (Schumaker & Lomax, 2004). The goodness-of-fit measures were used to assess the overall model fit. As indicated by the results of the study, the overall fit indices for the proposed/base model was acceptable, with Chi-square/df equal to 1.8, RMSEA of 0.056, NFI of 0.94, CFI of 0.97, PNFI of 0.81, IFI of 0.97, and RFI of 0.93. The 90 percent confidence interval of RMSEA was in the acceptable range, since it was less than 1 (See Table 14). All the above fit indices for
the base model indicated an acceptable fit (Bone, Sharma, & Shimp, 1989; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993; Hair et al., 1998).

The base model was further modified to fit the data better. As suggested by the modification indices (Lisrel output), which is an estimate of the decrease in chi-square that is obtained if a particular path is introduced in the model (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993), three additional paths were added to the model:

1) AFCOM17 AFCOM 18 CALCOM19 CALCOM20 CALCOM21 = CALCOM
2) AFCOM17 INVES26 CALCOM19 CALCOM20 CALCOM21 = CALCOM
3) TRUST13 AFCOM17 SAT30-SAT33 = SAT

The same fit indices used to measure the base model fit were used to measure the purified model fit. The fit indices for the purified model represented a better data fit to the model: Chi-square/df = 1.39, RMSEA = 0.04, NFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.99, PNFI = 0.82, IFI = 0.99, RFI = 0.94, the 90 percent confidence interval of RMSEA was in the acceptable range between 0.029 and 0.049 (See Table 17).
### Table 17: Measurement Model Fit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goodness-of-fit Statistics</th>
<th>Values (Base Model)</th>
<th>Values (Purified Model)</th>
<th>Desired values for Good Fit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square/df test $\chi^2$</td>
<td>502/502 = 1.8</td>
<td>383.06/274= 1.39</td>
<td>&lt; 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>&lt; 0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normed fit Index (NFI)</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>&gt; 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative fit index (CFI)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>&gt; 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsimonious named fit index (PNFI)</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>&gt; 0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental fit index (IFI)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>&gt; 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Fit index (RFI)</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>&gt; 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 Percent Confidence Interval for RMSEA</td>
<td>(0.047 ; 0.064)</td>
<td>(0.029; 0.049)</td>
<td>(&lt; 1; &lt; 1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.6. Evaluating the Measurement Model

After achieving adequate overall fit indices, the measurement model was further evaluated for its unidimensionality, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

#### 4.2.6.1 Unidimensionality

Cronbach alpha, the customary index of reliability, underestimates the reliability of a multidimensional measure. The use of reliability measures does not ensure unidimensionality but assumes that it exits (Hair et al., 1998). Thus the reliability of a
measure should be assessed after unidimensionality is demonstrated (Gerbing & Anderson, 1982). A unidimensional item has only one underlying construct, and a unidimensional measure consists of unidimensional items (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). A principal component factor analysis performed on all items provided evidence of unidimensionality. In addition, the item loadings obtained from the CFA confirmed the unidimensionality of all the seven latent constructs because the items loaded highly on their respective latent constructs thus confirming unidimensionality (See Table 18).

4.2.6.2 Reliability

Reliability can be assessed at two levels: Item reliability and construct reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 1998). Item reliability indicates “the amount of variance in an item due to underlying construct rather than to error and can be obtained by squaring the factor loadings” (Chau, 1997, p. 324). An item reliability greater than 0.50 (Roughly corresponds to standardized loading of 0.7) is considered to be evidence of reliability. Chin (1998a) indicated that the standardized loading for each item should be greater than 0.7 to demonstrate reliability but a value of 0.50 is still acceptable. A composite (construct) reliability value of at least 0.7 is required for a construct to be reliable.

Table 18 shows the results of item reliability and constructs reliability. The reliabilities of the different measures included in the model ranged from 0.35 to 0.98 thus indicating good item reliability. The composite reliabilities for all the constructs were above the threshold value of 0.70 (ranged from 0.78 to 0.91), an indication of high reliability for all the constructs.
4.2.6.3 Validity

Having ensured that a scale is unidimensional and meets the necessary levels of reliability, the next step would be the scale validity. Validity is the extent to which a scale or set of measures accurately represents the concept of interest (Hair et al., 1998). Although there are various forms of validity, this study tested only convergent and discriminant validity.

4.2.6.3.1 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity assesses the degree to which two measures of the same concept are correlated where high correlations indicate that the scale is measuring its intended construct. Thus, the items should load strongly on their own construct (Byrne, 1994). The average variance extracted (AVE) as suggested by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 1998; Chau & Lai, 2003) was used to assess convergent validity. Higher variance extracted values denote that the indicators are truly representative of the latent construct. Guidelines suggest that the average variance extracted value should exceed 0.50 for a construct (Hair et al., 1998). Table 18 shows that the AVE values ranged from 0.56 to 0.77, exceeding the 0.50 threshold value. As such, the convergent validity was not an issue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Standardized loadings</th>
<th>Item reliability</th>
<th>t-value*</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Construct Reliability**</th>
<th>AVE***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word of-mouth (WOM)</td>
<td>WOM1</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WOM2</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>10.09</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WOM3</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>10.77</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WOM4</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>11.38</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>TRUST1</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRUST2</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>16.36</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRUST3</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>14.31</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TRUST4</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>14.79</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Commitment (AFCOM)</td>
<td>AFCOM1</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AFCOM2</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AFCOM3</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>10.03</td>
<td>0.084</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Calculative Commitment (CALCOM)</td>
<td>CALCOM1</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CALCOM2</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>15.52</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CALCOM3</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>14.44</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment Size (INVES)</td>
<td>INVES1</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INVES2</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>10.82</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INVES3</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>11.47</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction (SAT)</td>
<td>SAT1</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SAT2</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>16.81</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SAT3</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>12.18</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Alternatives (ALTER)</td>
<td>ALTER1</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ALTER2</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>7.24</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ALTER3</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: Measurement Model Results

*All factor loadings are significant at p=0.05

**Construct Reliability = (Σ Standardized loadings)² / (Σ Standardized loadings)² + ΣЄj

***Average Variance Extracted (AVE) = Σ (Standardized loadings²) / Σ (Standardized loadings²) + ΣЄj

Where Єj is the measurement error
4.2.6.3.2 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity is the degree to which two conceptually similar concepts are distinct. The measures of theoretically different constructs should have a low correlation with each other. Therefore, a low cross-construct correlation is an indication of discriminant validity. According to Fornell & Larcker (1981), discriminant validity can be assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE). To ensure the discriminant validity, the average variance extracted for each construct (that is the average variance shared among the construct’s items) should be greater than the squared correlations (that is shared variance) between the construct and all other constructs in the model. Table 19 indicated high discriminant validity between each pair of constructs. For example, affective commitment (AFCOM) exhibited high discriminant validity from all other constructs. The AVE for (AFCOM) was 0.77 while the shared variance between (AFCOM) and other constructs ranged from -0.01 to 0.45, an indication of discriminant validity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WOM</th>
<th>TRUST</th>
<th>AFCOM</th>
<th>CALCOM</th>
<th>INVES</th>
<th>SAT</th>
<th>ALTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WOM</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUST</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFCOM</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALCOM</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INVES</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALTER</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19: Discriminant Validity Matrix
4.2.7 The Structural Equation Model

Structural equation modeling (SEM) involves developing measurement models to define latent variables and then establishing relationships or structural equations among the latent variables. As such, the structural model was based on the measurement model obtained in the previous section (CFA results). Seven latent constructs (Word-of-mouth, trust, affective commitment, calculative commitment, investment size, satisfaction, and quality of alternatives) and 26 observed variables were used to test the model. According to Bentler (1990) the significance of the path coefficient in the model provides support for hypothesized relationships. Since the normality assumption was not severely violated, the maximum likelihood estimation method using Lisrel 8.8 was used to test the base model.

4.2.7.1 Base Structural Model Fit

Since chi-square is N – 1 times the minimum value of the fit function, chi-square tends to be large in large samples if the model does not hold (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). A number of goodness-of-fit measures have been proposed to eliminate or reduce its dependence on sample size. As such, in this study the overall model fit was assessed using multiple fit indices (Hair et al., 1998; Schumacker & Lomax, 2004).

The goodness-of-fit measures were used to assess the overall structural model fit. As indicated by the results of the study as shown in table, the overall fit indices for the proposed/base model was acceptable, with Chi-square/df equal to 1.7, RMSEA of 0.053, NFI of 0.94, CFI of 0.97, PNFI of 0.81, IFI of 0.97, and RFI of 0.93. The 90 percent confidence interval of RMSEA was in the acceptable range, since it was less than 1. All the above fit indices for the base model indicated an acceptable structural model fit.
The base model was modified to fit the structural model better. As suggested by the modification indices (Lisrel output), an estimate of the decrease in chi-square that is obtained if a particular path is introduced in the model (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993).

Two additional paths were added to the model:

1) \( \text{AFCOM} = \text{INVES SAT TRUST ALTER CALCOM} \)

2) \( \text{SAT} = \text{TRUST13 AFCOM17 INVES27 SAT31-SAT33} \)

The same fit indices used to measure the base structural model fit were used to measure the purified structural model fit. The fit indices for the purified model represented a better model fit: Chi-square/df = 1.6, RMSEA = 0.050, NFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.98, PNFI = 0.82, IFI = 0.99, RFI = 0.94, the 90 percent confidence interval of RMSEA was in the acceptable range between 0.042 and 0.059 (See Table 20).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goodness-of-fit Statistics</th>
<th>Values (base model)</th>
<th>Values (purified model)</th>
<th>Desired values for Good Fit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square/df test ( \chi^2 )</td>
<td>484.06/280 = 1.7</td>
<td>383.06/274 = 1.6</td>
<td>&lt;3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)</td>
<td>0.053</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>&lt; 0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normed fit Index (NFI)</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>&gt; 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative fit index (CFI)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>&gt; 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsimonious named fit index (PNFI)</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>&gt; 0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental fit index (IFI)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>&gt; 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Fit index (RFI)</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>&gt; 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 Percent Confidence Interval for RMSEA =</td>
<td>(0.044 ; 0.061)</td>
<td>(0.042; 0.059)</td>
<td>(&lt; 1; &lt; 1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: Final Model Fit
4.2.8 Testing of Hypotheses

Hypotheses testing involve confirming that a theoretical specified model fits sample variance-covariance data, and testing structural coefficients for significance (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). Consequently, the path relationships between the seven latent variables (Word-of-mouth, trust, affective commitment, calculative commitment, investment size, satisfaction, and quality of alternatives) were examined. Thirteen hypothesized paths were tested for significance in this research. Table 21 shows a summary of the thirteen hypothesized paths.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: AFCOM $\rightarrow$ (+) WOM</td>
<td>Affective commitment is positively related to word-of-mouth communications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: CALCOM $\rightarrow$ (-) WOM</td>
<td>Calculative commitment is negatively associated with word-of-mouth communications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: CALCOM $\rightarrow$ (+) AFCOM</td>
<td>Calculative commitment is positively associated with affective commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: ALTER $\rightarrow$ (-) AFCOM</td>
<td>Quality of alternatives is negatively associated with affective commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5: ALTER $\rightarrow$ (-) CALCOM</td>
<td>Quality of alternatives is negatively associated with calculative commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6: INVES $\rightarrow$ (+) AFCOM</td>
<td>Investment size is positively associated with affective commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7: INVES $\rightarrow$ (+) CALCOM</td>
<td>Investment size is positively associated with calculative commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H8: SAT $\rightarrow$ (+) AFCOM</td>
<td>Satisfaction is positively associated with affective commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H9: SAT $\rightarrow$ (+) CALCOM</td>
<td>Satisfaction is negatively associated with calculative commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H10: SAT $\rightarrow$ (+) TRUST</td>
<td>Satisfaction is positively associated with trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H11: TRUST $\rightarrow$ (+) AFCOM</td>
<td>Trust is positively associated with affective commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H12: TRUST $\rightarrow$ (+) CALCOM</td>
<td>Trust is positively associated with calculative commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H13: TRUST $\rightarrow$ (+) WOM</td>
<td>Trust is positively associated with word-of-mouth communications.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:  
WOM = Word-of-Mouth  
TRUST = TRUST  
AFCOM = Affective Commitment  
CALCOM = Calculative Commitment  
INVES = Investment Size  
SAT = Satisfaction  
ALTER = Alternative Quality

Table 21: Summary of Hypotheses
Thirteen paths among the seven latent variables were tested. The significance of the path depends on t-value that equals parameter estimate divided by standard error of the parameter estimate. If the critical value exceeds the expected value at a specified $\alpha$ level, then the parameter is significantly different from zero (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). In addition the sign whether +/- is an indication of the relationship; positive denotes to a positive relationship between the two constructs, whereas negative denotes to an inverse relationship between the two constructs.

The results of the study as depicted in Figure 7, indicates that eleven of the paths were significant in the structural model. Two paths (TRUST-> AFCOM, CALCOM-> WOM) were significant at $p < 0.05$. Additionally nine paths (AFCOM-> WOM, CALCOM-> AFCOM, INVES-> AFCOM, INVES-> CALCOM, SAT-> AFCOM, SAT-> CALCOM, SAT-> TRUST, TRUST-> CALCOM, TRUST-> WOM) were significant at $p < 0.01$. The results of the structural model are shown in table 22.
As shown in table 22, Hypothesis 1, predicting a positive relationship between affective commitment (AFCOM) and word-of-mouth (WOM) was supported. The results
revealed that the path coefficient between the two constructs was (0.63), positively significant at p < 0.01.

Hypothesis 2, predicting a negative relationship between calculative commitment (CALCOM) and word-of-mouth (WOM) was supported. The path coefficient between the two constructs (-0.14) was negatively significant at p < 0.05.

Hypothesis 3, predicting a positive relationship between calculative commitment (CALCOM) and affective commitment (AFCOM) was supported. The path coefficient between the two constructs (0.24) was significant at p < 0.01.

Hypothesis 4, predicting a negative relationship between quality of alternatives (ALTER) and affective commitment (AFCOM) was not supported. Additionally, Hypothesis 5, predicting a negative relationship between quality of alternatives (ALTER) and calculative commitment (CALCOM) was not supported.

Hypothesis 6, predicting a positive relationship between investment size (INVES) and affective commitment (AFCOM) was supported. The path coefficient between the two constructs (0.31) was significant at p < 0.01.

Hypothesis 7, predicting a positive relationship between investment size (INVES) and calculative commitment (CALCOM) was supported. The path coefficient (0.67) was significant at p < 0.01.

Hypothesis 8, predicting a positive relationship between satisfaction (SAT) and affective commitment (AFCOM) was supported. The path coefficient (0.41) was significant at p < 0.01.
Hypothesis 9, predicting a negative relationship between satisfaction (SAT) and calculative commitment (CALCOM) was supported. The path coefficient (-0.28) was significant at p < 0.01.

Hypothesis 10, predicting a positive relationship between satisfaction (SAT) and trust (TRUST) was supported. The path coefficient between the two constructs (0.67) was significant at p < 0.01.

Hypothesis 11, predicting a positive relationship between trust (TRUST) and affective commitment (AFCOM) was supported. The path coefficient between both constructs was (0.14) significant at p < 0.05.

Hypothesis 12, predicting a positive relationship between trust (TRUST) and calculative commitment (CALCOM) was supported. The path coefficient between the two constructs was (0.22) significant at p < 0.01.

Finally, hypothesis 13, predicting a positive relationship between trust (TRUST) and word-of-mouth (WOM) was supported. The path coefficient between the two constructs (0.29) was significant at p < 0.01.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter estimates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structural paths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Standardized path coefficients</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Supported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: AFCOM → (+) WOM</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>6.48***</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: CALCOM → (-) WOM</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-2.09**</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: CALCOM → (+) AFCOM</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>2.73***</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: ALTER → (-) AFCOM</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.015n.s</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5: ALTER → (-) CALCOM</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.23n.s</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6: INVES → (+) AFCOM</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>3.32***</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7: INVES → (+) CALCOM</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>8.18***</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H8: SAT → (+) AFCOM</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>4.18***</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H9: SAT → (-) CALCOM</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>-3.98***</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H10: SAT → (+) TRUST</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>9.64***</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H11: TRUST → (+) AFCOM</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>1.65**</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H12: TRUST → (+) CALCOM</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>2.71***</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H13: TRUST → (+) WOM</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>4.01***</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01; n.s. non-significant

Table 22: Standardized path coefficient and t-value for the structural model
4.3 Summary

In this chapter results were presented. This chapter included a discussion of the pilot study procedure, procedures for data collection, sample characteristics, the measurement model evaluation, and the structural equation evaluation in terms of final model fit. The results have indicated a support of the following hypotheses: H1, H2, H3, H6, H7, H8, H9, H10, H11, H12, H13. However, H4 & H5 were not supported.

The next chapter is chapter five “DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION”. This chapter is divided into four sections, namely, (1) discussion of results; (2) limitations; (3) implications for research; and (4) Implications for practice.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

With the popularity of e-commerce, the Web offers a great opportunity to build relationships (Aladwani; 2001). The focus of this study was e-commerce Web sites that offer travel products and services in a Business-to-Customer (B-to-C) setting. However, developing the ability both to attract new customers and to retain existing ones on travel web sites is a major challenge and has drawn considerable attention from the research community (Piccoli, Brohman, Watson, & Parasuraman, 2004; Boyer & Hut, 2005). For a variety of reasons, the web makes it relatively easy to switch from one travel web site to another travel web site that offers similar products and services. Some customers for instance are committed to continue their patronage to a specific travel web site (i.e. Expedia.com, Travelocity.com, or Orbitz.com) and do not switch to other that provide similar services or content (i.e. Hotels.com, Hotwires.com, or Cheaptickets.com).

The purpose of this study was to develop a research model based on three relationship theories, the investment model (Rusbult, 1983), organizational commitment theory (Allen & Meyer, 1990), and commitment-trust theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The three theories are helpful in explaining why a customer commits to a relationship with a company and how the commitment to behavior is logically connected to the
commitment to a relationship. These theories are centered on the role of commitment and its effect on post-purchase behaviors (WOM communications). While there is ample support for the position that customer commitment facilitates the development of marketing relationships, however, the basic research question examined in this dissertation was the extent to which the specific components of customer commitment enhance and/or potentially detract from WOM behaviors in B-to-C relationships in a travel setting.

This chapter is divided into four sections, namely, (1) discussion of results; (2) limitations; (3) implications for research; and (4) implications for practice.

5.1 Discussion of Results

The overall model fit was assessed using multiple fit indices as suggested by (Hu et al., 1992; Hair et al., 1998; Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). The study reported the following fit indices for the final model: Chi-square/df = 1.6, RMSEA = 0.050, NFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.98, PNFI = 0.82, IFI = 0.99, RFI = 0.94, the 90 percent confidence interval of RMSEA was in the acceptable range between 0.042 and 0.059; an indication that the final structural model fit the data well.

A complete discussion of the results for the thirteen hypotheses derived from the three theories of relationship commitment, organizational commitment theory (Allen & Meyer, 1990), the investment model (Rusbult, 1983), and commitment-trust theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994); is provided in the following section:
5.1.1 Organizational Commitment Theory (Allen & Meyer, 1990)

5.1.1.1 H1: *Affective commitment (AFCOM) is positively related to word-of-mouth Communications (WOM).*

This research found that affective commitment had a significant positive impact on word-of-mouth communications. The path coefficient between these two constructs was 0.63, significant at p < 0.05. The findings regarding the relationship between the affective commitment and WOM were as expected and consistent with previous studies. For example, Harrison-Walker (2001) findings indicated that affective commitment is positively related to word-of-mouth communications. Additionally, Mayer and Schoorman (1992) reported that an individual who is high in affective commitment is motivated to engage in positive behaviors that would assist the firm achieve its desired goals. The relationship between affective commitment and WOM may be explained by reason that both are attitudinal measures (Portal et al., 1974), involving attitudes toward a service provider in terms of “liking” or “disliking”. This result demonstrated that if a customer stays affectively committed to a travel Web site because he/she likes the firm, then any WOM communication that takes place should be favorable on the firm’s behalf.

5.1.1.2 H2: *Calculative Commitment (CALCOM) is negatively related to word-of-mouth Communications (WOM).*

The findings of this study suggested a significant negative relationship between calculative commitment and word-of-mouth communications. The path coefficient between these two constructs was -0.24, significant at p < 0.01 level. This result is consistent with other studies that have examined the relationship between calculative
commitment and WOM communications. For example, Harrison-Walker (2001) found that calculative commitment is negatively related to WOM communications. Additionally, according to Mowday, Porter, & Steers (1982) customers who feel the need to stay with a firm to avoid financial or other costs may do little effort on its behalf. On the contrary, the result of this study is also inconsistent with another study by Li, Browne & Chau (2006) that supported a positive relationship between calculative commitment and the behavioral intention to stay in a relationship.

From the findings of this research, it can be concluded that customers who show high levels of calculative commitment to a travel Web vendor will be unwilling to voice positive word of mouth. When individuals experience calculative commitment they are bound to the travel Web retailer partner because of the structural ties that are associated with the relationship; that is getting the job done. Additionally, such a commitment builds from cost-based calculations and results in a need to stay in the long-term relationship when no other alternatives exist or the costs of switching to other options are too high. Consequently, individuals with commitment based on calculation do not want to invest in the relationship with their travel web site by talking positively about the travel Web firm.

5.1.1.3 H3: *Calculative commitment (CALCOM) is positively associated with affective Commitment (AFCOM).*

The proposed model has two mediating latent variables, one compromising the emotional attachment (affective commitment) and the other containing the calculative evaluations (calculative commitment). As suggested by Morgan & Hunt (1994) and Bagozzi (1975a), the emotional element is a precursor of the calculative element. This
study indicated a positive significant relationship between calculative commitment and affective commitment. The path coefficient between the two constructs was 0.24, significant at $p < 0.01$ level.

From the findings one can conclude that affective commitment and calculative commitment are not orthogonal constructs and individuals may feel both psychological states at any point during the relationship (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Calculative commitment has also been shown to undermine the positive affects of affective commitment in marketing relationships (Fullerton, 2005). In other words, the calculative evaluations have a negative influence on the affective evaluations since (H2) supported a negative significant relationship with word-of-mouth communications. As such, commitment can both enhance and erode marketing relationships. More commitment is not necessarily better in marketing relationships. Management should emphasize the affective commitment component that is central to the development of marketing relationships.

5.1.1.4 Conclusion: The Organizational Commitment Model

In sum, the results clearly show the pivotal role of affective commitment as an antecedent to post-purchase behaviors (WOM communications). Affective commitment explains the process where it is presumed that a customer is loyal because he/she has a favorable attitude toward the travel Web vendor and is also a frequent buyer of that site. Of the two forms of commitment, affective commitment had a stronger positive impact on word-of-mouth. Consequently, affective commitment is reflected by feeling committed to the vendor and believing that the vendor is the best alternative. Therefore,
affective commitment is the most effective for developing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships in a B-to-C travel relationship.

On the other hand the negative significant path between calculative commitment and word-of-mouth communication suggests that a travel site vendor should try to transform customers committed at the calculative level to affectively committed customers in order to reduce their influence with respect to spreading the negative word-of-mouth regarding the relationship.

5.1.2 The Investment Model (Rusbult, 1983)

5.1.2.1 $H4$: Quality of alternatives (ALTER) is negatively associated with affective Commitment (AFCOM).

The findings of this study were inconsistent with previous studies. For example, Anderson & Narus (1990) have shown that a wide-range of high-quality alternative suppliers is negatively associated with dependence on the present supplier. Additionally, according to Rusbult (1980) greater alternative quality is associated with greater tendencies toward active reactions to dissatisfaction and lesser tendencies toward commitment. Although the direction of the relationship was negative which is consistent with literature, however, the path coefficient between quality of alternatives and affective commitment (-0.02) was not significant. Consequently, this is an indication that customers believe that all travel Web retailers offer the same products and services with a little differentiation among them. Thus with this perception in mind, customers may not try an alternative relationship.
5.1.2.2 H5: Quality of Alternatives (ALTER) is negatively associated with Calculative Commitment (CALCOM)

Although previous studies have suggested that high quality of alternatives influences the development of affective and calculative commitment towards the partner, On the contrary, loss of relative attractiveness may stimulate exit or switching behavior. The findings of this research were inconsistent with previous studies. For example, Salancik (1977) indicated that increased investment in a relationship due to a lack of good quality alternatives will help the development of calculative commitment. On the contrary, if a customer is aware of many equivalent alternative Web sites, he/she may be biased by the relative advantages of these alternatives and therefore devaluate the previous inputs into the current Web site (Li, Browne & Chau, 2006). The path coefficient between quality of alternatives and calculative commitment (0.00) was not significant. Thus, quality of alternatives does not have an important role in this model.

The results of H4 & H5 suggest that online travel firms’ offers are commoditized with a little differentiation in terms of the services/products offered. Consequently, online travel firms need to move away from commodity-based sales to real experiences of online travel shopping. All travel vendors provide almost the same products and services with little differentiation among themselves. Therefore, managers need to find some strategies that make a travel vendor superior over competitors.

A study by Nusair & Kandampully (2008) found that most studied travel Web sites contain information on: privacy policy information, terms of use information, appropriate load time, cancellation/refund policies, site maps, frequently asked questions (FAQ), press release, customer support, customer support via phone and e-mail, investors
relations, travelers review …etc. However, most online travel services did not provide some key Web attributes. Examples of such attributes include: background music, virtual tours, zooming, get deal via e-mail, group hotel/flight reservations, customer service contacts, airport information, flight status information, travel alerts, site feedback, room feature information, site search engine, and search by brand/price options. Consequently, all the previously proposed attributes will help Web vendors to make a difference by creating an appealing online shopping experience that is positively perceived by the online shoppers. This experience will result in affective commitment to the travel vendor and thus long-term relationship with the same vendor.

Moreover, in order for the online travel retailers to be successful, travel sites need to improve their performance on some of the Web features. As suggested by Nusair & Kandampully (2008) more emphases on personalization and playfulness will make online shopping experiences more enjoyable. Enhanced online shopping experiences will potentially strengthen the relationship with the supplier and will increase repeat visits to the site.

5.1.2.3 H6: Investment size is positively associated with affective commitment.

H7: Investment size is positively associated with calculative commitment.

The study found that investment in the present travel Web site is positively related both to affective commitment (H6) and to calculative commitment (H7), consistent with previous studies (Beck, 1960; Salancik, 1977; Chen & Hitt, 2002; Gefen, 2002). Thus, this study suggests that customers value the sunk costs they have placed in a current travel web site and the potential switching costs when they decide whether they need/
desire to continue the relationship with a travel site. The path between investment size and affective commitment (H6) (0.31) is larger than the path between investment size and calculative commitment (H7) (0.67). This indicates that a customer who has invested a great deal of time and money in a travel site feels the need (calculative) to continue a relationship more than the desire (affective) to continue the relationship with a current travel site.

Consequently, the more a person has invested in a current travel Web's products and services, the more committed he/she will be to the company and the less likely he/she will switch to a competitor. Additionally, increased investment should lead to higher calculative commitment, because the costs of switching have increased and the benefits of staying with the current Web site have also increased. This result is supported by the fact that the path between investment size and affective commitment (H6) is larger than the path between investment size and calculative commitment (H7).

5.1.2.4 H8: Satisfaction is positively associated with affective commitment.

Satisfaction refers to the overall satisfaction experienced by a customer during the process of receiving service from the travel Web site. Because satisfaction leads to higher affective commitment, which in turn has a strong influence on positive word-of-mouth communications, it has an indirect effect on word-of-mouth communications. The findings are consistent with previous studies (Jones and Sasser, 1995; Fullerton, 2005; Li et al., 2006). The path coefficient between the two constructs (0.41) was significant. Without experiencing a fair level of satisfaction, customers do not develop affective
commitment toward the online travel firm. The impact of satisfaction on affective commitment is high in situations of low or no alternatives (Sharma & Patterson, 2000).

5.1.2.5 **H9: Satisfaction is negatively associated with calculative commitment.**

The findings suggest that a customer will tend to discontinue the current relationship if they perceive that the economic and psychological costs of developing a new relationship are too low. The path coefficient between the two constructs (-0.28) was significant. The findings of the study were consistent with previous studies. A study by Wetzels, De Ruyter, & Birgelen (1998) has shown that customers committed at the affective level have a much stronger intention to stay in a relationship with a service provider than customers committed at the calculative level. In sum, even though customers may be satisfied with prices, products and services, this may not necessarily translate into a need to stay in a relationship.

5.1.2.6 **Conclusion: The Investment Model**

The analysis suggest that quality of alternatives is the least important latent variable in the model due to (1) the non-significant path coefficient (0.00) between quality of alternatives and affective commitment; and (2) the non-significant (-0.02) path coefficient between quality of alternatives and affective commitment. This finding suggests that the online travel vendors have a little differentiation in terms of products/services offering. Thus, online travel businesses need to improve their performance on some of the attributes of their sites to achieve competitive advantage i.e. personalization, online communities, and playfulness features.
Additionally, satisfaction (0.31) seems to be more important than investment size (0.31) since it leads to higher affective commitment. On the other hand, investment size (0.67) seems to be positively related to calculative commitment; an indication that a customer who has invested a great deal of time and money in a relationship feels the need to stay in the current relationship rather than the desire to stay in the current relationship. On the contrary, satisfaction (-0.28) was found to be inversely related to calculative commitment; an indication that a customer will tend to discontinue the current relationship if he/she perceive that the economic and psychological costs of developing a new relationship are too low.

5.1.3 H10: Satisfaction is positively associated with Trust

The finding that satisfaction is positively related to trust is supported by the extant literature (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2001). The path coefficient between the two constructs (0.67) was significant. If customers are satisfied with the travel Web site, then they would be more likely to trust the travel Web site. This implies that when customers are satisfied with the online travel service in terms of prices, products and services, they are more likely to consider the online travel retailer’s honesty and trustworthiness. Moreover, the relationship between satisfaction and affective commitment (0.67) is much stronger than that of trust and affective commitment (0.14). Although the findings indicate that trust and satisfaction have a significant positive relationship with affective commitment, in fact the association between satisfaction and affective commitment is much stronger than that of trust and affective commitment and this is consistent with the findings of Sharma & Patterson.
This suggests that satisfaction is more important for building long-term relationships.

5.1.4. Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)

5.1.4.1 H11: Trust is positively associated with affective commitment

The results supported a significant positive relationship between trust and affective commitment, which is consistent with the previous studies (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Wetzels et al., 1998; Grbarino & Johnson, 1999). The path coefficient between the two constructs (0.14) was significant. As Morgan & Hunt (1994, p.24) described, “because commitment entails vulnerability, parties will seek only trustworthy partners”. This suggests that the more a customer perceives trust in an online travel portal, the more he/she is attached to the relationship. In other words, the more an individual trusts the relationship with the travel service provider, the more likely he/she is to be attached to the relationship.

5.1.4.2 H12: Trust is positively associated with calculative commitment

The results of this study indicated that trust is positively related to calculative commitment. The path coefficient between the two constructs (0.22) was significant. This finding is consistent with a study by Wetzels et al. (1998). They reported a significant positive relationship between trust and calculative commitment. Thus, the more a customer trusts the relationship with the online travel business, the more he/she feels the need to stay in a relationship. Additionally, commitment could result from negative
features (i.e. low alternatives, high barriers) that hinder dissolution, thus customer feel that it is hard to find a vendor to trust.

5.1.4.3 Conclusion: Commitment-Trust Theory

The association between trust and calculative commitment (0.31) is stronger than the association between trust and affective commitment (0.28). Such calculative commitment built from cost-based commitment, not because the customer feels he/she truly wants to engage in the long-term relationship but rather because no other alternatives exist or the costs of switching to other options are too high (Meyer & Allen, 1997). This study indicated the importance of the trust construct for the online travel businesses. Online trust issues affect customers’ relationship commitment with online travel firms and willingness to engage in online transaction. Additionally, perceived privacy and security concerns could hinder customers from engaging in commercial transactions on the Web.

5.1.5 H13: Trust is positively associated with word-of-mouth communications.

The results showed a significant relationship between trust and word-of-mouth communications. The path coefficient between the two constructs (0.29) was significant. The results are consistent with previous studies that reported a positive relationship between trust and WOM (Hart & Johnson, 1999; Ranaweera & Prahbu, 2003). Consequently, if a customer attributes higher trust to the travel service provider, he/she shows a stronger intention to maintain the relationship and spread positive word of mouth. In addition to the direct effect of trust on word of mouth communications (H13), an
indirect effect of trust on word-of-mouth communications via affective commitment was also found.

5.2. Limitations

Although this study has contributed significantly to the current literature, like any other study, this study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample of this study was undergraduate students at a Mid Western University. College students are the typical segment of users in an online travel context, however, they may behave differently than other segments in the marketplace. Thus, the generalizability of the findings to other segments of the marketplace may be limited. Secondly, commitment is a multidimensional construct, and this study only investigated two dimensions of commitment: affective and calculative commitment. For example, including normative commitment in the model may have materially affected the empirical results obtained in this study.

Thirdly, the focus of this study was the online agency type of travel retailers. Thus the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other online travel contexts; for example, supplier websites (i.e. Strawood.com), reverse auction sites (i.e. priceline.com), search engines (i.e. travelzoo.com), and online auctions (i.e. aol.com). Finally, although the number of respondents was sufficient to conduct this study, however, a larger sample size would have strengthened the results obtained.
5.3 Implications for Research

From a theoretical perspective, this study has shown the importance of two different dimensions of commitment. Affective commitment and calculative commitment were found to vary in terms of their impact on word-of-mouth communications. Thus, this study made a major contribution to the existing literature by examining two dimensions of commitment rather than confining its conceptualization to a unidimensional construct.

The primary goal of this dissertation was to develop a theory-based model of relationship commitment in a B-to-C online travel context. The focus of this study was the online agency of travel retailers. The results of this study should open the door to additional research in this area. Future research may consider the applicability of this model to other online travel contexts; for example, supplier websites (i.e. Strawood.com), reverse auction sites (i.e. priceline.com), search engines (i.e. travelzoo.com), and online auctions (i.e. aol.com). Additionally, this study tested a model of commitment in a B-to-C online travel context; however, replicating the same model in a B-to-B travel context is another direction for future research.

Future research is also recommended to examine the generalizability of the model by replicating the same study with segments of the market other than the student population. An empirical investigation can be examined by: using diversified samples across age groups and ethnic groups; shopping motivation (hedonic/utilitarian); and the type of the travel site.

In this research only a limited number of antecedents were reported. Additional research is needed as to other variables that lead to a comprehensive relational
commitment model. Potential variables include the nature and the frequency of interaction between exchange partners, technical quality, functional quality, perceived risk, switching costs, opportunistic behavior, etc. Finally, the model of this study could also be expanded to other consequences of attitude formation such as intention to purchase, and repeat visit.

5.4 Implications for Practice

The results of this study showed that affective commitment is the most important determinant of word-mouth-behaviors. Affective commitment deals with having a sense of belong ness to the travel Web site, being happy of being a customer of the site, feeling emotionally attached to the travel site, and believing that the vendor is the best alternative. Therefore, affective commitment is the most effective for developing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships in a B-to-C travel setting. Additionally, due to the negative impact of calculative commitment on word-of-mouth communications, management may need to decrease its influence in a relationship. Management should try to avoid business relationships in which the partner only committed at the calculative level. In other words, given the choice between developing closeness to the travel service provider through attraction or obligation, it is clear that management should cultivate the former over the latter.

The results of the study indicated that the more a customer has invested in a relationship with a travel Web site, the more committed he/she will be to the company and the less likely he/she will switch to another vendor. Increased investment should lead to higher calculative commitment, because the costs of switching have increased and
the benefits of staying with the current travel Web site have also increased. In online travel, where customers look out for a memorable fun experience, the need for a personalized dimension is of high importance. Thus, it is necessary for online travel businesses to maintain comprehensive customer database capturing their personal profile. Personalization may also include personal thank you notes from online stores, and the availability of a message area for customer questions or comments (Yang, 2001). An example of such feature was evident when Expedia.com launched an online “travel community”. Once a traveler books through Expedia.com, he/she will receive a personal page. This page would include guidebook information on the chosen destination, current weather and other details such as flight status. It is also vital that premium customers to be identified and rewarded by tracking each customer’s history of purchase and visits.

Online travel vendors must emphasize customer satisfaction. For example: facilitating online communities, providing better service quality, faster responses to customer suggestions and complaints. Without high satisfaction levels, customers do not develop affective commitment toward the online travel firm (Gallagher, 1999). Satisfying customer needs may be an important way to overcome customer reluctant to Web shopping. After a purchase, customers tend to voluntarily share their experience with other individuals. If happy with their purchasing experience, Web shoppers will be more likely to tell other people about the experience.

Moreover the creation of trust in the relationship should be a focal point of attention for managers. It was shown that trust not only has a positive effect on affective commitment, but also calculative commitment and word of mouth. Trust arises when the online travel retailer is honest with the customer. Online travel retailers need to address
the issue of privacy and security. For example, the online customers expect Web sites to protect personal data, provide for secure payment, and maintain the privacy of online communication (Franzak, Pitta, & Fritsche, 2001). Therefore, along with a secure connection for transmitting credit card information, users want a highly visible privacy policy that tells them precisely how the company will use their data. To increase trust, marketers must guarantee the security of their Web sites and each individual’s privacy at the same time.

Service guarantees are considered efficient instruments in establishing trustworthy relationship with a travel vendor. To these customers service guarantees are signs of a company’s customer commitment and form of an attribute through which companies can distinguish themselves from competitors.

The implication of these findings is that commitment can both enhance and erode marketing relationships. Affective commitment is the foundation on which relationships are built. Calculative commitment has a negative effect on customer word of mouth behavior which is being recognized as an increasingly important side-effect of relationships (Reichheld, 2003). The extent to which commitment is central to the development of marketing relationships, depends entirely upon the component of commitment on which the relationship is being built on. More commitment is not necessarily better in marketing relationships.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INSTRUMENT
Dear O.S.U. Students,

You are kindly requested to participate in an online Travel website evaluation experiment. The purpose of this research is to develop a theory-based model of relationship commitment in an online travel domain. Your participation in this research is voluntary, and would be much appreciated. You can refuse to participate or withdraw from the survey at any time.

This study is concerned with group data and not with your individual responses. Thus your responses will remain confidential. Therefore, your name will not associate with the data collected.

After you have read the instructions, please feel free contact me to ask any questions you may have. We appreciate your cooperation. This survey will take you approximately 20 - 25 minutes. All questions are important, so please answer all questions indicated in the questionnaire.

Thank you,

H. G. Parsa, Ph.D.
Khaldoon Nusair
Department of Consumer Sciences
1787 Neil Avenue
Columbus, OH
A Model of Commitment in B-to-C Travel Context: A Structural Equation Modeling

Participation in this survey is voluntary. You may decline to participate in this survey at anytime.

SECTION I

- While completing this questionnaire, please consider your last online search/purchase process you used for traveling purposes.
- Examples of Travel Web Sites:
  (Expedia.com, Hotels.com, Orbitz.com, Travelocity.com, Hotwire.com, Cheaptickets.com, etc…)

1. Have you purchased travel products at a consumer travel site in the past year (i.e. airline ticket, hotel booking, car rental) for travel purposes:
   _____ Yes  _____ No

2. Do you have at least one e-mail account and at least one credit or debit card: _____ Yes
   _____ No

3. What is your favorite travel website: ____________________________

4. How many times a year you use online travel services for traveling purposes?
   □ Once a month  □ Once every 3 months  □ Once every 6 months
   □ Once a year  □ Never

5. How often do you navigate the web?
   □ More than once a day  □ Once a day  □ Once in two or three days
   □ Once a week  □ Once a month  □ Never

6. How often do you normally buy online travel products such as airline tickets?
   □ Once a month  □ Once every 3 months  □ Once every 6 months
   □ Once a year  □ Never

7. How often do you normally buy online travel products such as hotel rooms?
   □ Once a month  □ Once every 3 months  □ Once every 6 months
   □ Once a year  □ Never
8. How often do you normally buy online travel products such as rental cars?
   □ Once a month   □ Once every 3 months   □ Once every 6 months
   □ Once a year    □ Never

9. How long have you been using the web for online travel products/services purchases?
   □ less than 6 months   □ 6-12 months   □ 1-2 years
   □ 3-4 years   □ More than 4 years   □ Never

10. Approximately how much did you spend last year on travel related activities using online services?
    □ under $100   □ $101 to $200   □ $201 to $300
    □ $301 to $400   □ $401 to $500   □ $501 to $699
    □ $700 to $999   □ $1,000 or more   □ Never

11. Which website do you usually use for purchasing online services such as airline tickets, hotel bookings, or rental cars, etc?
    Please specify.___________________________________________________________

SECTION II:
   ▪ If you respond “No” to Q1 or Q2, skip the Section III. Go to the General Information section.
   ▪ Please respond to the following questions based on the website that you specified in Q11.

SECTION III.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOM</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I tell people positive things about this travel Web site.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I have only good things to say about this travel web site.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I am proud to tell others that I use this travel web site.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I recommend this web site to my friends.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRUST</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 This travel site is perfectly honest and truthful.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 This travel site can be trusted completely.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 This travel site can be counted on.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 This travel site has high integrity.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 It is easy to become attached to this travel Web site</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 This travel site has a great deal of attraction for me.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 This travel site has a great deal of personal meaning for me.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CALCULATIVE COMMITMENT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strongly Agree</strong></td>
<td><strong>Neutral</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strongly Disagree</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 I am afraid something will be lost if I stop using this travel web site.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 To stop using this travel web site would require considerable personal sacrifice.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Some aspects of my life would be affected if I stop using this travel Web site.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 One of the few serious consequences of stop dealing with this travel web site would be the scarcity of available alternatives (other travel web sites).</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>INVESTMENT SIZE</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strongly Agree</strong></th>
<th><strong>Neutral</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strongly Disagree</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 I have put much time into using this travel Web Site.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Many aspects of my life have become linked to this travel Web site.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 I have invested a lot in learning how to use this travel Web site.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 The time I have spent on this travel Web site is significant.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SATISFACTION</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strongly Agree</strong></th>
<th><strong>Neutral</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strongly Disagree</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 I feel satisfied with this travel Web site.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 My experience with this travel Web site is very pleasing.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 This travel Web site makes me happy.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 This travel Web site does a satisfactory job of fulfilling my needs.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ALTERNATIVE QUALITY</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strongly Agree</strong></th>
<th><strong>Neutral</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strongly Disagree</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 An alternative travel Web site is appealing.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 To my knowledge, another travel Web site is close to ideal.</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 An alternative travel Web site is attractive to me</td>
<td>1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section III: General Information

1. Please select your gender. □ Male □ Female

2. Please check one that best describes your status as a student:
   □ Full-time undergraduate student □ Part-time undergraduate student

3. Please check your employment status:
   □ Full-time □ Part-time □ Unemployed

4. Please indicate your age range.
   □ under 19 years □ 19 to 20 years □ 21 to 22 years
   □ 23 to 24 years □ 25 to 26 years □ 27 or older

5. Please check your education:
   □ Freshman □ 1st year in college □ 2nd year in college
   □ 3rd year in college □ 4th year in college □ 5th year in college

6. Please select your ethnicity.
   □ Caucasian □ African American □ Hispanic
   □ Asian/Island Pacific □ Native American □ other _______________

7. Please select your monthly household expenses (Shelter, food, clothing, etc.).
   □ under $1,000 □ $1,000 to $1,999 □ $2,000 to $2,999
   □ $3,000 to $3,999 □ $4,000 to $4,999 □ $5,000 to $5,999
   □ $6,000 to $6,999 □ $7,000 to $7,999 □ $8,000 or more

Any comments:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Thank You for Your Participation!!!!!!!!!!
Participation in this survey is voluntary. This survey has received human subjects’ approval from the Ohio State University. You may decline to participate in this survey at anytime.